

Canada limits the number of privately sponsored Syrian refugee applicants in 2017

'We are in shock and dismay,' says sponsor scrambling to fundraise, finish paperwork

By Bal Brach, [CBC News](#) Posted: Dec 23, 2016 1:53 PM PT Last Updated: Dec 24, 2016 12:05 PM PT

Private sponsors are scrambling to raise funds and complete applications for Syrian refugees after the Canadian government revealed that in 2017 there will be cap of 1,000 new applicants under a particular type of private sponsorship.

Private refugee sponsorships aren't all the same: there are larger groups known as sponsorship agreement holders (SAH), and smaller groups in which individuals come together to be community sponsors, also known as a "group of five" sponsorships.

"We are in shock and dismay," said Canadian sponsor Vania Davidovic.

"It makes a huge difference because all of a sudden if your family is not in the first thousand spots, it means they will basically be rejected."

Davodovic has three families she's helping sponsor and is worried because just one application has been completed and only \$8,000 has been raised for the others.

'I have a very short time now to fundraise, and raising \$16,000 or \$17,000 in a few weeks is close to impossible.' - *Vania Davidovic*

"You cannot submit your application until you have full funds in place ... if I have a three-member family, I need the full \$23,000 proof of money in the account," she said.

"That means that I have a very short time now to fundraise, and raising \$16,000 or \$17,000 in a few weeks is close to impossible."

The most recent change by the government impacts both types of private sponsorship arrangements.

- [Canada's private refugee sponsorship system exported as model for the world](#)
- [Backlog of refugee applications will likely get longer as federal targets drop](#)
- [Canada's declining target for refugees 'doesn't add up' for immigration advocate](#)

Government cites backlog

Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada (IRCC) says the cap was put in place to address the backlog in processing applications and the number of admissions expected in 2017 is double that seen in 2015.

"Due to accepting an unlimited number of private sponsorship applications prior to 2013, there was a large backlog of applicants," said IRCC spokeswoman Sonia Lesage.

"Annual caps help reduce processing times and prevent an inventory backlog to build up."

The [new public policy](#) — which came into effect this week — limits the number of [Syrian and Iraqi groups-of-five](#) and community sponsorship applications to 1,000 people in 2017.

"Our goal is to eliminate the backlog by 2019 and reduce wait times for new applications to about 12 months," Lesage said.

Since November 2015, Canada has accepted more than 38,000 Syrian refugees. More than 21,000 are government-assisted refugees, and 13,000 are privately sponsored.

'It's really tough'

Refugee resettlement organizations, like Vancouver's MOSAIC, which help sponsors complete their group-of-five applications, say the new cap on group-of-five privately sponsored refugee applications is disappointing.

"It's really tough because we have seen the demand for private sponsorships increasing," said MOSAIC's Saleem Spindari.

"Unfortunately, by having the caps there, it would be very difficult for us to help people submit the application ... 1,000 applications for all of Canada is really a small number."

Spindari says he would rather see the government accept more refugees.

"The backlog is a really big problem, I know that. But we have to understand that many of the refugees are really in need of coming here," said Spindari.

"If they increase the quota, it could be much better, instead of limiting the number of applications they are accepting."

The cap applies only to group-of-five and community sponsors. Sponsorship Agreement Holders can still submit a total of 7,500 applications for refugees from any country.

An IRCC media spokesperson said it is important to note that despite changes to application totals, Canada will process double the number of refugee admissions compared to 2015.

"In 2017, we will welcome one the highest numbers of refugees and protected persons in Canadian history," the ministry said in a written statement on Dec. 24. "There will be substantially more privately sponsored refugees in particular, increasing from 4,500 in 2014 to 16,000 in 2017."

Corrections

- A previous version of this story said the Canadian government had put a cap of 1,000 on the number of Syrian and Iraqi refugees allowed to enter Canada in 2017. In fact, the cap relates only to applications, not to people arriving in 2017.

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