

When Protection Waits

*Canada's Private Sponsorship Delays and the
Human Cost for Refugees in Türkiye*



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Appel personnel d'Arsham Parsi

Madame la députée,
Monsieur le député,

Je m'appelle **Arsham Parsi**. J'ai commencé mon militantisme en 2001 en dénonçant la persécution des personnes LGBTQ+ par le régime iranien. En raison de mon orientation sexuelle et de mon engagement, j'ai été forcé de fuir l'Iran, de demander l'asile en Türkiye, puis je suis finalement arrivé au Canada en mai 2006 à titre de réfugié parrainé par le gouvernement. Je n'ai jamais oublié ma responsabilité. Ce qui a commencé comme une question de survie est devenu l'œuvre de ma vie.



En 2008, j'ai fondé l'**International Railroad for Queer Refugees (IRQR)**, un organisme de bienfaisance enregistré au Canada. Depuis plus de deux décennies, IRQR soutient des réfugiés LGBTQ+ fuyant la persécution, en particulier ceux qui échappent à des régimes où leur identité, leur dignité et leur vie sont menacées. Notre travail comprend le soutien en situation de crise, la défense des droits, la sensibilisation du public, la collaboration internationale et l'aide directe aux réfugiés qui doivent naviguer dans des systèmes complexes et souvent dangereux.

En 2019, nous avons fondé la **Fondation Marjan**, un organisme sans but lucratif sœur qui travaille aux côtés d'IRQR. La fondation porte le nom de **Marjan Mohammadi**, une femme transgenre qu'IRQR a tenté désespérément de faire venir au Canada en raison de son état de santé critique et de sa situation de grande vulnérabilité en Türkiye. Nous avons pu travailler avec IRCC et le ministre de l'Immigration afin d'obtenir pour elle un visa d'urgence, comme nous l'avions fait pour d'autres réfugiés se trouvant dans des situations d'urgence similaires. Tragiquement, Marjan est décédée deux mois seulement avant son départ prévu pour le Canada. Sa mort demeure un rappel douloureux qu'en matière de protection des réfugiés, le temps n'est pas un simple détail administratif — il peut faire la différence entre la vie et la mort.

La Fondation Marjan a été créée parce que la voie des réfugiés parrainés par le gouvernement était devenue de plus en plus surchargée et n'offrait plus de solution rapide à de nombreux réfugiés ayant un besoin urgent de protection. Grâce au parrainage privé, nous pensions pouvoir mobiliser les communautés canadiennes, recueillir des fonds, préparer des demandes et aider des réfugiés vulnérables à se mettre en sécurité. Pour un petit organisme communautaire, cela n'a pas été facile. Nous ne sommes pas une entreprise. Nous ne considérons pas les réfugiés comme des clients, des dossiers ou des numéros. Nous les voyons comme des êtres humains dont la vie est en danger et dont l'avenir dépend d'une action rapide.

Au fil des ans, nous avons travaillé sans relâche pour bâtir du soutien, recueillir des fonds, compléter des demandes de parrainage et collaborer avec les institutions canadiennes. Nous avons également connu des moments où le Canada a agi avec urgence et compassion. Par le passé, notamment durant le mandat de l'ancien ministre de l'Immigration Jason Kenney, le Canada a répondu à des situations urgentes touchant des réfugiés exposés à un risque immédiat,

y compris ceux qui faisaient face à une déportation depuis la Türkiye. Ces réfugiés ont été mis en sécurité dans des délais raisonnables, et beaucoup demeurent profondément reconnaissants envers le Canada de leur avoir sauvé la vie.

Malheureusement, la situation actuelle est très différente. Des réfugiés ayant fui la persécution — y compris des réfugiés LGBTQ+ fuyant le régime iranien — attendent maintenant depuis des années en Türkiye, souvent dans des conditions dangereuses et instables. Certains font face à de graves problèmes de santé. D'autres risquent l'arrestation, la détention ou la déportation. Certains vivent chaque jour dans la peur. Malgré les nombreuses lettres, relances, demandes de traitement urgent et documents transmis à IRCC et aux responsables canadiens, nous recevons trop souvent des réponses génériques ou automatisées qui ne tiennent pas réellement compte du danger auquel ces personnes sont exposées.

Ces derniers jours, nous avons également été profondément troublés par les informations selon lesquelles **Mehdi Taj**, président de la fédération iranienne de football et personne publiquement présentée comme ayant eu des liens passés avec le **Corps des gardiens de la révolution islamique (CGRI)**, aurait obtenu une autorisation de voyage pour le Canada avant de se voir refuser l'entrée à son arrivée. Selon les médias, M. Taj s'est vu refuser l'entrée en raison de ses liens présumés avec le CGRI, tandis que des responsables canadiens ont reconnu que des responsables du football iranien s'étaient vu refuser l'entrée avant le Congrès de la FIFA à Vancouver.

