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MEMORANDUM

TO: Hon. Lena Metlege Diab, Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship

FROM: Renze Nauta, Program Director, Work & Economics
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DATE: September 1, 2026

SUBJECT: Importance of the Privately Sponsored Refugee Program for Improved Integration and Outcomes

WHO WE ARE

Cardus is a non-partisan think tank dedicated to clarifying and strengthening, through research and dialogue, the ways in which society's institutions can work together for the common good.

ISSUE

The Government of Canada's immigration levels plan for 2026 to 2028 decreased the proportion of privately sponsored refugees (PSRs), while the proportion of government-assisted refugees (GARs) increased. Yet PSRs, who are sponsored by civil-society organizations, tend to have better integration results than those assisted by government.

RECOMMENDATION

Cardus recommends that the Government of Canada return to the balance of GARs and PSRs seen in 2024 and reverse the trend of the last two immigration levels plans that de-emphasized PSRs.

BACKGROUND

The data in this memorandum is largely from the Cardus report *Bonds of Solidarity: How Subsidiarity Helps Canadians Care for Refugees*.[1]

The Government of Canada has two main streams for resettling refugees: privately sponsored refugees (PSRs) and government assisted refugees (GARs). GARs are generally referred by the United Nations and supported by the Government of Canada through the Resettlement Assistance Program, providing a number of services including financial aid, language training, and employment-related services. PSRs are supported by private sponsors who provide housing, food, transport, clothing and social supports. These private sponsors can take the form of organizations, communities, or groups of five adult Canadian citizens or permanent residents living in the area where the refugee is going to stay. There is a third category, known as blended visa office-referred refugees (BVORs). BVORs are quite rare, and are not the focus of this memo.

[1] R. Nauta, "Bonds of Solidarity: How Subsidiarity Helps Canadians Care for Refugees," *Cardus*, March 12, 2026, https://www.cardus.ca/research/work-economics/reports/bonds-of-solidarity/.

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Documenting the change in proportion of GARs to PSRs between the 2025-27 Immigration Levels Plan and the 2026-28 Immigration Levels Plan

	2024[2]		**2025**[3]		**2026**[4]		**% change**
	2024 Actual		**Levels Plan**		**Levels Plan**		**Between 2025 and 2026**
GARs	19,485	39.5%	15,250	39.8%	13,250	45.2%	-13%
BVORs	85	0.2%	100	0.3%	50	0.2%	-50%
PSRs	29,715	60.3%	23,000	60.0%	16,000	54.6%	-30%
Total refugees	49,285		38,350		29,300		

In 2024, the proportion of PSRs to GARs were roughly 60 percent to 40 percent in favour of PSRs, with 29,715 PSRs and 19,485 GARs being resettled to Canada. Recent immigration levels plans (2025-2027 and 2026-2028) projected cuts to both the number of GARs and PSRs, but PSRs were reduced by 30 percent in the 2026 to 2028 immigration levels plan relative to the 2025 to 2027 immigration levels plan while GARs were reduced by 13 percent. As a result, the incoming proportion of PSRs to GARs is projected to be roughly 55 percent to 45 percent for 2026 in the 2026 to 2028 plan. The Government of Canada should return to the previous proportions of PSRs and GARs from 2024.

RATIONALE

(1) PSRs find employment faster, have better long-term economic outcomes, and have more built-in community.

In a study of Syrian refugees, more than half of PSRs found employment within a year of their arrival, compared to less than 10 percent of government-assisted refugees.[5] Another study found that, when controlling for several variables such as age, education, and language skills, PSRs also

[2] Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada, *2025 Annual Report to Parliament on Immigration* (Ottawa, Immigration Refugees and Citizenship Canada, 2025), https://www.canada.ca/content/dam/ircc/documents/pdf/english/corporate/publications-manuals/annual-report-parliament-immigration-2025.pdf/.

[3] Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada, *Supplementary Information for the 2025-27 Immigration Levels Plan* (Ottawa, Immigration Refugees and Citizenship Canada, 2024), https://www.canada.ca/content/dam/ircc/documents/pdf/english/corporate/publications-manuals/annual-report-parliament-immigration-2025.pdf/.

[4] Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada, *Supplementary Information for the 2026-28 Immigration Levels Plan* (Ottawa, Immigration Refugees and Citizenship Canada, 2025), https://www.canada.ca/en/immigration-refugees-citizenship/corporate/mandate/corporate-initiatives/levels/supplementary-immigration-levels-2026-2028.html.

[5] Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada, *Rapid Impact Evaluation of the Syrian Refugee Initiative*. (Ottawa, Immigration, Refugees, and Citizenship Canada, 2016), https://www.canada.ca/en/immigration-refugees-citizenship/corporate/reports-statistics/evaluations/rapid-impact-evaluation-syrian-refugee-initiative.html.

tend to outperform GARs in terms of income both in the short term and long term.[6] This study found that, after one year, privately sponsored men had a nearly 14 percent higher income than government-assisted men, and the gap rose to over 20 percent between privately sponsored women compared to government-assisted women.

PSRs benefit from the established community that the sponsoring groups provide. Surveys of PSRs show that they describe their sponsors as being like "family".[7] The close-knit communal bonds provided by sponsors, who already have wide networks and high social capital in Canada, benefit privately sponsored refugee integration into Canada.

(2) PSRs allow the communities closest to the refugee to personalize assistance.

The economic advantages experienced by PSRs can be explained by the application of subsidiarity, a principle of social organization that prioritizes actions and decisions by those closest to the matter at hand. Smaller units of social organization that are closer to a person, such as private sponsors of refugees, often have better information about that person compared to organizations that are further removed from them.

Moreover, a private sponsor like a church or a group of five can more readily form relationships of care with newcomers. This motivates them to personalize assistance and welcome newcomers into a wider community. These relationships of care can last a lifetime and act as something approaching an extended family and support network for the refugees. While there will always be a need for both government-assisted refugees and privately sponsored refugees, the government should leverage the benefits of civil society participation in Canada's refugee resettlement policy.

CONTACT

We would welcome the opportunity to meet with you and assist with future considerations on this issue. Please do not hesitate to contact us at rnauta@cardus.ca.

[6] Picot, G., Y. Zhang, and F. Hou. "Labour Market Outcomes Among Refugees to Canada" (2019), https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/11f0019m/11f0019m2019007-eng.htm.
[7] Ali, M.A., S. Zendo, and S. Somers. "Structures and Strategies for Social Integration: Privately Sponsored and Government Assisted Refugees." *Journal of Immigrant and Refugee Studies* 20, no. 4 (2022): 48, https://doi.org/10.1080/15562948.2021.1938332.