



**Statement from the National Council of Women of Canada (NCWC)**  
**on**  
**World Refugee Day: Refugee Protection in Canada 2026**

The National Council of Women of Canada joins communities across the country in recognizing the courage of people who are forced to flee their homes and seek safety in a new place. On June 20, 2026, we mark this day as an opportunity to better understand the language of refugee protection.

In Canada, an **asylum seeker** — also called a **refugee claimant** — is a person who has fled their home country and is asking for international protection, but whose legal status has not yet been approved. A **refugee** is a person whose claim has been legally assessed and who has been recognized by authorities as a protected person. Refugee claimants in Canada make their request at the border or while inside the country, while resettled refugees are typically identified and selected before they arrive.

The difference matters because it shapes both legal status and the path to safety. Asylum seekers are waiting for a decision, while recognized refugees have confirmed protection under Canadian and international law — notably through the [UNHCR](#). It is important to note that every recognized refugee began as an asylum seeker, but not every claim is approved; some are refused, and others may be resolved through other humanitarian pathways.

Our tradition of welcome — which admittedly has seen some dark days — has recently been affected by broader immigration caps and stricter asylum rules implemented through the government's [2026–2028 Immigration Levels Plan—Permanent Resident Targets](#) for resettled refugees and protected persons set at just over 49,000 per year. Bills such as [Bill C-12 – the Strengthening Canada's Immigration System and Borders Act](#), which received Royal Assent on March 26, 2026 introduced new eligibility requirements. To read a critique of Bill C-12, please see the Canadian Council of Refugees statement here: [Passing of Bill C-12 is an Attack on Refugee and Migrant Rights in Canada](#).

- For an overview of our history: [Refugees to Canada | The Canadian Encyclopedia](#)
- For a Timeline (1776-2018): [Canada: A History of Refuge – A timeline - Canada.ca](#)
- Famous Canadian Refugees:

- o [Refugee in Canada | The Right Honourable Michaele Jean – Witness to Struggle and Triumph](#)
- o [Refugee in Canada | Her Excellency the Right Honourable Adrienne Clarkson – Wisdom and Experience](#)
- o [Refugee in Canada | Why Award-winning Writer Kim Thuy Always Has Time for Another Refugee](#)

Beyond these and other famous women who arrived in Canada as refugees, we celebrate the many women who also came as refugees and continue to enrich our society — the countless women who arrived as refugees and now drive buses, care for the sick, inspire students, and build bridges, both literally and figuratively!

On this World Refugee Day, NCWC reaffirms its commitment to compassion, equity, and human dignity. We encourage Canadians to learn the terminology, understand the process, and stand with those seeking safety and a future for themselves and their families.

Respectfully

Penny Rankin  
NCWC President