Pour nous, cela soulève une question douloureuse et urgente : **comment le système canadien peut-il agir assez rapidement pour délivrer une autorisation de voyage à une personne publiquement associée au même régime que fuient nos réfugiés, alors que des réfugiés dont la vie est en danger se font dire d'attendre pendant des années?**

Il ne s'agit pas seulement d'une question politique. Il s'agit d'une question humanitaire. C'est aussi une question de confiance du public, de cohérence et de responsabilité. Les réfugiés qui ont fui le régime iranien ne devraient pas être laissés dans l'incertitude alors que le Canada semble capable d'agir rapidement dans d'autres dossiers d'immigration. Si le système a la capacité de traiter ce type de dossiers, il doit aussi avoir la capacité de répondre d'urgence aux réfugiés exposés à un risque de détention, de déportation, de maladie, de violence ou de mort.

Cette note d'information est soumise conjointement par **IRQR et la Fondation Marjan** afin de fournir aux députés et députées de l'information, du contexte et des éléments probants. Dans les pages qui suivent, nous décrivons la crise croissante du traitement des demandes de réfugiés, l'aggravation des délais dans le parrainage privé, l'absence répétée de réponses significatives de la part d'IRCC, le fardeau financier et opérationnel imposé aux petits organismes de parrainage, ainsi que les conséquences humaines réelles de ces retards.

Nous vous demandons, à titre de membres du Parlement, d'examiner attentivement ce rapport et d'agir. Les réfugiés ne peuvent pas attendre indéfiniment. Les répondants ne peuvent pas continuer à recueillir des fonds, à soumettre des demandes complètes, à faire des suivis urgents et à ne recevoir que des réponses génériques pendant que des vies demeurent en danger. Le

système canadien de protection des réfugiés doit être plus qu'une promesse; il doit fonctionner dans la pratique.

Nous vous demandons d'utiliser votre position pour exercer des pressions auprès d'**IRCC et du gouvernement du Canada** afin qu'ils prennent des mesures urgentes, mesurables et transparentes. Personne ne devrait devenir une autre Marjan parce qu'un dossier est resté trop longtemps dans un système qui connaissait le danger, mais n'a pas agi.

Arsham Parsi

Fondateur et directeur général

International Railroad for Queer Refugees (IRQR)

Fondation Marjan

A Personal Appeal from Arsham Parsi

Dear Members of Parliament,

My name is **Arsham Parsi**. I began my activism in 2001, speaking out against the Iranian regime's persecution of LGBTQ+ individuals. Due to my sexual orientation and advocacy, I was forced to flee Iran, seek asylum in Türkiye, and eventually arrive in Canada in May 2006 as a government-sponsored refugee. I never forgot my responsibility. What began as survival became my life's work.



In 2008, I founded the **International Railroad for Queer Refugees (IRQR)**, a registered Canadian charity. For more than two decades, IRQR has supported LGBTQ+ refugees fleeing persecution, particularly those escaping regimes where their identity, dignity, and lives are at risk. Our work has included crisis support, advocacy, public education, international collaboration, and direct assistance to refugees navigating complex and often dangerous systems.

In 2019, we founded the **Marjan Foundation**, a non-profit sister organization working alongside IRQR. The foundation was named after **Marjan Mohammadi**, a transgender woman whom IRQR tried desperately to bring to Canada because of her critical health condition and vulnerable situation in Türkiye. We were able to work with IRCC and the Minister of Immigration to secure an urgent visa for her, as we had done for other refugees in similarly urgent situations. Tragically, Marjan passed away just two months before her planned departure to Canada. Her death remains a painful reminder that in refugee protection, time is not an administrative detail — time can be the difference between life and death.

The Marjan Foundation was created because the government-sponsored refugee pathway had become increasingly overwhelmed and no longer offered a timely solution for many refugees in urgent need of protection. Through private sponsorship, we believed we could mobilize Canadian communities, raise funds, prepare applications, and help bring vulnerable refugees to safety. For a small grassroots organization, this was not easy. We are not a business entity. We do not see refugees as clients, files, or numbers. We see them as human beings whose lives are in danger and whose futures depend on timely action.

Over the years, we have worked hard to build support, raise funds, complete sponsorship applications, and collaborate with Canadian institutions. We have also seen moments when Canada acted with urgency and compassion. In the past, including during the tenure of former Immigration Minister Jason Kenney, Canada responded to urgent cases involving refugees at immediate risk, including those facing deportation from Türkiye. Those refugees were brought to safety in a timely manner, and many remain deeply grateful to Canada for saving their lives.

