
REFUGEE ISSUES TO RAISE WITH FEDERAL ELECTION CANDIDATES

The Canadian Association of Refugee Lawyers (CARL) is encouraging members to contact federal election candidates in their riding—via social media, at their doorstep, or otherwise—to raise two issues affecting refugees: (1) Canada’s response to the crisis in Afghanistan, and (2) expanding paths to permanent residence for COVID frontline workers.

(1) Canada’s response to the crisis in Afghanistan

Background

Canada’s response to the unfolding crisis has thus far included the evacuation of 3,700 people from Kabul, the establishment of programs for Afghans who assisted the Canadian government and for particularly vulnerable Afghans, the commitment to resettle 20,000 Afghan nationals, and the prioritization of family reunification applications. However, these measures do little to assist individuals trapped in Afghanistan, and bureaucratic requirements limit their accessibility.

CARL’s Proposals

1. Commit to the development of a program focused on resettlement of Afghan nationals who are still inside Afghanistan;
2. Issue Temporary Residence Permits (TRPs) to family members of Afghan nationals already in Canada who have applications in process;
3. Use all available tools to maximize the number of Afghan refugees that can be resettled to Canada, while respecting our existing global resettlement commitment;
4. Waive the requirement of UNHCR recognition for Afghan nationals being resettled via private sponsorship, and recognize the Afghan crisis as a *prima facie* refugee situation.

Where do the parties stand?

Liberal Party: Commitment to resettle 40,000 Afghan refugees through FY2023 (through combination of Government Assisted Refugees (GARs) and private sponsorship); increase of 8,000 GAR places beyond current global resettlement commitment.

Conservative Party: Plan to eliminate GAR resettlement program; mention of resettlement of LGBTQ persons (only through private sponsorship); no specific commitments re: Afghanistan.

New Democratic Party: No specific commitments re: Afghanistan. Commitment to establish direct pathway to resettlement of LGBTQ2S+ refugees.

Bloq Quebecois and Green Party: No specific commitments re: Afghanistan.

Issues to raise with candidates

- What will they do to assist vulnerable Afghans who remain trapped inside Afghanistan?
- How will they prioritize family reunification of Afghans with their family in Canada?
- How will they use the Government Assisted Refugee and private sponsorship programs to assist Afghan refugees?
- Will they waive the UNHCR refugee status determination requirement for privately sponsored Afghan refugees?

(2) Expanding pathways to permanent residence for COVID-19 frontline workers

Background

The work of refugee claimants and other migrants has been vital in food production, healthcare, construction, sanitation, caregiving and other industries that have served as the backbone of Canada's economy during the COVID-19 pandemic. The importance of this work was recognized with the creation of two new pathways to permanent residence in 2020: the healthcare workers pathway and the temporary to permanent residence pathway. Yet more can and needs to be done. Many persons working in essential industries continue to contribute to Canada's economic recovery, but lack a pathway to permanent status, including undocumented workers.

CARL's Proposal

CARL has been advocating for the expansion of existing pathways and the creation of new pathways to capture a broader spectrum of workers in Canada performing essential jobs. New pathways are a relatively simple way to fuel economic recovery in the aftermath of COVID-19 and should not exclude those who have initiated a refugee claim or who no longer have status.

Where do the parties stand?

Liberal Party: Commitment to expanding pathways to permanent residence for temporary foreign workers through the Express Entry system, but no details about whether those who do not currently qualify under this system (including refugee claimants and undocumented workers) would be included.

Conservative Party: Commitment to create pathways to permanence for those already living and working in Canada, but no further details about who would be included.

New Democratic Party: Proposal to create a path for workers to stay permanently, including those who have worked throughout the pandemic in agriculture and caregiving.

Bloq Quebecois: No specific commitment for new pathways to permanent residence.

Green Party: Commitment to introduce lower barrier, more accessible pathways to permanent residency in recognition of work in healthcare and economy during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Issues to raise with candidates

- Where do they stand on pathways to permanent residence for COVID frontline workers who lack permanent status, including refugee claimants and undocumented workers?
- Will they support the May 2021 recommendation of the Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration (CIMM) specifically recommending that IRCC develop programs similar to the Guardian Angel program, especially considering the inclusion of foreign workers who contributed during the COVID-19 pandemic, regardless of status?