

Federal Election 2015

November 2015

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Executive Summary

On Tuesday, October 19th, 2015, the Liberal Party of Canada, led by Justin Trudeau, won the federal election with a strong majority. Preceding his election, Prime Minister Trudeau unveiled a platform that consistently referenced the significance of immigration and the unique contributions newcomers have made to Canada's development. Following the election and subsequent appointment of the Honourable Minister John McCallum to the newly designated Ministry of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship, the government has demonstrated that they are devoted to delivering their campaign promises. Particularly with regards to a compassionate and collaborative plan for Syrian refugee resettlement. At this time, an analysis of the impact of new policies, government stakeholders, and current affairs reveals that while there is uncertainty related to refugee resettlement, conditions are favourable to advance the priorities of Alberta's settlement and integration sector at the national level.

Platform Promises

Throughout their campaign the Liberals emphasized the necessity of a plan to ground Canada's immigration system in compassion, openness, economic opportunity and strong communities.ⁱ The Liberal Party platform outlines the incoming government's central priorities in the area of immigration. Research indicates that platform commitments form the basis of a governing party's policy agenda.ⁱⁱ Therefore, it is expected that immigration policy changes outlined in the platform will be enacted by the Ministry of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship (formerly Citizenship and Immigration Canada). The platform focuses on:

Reuniting Families and Remittances

The government will make reuniting families a priority by doubling the family class sponsorship budget, as well as the number of applications allowed for parents and grandparents to 10,000 each year. Furthermore, barriers to family reunification under Express Entry will be diminished by awarding additional points to applicants with Canadian siblings while the maximum age for dependents will be reverted to 22 from 19 in order to facilitate sponsorship. Lastly, immediate permanent residency will now be granted to new spouses entering the country thereby eliminating the two-year waiting period. With regards to remittances, the federal government will work with provincial and territorial governments and banks to improve and regulate the remittance industry so that residents are not subject to predatory practices and exorbitant fees.

International Students and Temporary Residents

The incoming government has committed to reduce barriers for international students and other temporary residents (including Temporary Foreign Workers) to become Canadian citizens by restoring the residency time credit and making amendments to the Canadian Experience Class which in its current form created impediments to international student immigration.

Hiring Caregivers

A plan will be developed to make hiring caregivers that assist family members with physical or mental disabilities easier and more affordable. Generally, the plan will include collaboration between the federal, provincial and territorial governments to develop a system of regulated companies that will simplify caregiver hiring and ensure employment protection for caregivers. This will include allowing caregivers to change employers in the event of conflict or abuse. Specifically, the government will eliminate the existing \$1,000 Labour Market Impact Assessment (LMIA) fee.

Refugees

Aligned with the pledge to ensure Canada maintains its historic reputation as an open and compassionate country, the government will welcome more refugees through a program that is safe and secure. In order to achieve this, the following actions will be taken at the federal level:

- Immediately and fully restore the Interim Federal Health Program which provides limited and temporary health benefits to refugees and refugee claimants;
- Creation of a human rights panel that determines designated countries of origin and provide the right to appeal decisions for citizens from these countries; and
- Professionalize the Immigration and Refugee Board by appointing individuals with appropriate subject-matter expertise.

Syrian Refugees

Responding to a public outpouring of support for the resettlement of refugees fleeing the escalating violence in Syria and the surrounding region, the federal government will expand existing refugee targets and provide a refuge for those fleeing war and conflict. This commitment will be enacted through an ambitious policy change that includes expanding the intake of Syrian refugees by 25,000 through immediate government sponsorship. As a complement to government sponsorship, private sponsors will work to accept additional Syrian refugees in communities across Canada. In order to support this process, an investment of \$250 million will be made (\$100 million in fiscal year 2015/2016) to increase refugee processing times as well as sponsorship and settlement capacity in each province.