Unfortunately, the situation today is very different. Refugees who have escaped persecution — including LGBTQ+ refugees fleeing the Iranian regime — are now waiting for years in Türkiye, often in unsafe and unstable conditions. Some face serious medical issues. Some face arrest,

detention, or deportation. Some are living in fear every day. Despite repeated letters, follow-ups, requests for urgent processing, and documentation sent to IRCC and Canadian officials, we too often receive generic or automated responses that do not meaningfully address the danger these individuals face.

In recent days, we were also deeply disturbed by reports that **Mehdi Taj**, the president of Iran's football federation and a person publicly reported to have past ties to the **Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC)**, was granted Canadian travel authorization before being denied entry upon arrival in Canada. Media reports state that Mr. Taj was denied entry in connection with his reported IRGC ties, while Canadian officials acknowledged that Iranian soccer officials were denied entry ahead of the FIFA Congress in Vancouver.

For us, this raises a painful and urgent question: **How can Canada's system move quickly enough to issue travel authorization to an individual publicly reported to have ties to the same regime our refugees are fleeing, while refugees whose lives are in danger are told to wait for years?**

This is not only a political question. It is a humanitarian one. It is a question of public confidence, consistency, and accountability. Refugees who fled the Iranian regime should not be left trapped in uncertainty while Canada appears capable of moving quickly in other immigration matters. If the system has the capacity to process such cases, then it must also have the capacity to respond urgently to refugees at risk of detention, deportation, illness, violence, or death.

This briefing is submitted jointly by IRQR and the Marjan Foundation to provide Members of Parliament with documentation, context, and evidence. In the following pages, we outline the growing refugee processing crisis, the worsening delays in private sponsorship, the repeated lack of meaningful response from IRCC, the financial and operational burden placed on small sponsorship organizations, and the real human consequences of delay.

We are asking you, as Members of Parliament, to review this report carefully and take action. Refugees cannot wait indefinitely. Sponsors cannot continue to raise funds, submit complete applications, follow up urgently, and receive only generic responses while lives remain at risk. Canada's refugee protection system must be more than a promise; it must function in practice.

We ask you to use your position to press IRCC and the Government of Canada for urgent, measurable, and transparent action. No one should become another Marjan because a file sat too long in a system that knew the danger but failed to act.

Sincerely,
Arsham Parsi
Founder and Executive Director
International Railroad for Queer Refugees (IRQR)
Marjan Foundation

Section 1: Overview of the Refugee Crisis Facing Vulnerable Refugees in Türkiye

Türkiye has long been one of the main transit countries for refugees fleeing persecution from Iran and other countries in the region. For many refugees, Türkiye is not a final place of safety, but a temporary and often dangerous waiting ground. Many have fled countries where their identity, religion, gender, sexual orientation, gender identity, family circumstances, or association with marginalized communities put them at risk of arrest, torture, imprisonment, family violence, honour-based violence, abuse, or death.

While IRQR has historically focused on LGBTQ+ refugees, mainly from Iran and Syria, and while many of the refugees supported by IRQR and the Marjan Foundation are LGBTQ+ individuals escaping persecution, our sponsorship work has also included other vulnerable refugees whose lives are at risk. These non-LGBTQ+ cases are primarily Iranian refugees, including people who converted from Islam to Christianity, members of the Baha'i community, victims of abuse and violence, and single women or single mothers who have faced violence, abandonment, or severe vulnerability. In every case, our work is guided by the same principle: people who are in danger should not be left waiting indefinitely when a pathway to safety exists.

For Iranian refugees in particular, return is not an option for many. Some escaped persecution because of their sexual orientation or gender identity. Others fled because of their religion, conversion, membership in a persecuted religious minority, gender-based violence, family violence, or other forms of targeted abuse and vulnerability. Many cannot safely return home. Some have been visible online, rejected by their families, identified by authorities, or exposed to threats from community members. For these individuals, delay is not merely inconvenient. Delay means continued exposure to danger.

IRQR has previously documented the situation of Iranian LGBTQ+ refugees in detail through its 2018 Iranian Queer Watch Report and the updated January 2025 Iranian Queer Watch Report, both available on IRQR's website.¹ Those reports provide broader background on the legal, social, economic, health, housing, and resettlement challenges facing LGBTQ+ refugees, particularly Iranian LGBTQ+ refugees in Türkiye. This briefing builds on that earlier work, but it has a more specific purpose: to address Canada's current private sponsorship delays, IRCC's lack of meaningful response to urgent cases, and the need for immediate parliamentary action.

While Türkiye has provided temporary refuge for many people over the years, refugees there often live in legal, financial, and social insecurity. Many face difficulty obtaining stable employment, housing, medical care, legal protection, and long-term status. LGBTQ+ refugees are especially vulnerable because they may face discrimination not only as refugees, but also because of their sexual orientation or gender identity. At the same time, non-LGBTQ+ refugees supported through our sponsorship work may also face severe risks, including religious

¹ <https://irqr.net/wp-content/uploads/2024/11/IQW-Report.pdf> and <https://irqr.net/wp-content/uploads/2024/12/IQW-2025.pdf>

persecution, abuse, serious illness, detention, deportation, poverty, trauma, family separation, and gender-based violence.

In recent years, the situation has become increasingly difficult. Refugees have reported growing fear of arrest, detention, deportation, loss of legal status, and pressure to leave Türkiye. Some have been detained or placed in removal centres. Others live with the constant fear that any interaction with authorities may put them at risk. For people who fled Iran, the possibility of deportation is terrifying. Being returned to Iran could expose them to imprisonment, violence, persecution, abuse, or death.



This is why private sponsorship has been so important. For many vulnerable refugees, private sponsorship is not simply an immigration pathway; it is a lifeline. It is often the only realistic route to safety when government-assisted resettlement spaces are limited, delayed, or unavailable. Sponsors raise funds, prepare applications, gather documents, communicate with refugees, and take responsibility for settlement in Canada. In doing so, they help Canada meet its humanitarian commitments.

However, the private sponsorship system is now failing many of the very people it was meant to protect. Refugees who have already been identified as vulnerable, whose sponsors are ready, and whose applications have been submitted are still waiting for years. During this time, their conditions often deteriorate. Medical issues worsen. Mental health declines. Families face

poverty. People lose hope. Some face arrest, detention, or deportation risk while their files remain pending.

The crisis is therefore not only overseas. It is also a Canadian policy and processing crisis. When refugees in danger are asked to wait for years despite urgent circumstances, the promise of protection becomes hollow. For vulnerable refugees in Türkiye — LGBTQ+ and non-LGBTQ+ alike — every day of delay can bring new threats, new trauma, and new risks. The longer Canada's processing system fails to act, the greater the chance that another life will be lost before safety arrives.

This briefing asks Members of Parliament to recognize the urgency of this situation and to treat prolonged refugee processing delays as a humanitarian emergency, not simply an administrative backlog.

Section 2: Our Track Record and Current Sponsorship Work

IRQR and the Marjan Foundation are not approaching this issue as outside observers. We are directly involved in Canada's private refugee sponsorship system. We have prepared applications, raised funds, supported refugees before and after arrival, communicated with IRCC, and carried the responsibility of helping vulnerable people reach safety. Our concern comes from years of direct experience with the system and from seeing how delays affect real human lives.

Before the Marjan Foundation was created, IRQR had already spent many years supporting refugees who arrived in Canada through the government-assisted refugee pathway. This experience gave us a deep understanding of both the strengths and limitations of Canada's resettlement system. It also showed us that arrival in Canada is not the end of the process; successful settlement requires preparation, support, community connection, employment assistance, and long-term stability.

Since its founding, IRQR has worked to identify and support LGBTQ+ refugees who are at risk, particularly those fleeing Iran and Syria. This work has included crisis intervention, documentation support, advocacy, referrals, public education, and collaboration with Canadian and international partners. Over the years, IRQR has helped many refugees navigate extremely difficult circumstances, including family rejection, threats, poverty, trauma, legal insecurity, and fear of deportation.

The Marjan Foundation was created to respond to a specific gap: the need for a practical sponsorship pathway when vulnerable refugees could not wait for limited government-assisted resettlement opportunities. Through the Marjan Foundation, we have worked to mobilize community support, raise the required settlement funds, prepare sponsorship applications, and support refugees through the long and complex process of private sponsorship.

Since 2019, the Marjan Foundation has been involved in **172 private sponsorship applications**, representing approximately **289 people**. These applications include single individuals as well as families. Of these, **90 applications** (representing 139 people) have arrived in Canada or are at the final stage of arrival. The remaining **82 applications (representing approximately 150 people) are still in process**, and they are our main concern in this briefing.

These numbers show both the success and the strain of the private sponsorship system. They demonstrate that when the system works, refugees reach safety, rebuild their lives, and become part of Canadian communities. But they also show that many people remain trapped in the process despite having sponsors, funds, and a clear pathway to safety.