Ministry of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship

To lead the enactment of the Liberal Party's immigration goals, Honourable John McCallum was named Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship (IRC) on November 4th, 2015. First elected in 2000, McCallum is an experienced economist and politician who has held a variety of roles in government, academia and the banking sector.¹ As one of the Ministry's first official actions, Minister McCallum announced the creation of a Cabinet ad-hoc committee to lead the effort to bring 25,000 Syrian refugees to Canada by the end of 2015.^{2 iii}

Finally, on November 16th, Minister McCallum along with Honourable Minister Jody Wilson-Raybould of the Ministry of Justice and Attorney General of Canada issued a statement that the Attorney General of Canada had discontinued its application for leave to appeal in the case of *Minister Citizenship and Immigration v. Ishaq*. This verdict ruled that the policy requiring those who wear the niqab must remove their veil during the Oath of Citizenship is unlawful. The joint statement conveyed the new government's respect for this decision in both the Federal Court and Federal Court of Appeals.^{iv} In the same statement, the ministries underscored diversity as one of Canada's "greatest strengths," and ensured the public that successful citizenship candidates will be "included in the Canadian family."^v

Interpretation and Impact on Alberta

In the weeks following the election, change has reverberated across Canada's settlement and integration sector. The newly created IRC has been working quickly to implement several of their platform promises, chiefly the support of Syrian refugee resettlement, reinstatement of the Federal Health Program, and the discontinuation of the *Minister of Citizenship and Immigration v. Ishaq* appeal.

Indicatively, through the creation of the Syrian refugee ad hoc committee, IRC has officially committed to the promise to expand government sponsorship, invest a minimum of \$100 million to increase refugee processing as well as sponsorship and settlement services capacity across the country, and to provide a financial contribution of \$100 million to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees in support of critical relief efforts in Syria. In order to accomplish these ambitious commitments, the government has pledged to work with all key stakeholders such as provincial, municipal and settlement partners as well as the ad hoc committee members.

Although Syrian refugee resettlement planning is lead at the federal level, the Government of Alberta has promptly responded to the challenge by putting out a call for proposals to support the settlement and integration of this population.³ Meanwhile, in communities across the province, the settlement and integration

¹ He is a former Senior Vice President and Chief Economist of the Royal Bank of Canada, Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance and has served as Minister of Finance, Secretary of State (International Financial Institutions), Minister of National Defense, Minister of Veteran Affairs, and Minister of National Revenue. Most recently, he served as the Critic for Citizenship, Immigration, Multiculturalism and Seniors.

² The committee will be comprised of officials from a wide range of ministries including Health, Canadian Heritage, Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness, Foreign Affairs, Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship, Treasury Board, International Development and La Francophonie, National Defense and Democratic Institutions.

³ The [Alberta Refugee Resettlement Grant Initiative](#) is seeking proposals to support resettlement in the areas of coordination, public awareness, services, reducing barriers, language support and community action plans.

sector has been working enthusiastically and strategically to address the uncertainty involved in the resettlement of a significantly larger number of refugees than have previously settled in this period of time, and to plan for their short and long-term needs.⁴

Based on the platform promises, immediate actions, and public discourse of the Ministry of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship, most notably the inclusion of the “refugees” in the newly named ministry, it appears that the government will champion compassionate refugee resettlement, more open immigration and the creation of diverse communities as a cornerstone of Canadian society. What is more, under the experienced leadership of Minister McCallum, the government has emphasized their willingness to collaborate with multiple stakeholders to accomplish improved settlement outcomes. With these developments in mind, the outlook for Alberta’s settlement and integration sector is favourable.

References

ⁱ Liberal Party of Canada, *Real Change A Plan for a Strong Middle Class*, 2015, 62.

ⁱⁱ Greg Flynn, “Rethinking policy capacity in Canada: The role of parties and election platforms in government policy making,” *Canadian Public Administration* 54, no. 2 (2011): 235-253.

ⁱⁱⁱ Canada, Ministry of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship, “Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship announces action on Syrian refugee crisis,” 2015, accessed November 16th, 2015, <http://news.gc.ca/web/article-en.do?mthd=advSrch&ctr.page=1&nid=1019909>.

^{iv} Canada, Ministries of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship and Justice, “Statement from the Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship and the Minister of Justice,” 2015, accessed November 16th, 2015, <http://news.gc.ca/web/article-en.do?mthd=advSrch&ctr.page=1&nid=1020919>.

^v Ibid.

⁴ In 2014, Alberta welcomed 2,722 refugees which accounts for 11.7% of the national total. Based on this figure, current projections suggest that Alberta will receive approximately 10% of the Syrian refugees destined to Canada.