The remaining cases include people who continue to wait in Türkiye in vulnerable and unstable circumstances. Many face medical concerns, religious persecution, family violence, gender-based violence, serious insecurity, or risk connected to detention or deportation. Their files are not abstract administrative matters. They represent human beings whose lives continue to be affected by every day of delay.

Our experience also shows that private sponsorship can produce strong settlement outcomes. In our experience with government-assisted refugees, many struggled after their initial 12 months of government support ended, and a significant number later needed to apply for social assistance. By contrast, among refugees privately sponsored through the Marjan Foundation since 2019, only **one person** has applied for social assistance after completing the initial 12 months of sponsor support. This demonstrates that private sponsorship, when properly supported and processed in a timely manner, can help refugees integrate successfully, find employment, and reduce long-term pressure on local, provincial, and federal support systems.

This point is important because private sponsorship is not only a humanitarian pathway; it is also a partnership in which civil society carries a significant share of the responsibility. Sponsors raise the settlement funds, provide the first year of support, help newcomers find housing, navigate services, access healthcare, enroll in school where needed, search for employment, and build community connections. The federal government does not carry the same initial financial burden as it does for government-assisted refugees. When the private sponsorship system works, refugees are protected, sponsors are engaged, and Canada benefits.

This work is demanding for any organization, but especially for a small grassroots organization. Private sponsorship requires not only compassion, but also significant financial, administrative, and emotional commitment. Sponsors must raise and hold settlement funds, prepare detailed applications, gather documents from refugees abroad, maintain communication across time zones and languages, respond to IRCC requests, update expired documents, and continue supporting people who are often living in crisis while waiting.

Despite these challenges, we have continued this work because private sponsorship has saved lives. Many refugees supported through our efforts have arrived in Canada, rebuilt their lives, contributed to their communities, and remained deeply grateful for the protection Canada provided. Their success demonstrates what the private sponsorship system can achieve when it works as intended.

However, the same system is now placing refugees and sponsors under increasing strain. Applications that should move forward in a timely and humane manner are taking years. Refugees who were already vulnerable at the time of application become even more vulnerable while waiting. Sponsors are left with few meaningful answers, even when urgent circumstances are brought repeatedly to IRCC's attention.

Our current sponsorship work includes both LGBTQ+ and non-LGBTQ+ refugees. Many are Iranian LGBTQ+ refugees fleeing persecution because of their sexual orientation or gender identity. Others are Iranian refugees who converted from Islam to Christianity, members of the Baha'i community, survivors of abuse and violence, and single women or single mothers facing severe vulnerability. In many cases, the refugees we support are not simply waiting for a better future; they are waiting for basic safety.

This is why processing delays are so damaging. When IRCC delays a file, the impact is not limited to a calendar or a case number. A delay can mean a refugee remains without legal security, without stable housing, without medical treatment, without protection from deportation,

or without hope. For sponsors, delay means continuing to manage urgent cases without clear timelines, while trying to reassure people whose lives may be deteriorating day by day.

This briefing is therefore grounded in our direct experience. We are not asking Members of Parliament to act based only on general concern. We are asking you to act based on a clear pattern we have witnessed through our work: refugees in urgent need of protection are waiting far too long, sponsors are receiving inadequate responses, and the system is not meeting the humanitarian purpose it was created to serve.

Section 3: Processing Delays, Broken Commitments, and the Growing Backlog

Canada's Private Sponsorship of Refugees program was created as a partnership between the government and civil society. It depends on sponsors who are willing to raise funds, prepare applications, support newcomers, and take responsibility for settlement. In return, sponsors and refugees must be able to rely on a processing system that is timely, transparent, and responsive to urgent humanitarian circumstances.

IRCC has long recognized that delays in the private sponsorship system are a serious problem. In its 2018–2019 Departmental Plan, IRCC stated that it aimed to eliminate the backlog of privately sponsored refugee applications outside Quebec in 2019 and reduce processing times to an average of 12 months for the majority of applications submitted on or after January 1, 2020.² This commitment was important because it recognized that refugee protection cannot function properly when vulnerable people are left waiting for years.

That commitment has not been met. By early 2022, IRCC's own materials showed that the privately sponsored refugee inventory remained very large. As of February 2022, IRCC reported a privately sponsored refugee inventory of approximately 70,000 persons and a processing time of 35 months. As of March 2022, IRCC reported the inventory at approximately 71,500 persons, again with a processing time of 35 months.³

The situation did not meaningfully improve in 2023. IRCC later reported that privately sponsored refugee processing times increased from 35 months at the end of July 2022 to 38 months at the end of October 2023, with a privately sponsored refugee inventory of 71,180 persons. This means that several years after IRCC's stated goal of reducing processing times to approximately 12 months, the system was still operating at more than three times that target.⁴

For refugees in Türkiye, the situation has become even more troubling. Available processing-time data indicates that privately sponsored refugees in Türkiye have faced a substantial increase in the combined practical wait time in recent years. Earlier available figures suggested a combined wait of roughly 29–31 months, while more recent figures indicate a combined wait of

2 IRCC, 2018-2019 Departmental Plan, Government of Canada, 2018, p. 12.

https://publications.gc.ca/collections/collection_2018/ircc/Ci1-27-2018-eng.pdf

3 IRCC, Inventories and Processing Times, Government of Canada, 2022.

[https://www.canada.ca/en/immigration-refugees-](https://www.canada.ca/en/immigration-refugees-citizenship/corporate/transparency/committees/cimm-mar-24-2022/inventories-processing-times.html)

[citizenship/corporate/transparency/committees/cimm-mar-24-2022/inventories-processing-times.html](https://www.canada.ca/en/immigration-refugees-citizenship/corporate/transparency/committees/cimm-mar-24-2022/inventories-processing-times.html) ;

[https://www.canada.ca/en/immigration-refugees-](https://www.canada.ca/en/immigration-refugees-citizenship/corporate/transparency/committees/cimm-mar-24-2022/inventories-processing-times.html)

[citizenship/corporate/transparency/committees/cimm-mar-24-2022/inventories-processing-times.html](https://www.canada.ca/en/immigration-refugees-citizenship/corporate/transparency/committees/cimm-mar-24-2022/inventories-processing-times.html)

4 IRCC, Processing Times for Refugee Programs, Government of Canada, 2023.

<https://www.canada.ca/en/immigration-refugees-citizenship/corporate/transparency/committees/pacp-dec-05-2023/processing-times-refugee-programs.html>

approximately 59–60 months when both sponsorship assessment and overseas refugee processing are considered together. In other words, the listed practical wait time for Türkiye-related cases appears to have increased by roughly 28–31 months in a short period of time. Even if exact figures fluctuate, the overall pattern is clear: the system has not moved toward timely protection; it has moved further away from it.

In November 2024, IRCC paused new applications from Groups of Five and Community Sponsors under the Private Sponsorship of Refugees program. IRCC explained that applications from private sponsors continued to exceed the spaces available under the immigration levels plan, resulting in a large and growing inventory and lengthy processing times. IRCC stated that applications already submitted would continue to be processed.⁵

However, for refugees already waiting and for sponsors already carrying responsibility, the pause has not provided visible relief. The purpose of pausing intake should be to reduce pressure on the system and allow existing cases to move forward more efficiently. Yet the experience of sponsors and refugees shows that many files continue to move slowly, urgent requests continue to receive generic responses, and refugees remain trapped in dangerous and unstable conditions. In November 2025, IRCC extended the pause on new Group of Five and Community Sponsor applications until December 31, 2026, again citing high demand, large application volumes, and lengthy wait times.⁶

This raises a serious concern. If the government pauses new applications but does not significantly improve processing for existing applications, the pause becomes a restriction without relief. It prevents new refugees from accessing a pathway to safety while doing too little for those already in the system. For sponsors, this creates frustration and uncertainty. For refugees, it creates fear, despair, and prolonged exposure to danger.

The issue is not simply that processing takes time. We understand that refugee resettlement requires eligibility review, security screening, medical checks, documentation, and coordination with overseas offices. We also understand that some factors may be outside IRCC's direct control. However, prolonged delay becomes unacceptable when urgent circumstances are repeatedly brought to IRCC's attention and the response remains generic, delayed, or non-specific.

In many of the cases supported by IRQR and the Marjan Foundation, refugees are not waiting in stable or safe conditions. Some face serious medical concerns. Some face detention or deportation risk. Some are survivors of abuse or gender-based violence. Some are LGBTQ+

5 IRCC, Temporary pause on intake of refugee sponsorship applications from Groups of Five and Community Sponsors, November 2024. <https://www.canada.ca/en/immigration-refugees-citizenship/news/notices/temporary-pause-intake-refugee-sponsorship-applications-groups-five-community-sponsors.html>

6 IRCC, Temporary Pause Extended on Intake of Refugee Sponsorship Applications From Groups of Five and Community Sponsors, November 21, 2025. <https://www.canada.ca/en/immigration-refugees-citizenship/news/notices/temporary-pause-extended-refugee-sponsorship-applications-groups-five.html>

refugees who remain exposed to discrimination, violence, and isolation. Some belong to religious minorities or have converted from Islam to Christianity and cannot safely return to Iran. These are not ordinary administrative files. They are humanitarian protection cases.

The growing delay also undermines the purpose of private sponsorship. Sponsors are ready. Funds have been raised. Applications have been submitted. Communities are prepared to welcome newcomers. Yet refugees can remain overseas for several years, with recent publicly archived IRCC processing-time data for Türkiye-related cases indicating a combined practical wait of approximately 59–60 months. These are not short administrative waits; they are multi-year delays that can determine whether a person remains safe, becomes homeless, is detained, is deported, or loses hope entirely.

This damages public confidence in the system and discourages community members from participating in private sponsorship in the future. A system that depends on civil society cannot continue to ask sponsors to do their part while failing to provide timely, meaningful action in return.

For this reason, we believe the current backlog and processing delays must be treated as a humanitarian emergency. Canada cannot claim to support refugee protection while allowing vulnerable people with sponsors, funds, and complete applications to remain in danger for dozens of months. The government must show that its commitments are not only words in departmental plans, but actions reflected in processing decisions, communication, and urgent intervention when lives are at risk.

Section 4: Communication Failures with IRCC and Lack of Accountability

One of the most serious concerns faced by IRQR and the Marjan Foundation is not only the length of processing delays, but the lack of meaningful communication when urgent risks are brought to IRCC's attention. Over the years, we have submitted follow-up letters, urgent requests, supporting documents, medical information, detention-related updates, and safety concerns on behalf of refugees whose circumstances required immediate attention. Too often, the responses we received were generic, automated, or non-specific.

We understand that IRCC receives a high volume of correspondence. We also understand that officers must follow procedures and that not every request can result in immediate action. However, when sponsors provide evidence that a refugee is facing serious illness, detention, deportation risk, gender-based violence, religious persecution, or a threat to their physical safety, the response must be more than a standard acknowledgement. In such cases, a generic response is not meaningful communication. It does not tell sponsors whether the information was reviewed, whether the file was assessed for urgency, whether any action was taken, or whether further documentation is required.

IRCC's own materials recognize that privately sponsored refugee applications may involve complex and urgent circumstances. IRCC explains that processing times can vary depending on factors such as the number of applications, regional security conditions, the ability to communicate with the refugee, medical exams, security screening, family profile, exit permits, and other barriers. IRCC also acknowledges that visa officers consider whether a refugee has special needs, including medical needs, during processing.⁷

The problem is that, in practice, urgent information submitted by sponsors often appears to disappear into the system without a clear response. Sponsors may be told that processing takes time, that applications are reviewed according to existing procedures, or that IRCC is aware of difficult circumstances. But this does not answer the central question: **what happens when a refugee's situation becomes dangerous while the file is still pending?**

This gap is especially troubling because Canada already recognizes the principle of urgent refugee protection. Under Canada's Urgent Protection Program, refugees facing immediate threats to life, liberty, or physical well-being may be processed on an expedited basis following referral by UNHCR or another recognized referral organization. While not every privately sponsored case falls under that program, the existence of such a mechanism confirms an

⁷ IRCC, How we process privately sponsored refugee applications.

<https://www.canada.ca/en/immigration-refugees-citizenship/services/refugees/sponsor-refugee/private-sponsorship-program/how-we-process-applications.html>

important principle: when a refugee faces immediate danger, the system must be capable of responding urgently.⁸

In our experience, however, urgent private sponsorship cases too often receive no meaningful pathway for escalation. When we contact IRCC or Canadian officials regarding refugees facing critical health concerns, detention, deportation risk, or other urgent threats, we often receive responses that do not engage with the specific facts of the case. Sponsors are left without a clear officer contact, without an explanation of what criteria were considered, and without confirmation that the urgent evidence was meaningfully reviewed.

This has created a serious accountability problem. Sponsors are expected to provide accurate documentation, raise funds, maintain settlement plans, update forms, and respond quickly to IRCC requests. Refugees are expected to keep documents current, attend interviews, complete medical exams, provide biometrics, and remain reachable despite unstable living conditions. Yet when sponsors ask IRCC for urgent attention, they often receive limited or generic responses that provide no meaningful accountability in return.

The same problem was reflected in our parliamentary petition, **e-6563**, which addressed delays affecting privately sponsored refugee applicants, including applicants waiting for interviews at the Canadian embassy in Ankara, Türkiye. The petition received more than **1,160 signatures** and was presented in the House of Commons by Elizabeth May, Member of Parliament for Saanich—Gulf Islands.⁹ Through this petition, we sought a meaningful government response to the delays and the urgent risks faced by refugees. However, the response we received did not provide a concrete timeline, a practical solution, or a clear mechanism for urgent cases. Instead, it largely repeated the same general explanations sponsors often receive in correspondence: that processing takes time, that applications are complex, and that the system is facing high demand.

This pattern has also extended to attempts to engage directly with political leadership. IRQR and the Marjan Foundation have repeatedly attempted to secure a meeting with the Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship, or with someone from the Minister's office or department, to discuss urgent cases and explore how we could work with IRCC to protect individuals at risk. Despite these efforts, we have not been able to secure a meeting or even a phone call with the Minister's office or the department for this purpose.

We have also met with several Members of Parliament across Canada. Some MPs acknowledged the seriousness of the issue and indicated that they, too, have faced difficulty obtaining meaningful communication from the Minister's office on immigration matters. We were referred to the Minister's Parliamentary Secretary, **Peter Fragiskatos**, Member of Parliament for London Centre. While we did receive a response from his office, the information provided did not offer

8 IRCC, Guide to the Private Sponsorship of Refugees Program - Urgent Protection Program.
<https://www.canada.ca/en/immigration-refugees-citizenship/corporate/publications-manuals/guide-private-sponsorship-refugees-program/section-3.html>

9 House of Commons of Canada, Petition e-6563.
<https://www.ourcommons.ca/petitions/en/Petition/Details?Petition=e-6563>

new details, a case-specific pathway, a timeline, or a practical solution for the urgent refugee cases we raised.

For refugees, communication failure is not a minor administrative inconvenience. It increases fear and uncertainty. A person facing possible deportation cannot be reassured by a generic email. A person diagnosed with a serious illness cannot be protected by a standard acknowledgement. A person detained or at risk of detention needs action, not general language about processing times. When urgent information is provided and no meaningful response follows, the system effectively shifts the burden of uncertainty back onto refugees and sponsors.

For sponsors, the lack of communication also creates operational and ethical strain. We are responsible for keeping refugees informed, supporting them emotionally, updating their files, and helping them survive during the waiting period. When IRCC does not provide meaningful answers, sponsors are placed in the impossible position of trying to reassure people in danger without having any real information to give them.

We have retained supporting documentation, including samples of correspondence, urgent follow-up requests, generic responses, petition-related materials, and records of attempts to obtain meetings or meaningful engagement. These materials can be provided to Members of Parliament or their offices upon request, with appropriate consent and confidentiality safeguards. These documents demonstrate that our concerns are not abstract. They are based on repeated attempts to use the proper channels, provide evidence, and request urgent action. The issue is not that sponsors have failed to communicate with IRCC. The issue is that IRCC has failed to communicate meaningfully in return.

IRQR and the Marjan Foundation are not asking for special treatment outside the law. We are asking for a clear, transparent, and accountable process for urgent private sponsorship cases. When sponsors submit credible evidence of medical crisis, detention, deportation risk, serious violence, or other immediate danger, IRCC should provide a case-specific response, confirm whether urgency has been assessed, identify whether additional documents are needed, and explain what action, if any, will be taken.

Without such a mechanism, the promise of refugee protection becomes dependent not only on eligibility, sponsorship, or vulnerability, but on silence and waiting. That is not a humane system. It is not a transparent system. And it is not consistent with Canada's stated commitment to protect refugees whose lives are at risk.

Section 5: Human Impact — Case Examples and Consequences of Delay

Behind every sponsorship application is a person or family waiting for safety. For IRQR and the Marjan Foundation, these are not anonymous files in a queue. They are people we know, people we communicate with, and people whose lives are affected by every delay, every unanswered email, and every missed opportunity for urgent intervention.

For privacy and safety reasons, this public briefing does not include full names, dates of birth, immigration documents, medical records, detention records, or other identifying personal information. Some examples below use first names or initials only. Full supporting documentation can be made available to Members of Parliament or their offices upon request, with appropriate consent and confidentiality safeguards.

The following examples are not isolated incidents. They reflect a broader pattern we have experienced repeatedly: refugees face urgent risks, sponsors provide documentation to IRCC or Canadian officials, and the response is often delayed, generic, or not meaningfully connected to the specific danger raised.

Case Example 1: Approved Sponsorship, Detention, and Missed Embassy Interview

In one case, an Iranian couple sponsored by the Marjan Foundation had already received sponsorship approval and had been scheduled for an interview at the Canadian Embassy in Ankara. Before the interview date, however, they became subject to administrative detention and deportation proceedings in Türkiye. Their lawyer confirmed that legal action had temporarily suspended removal, but that this protection was procedural and temporary. The couple remained in detention and continued to face legal uncertainty.

Because they were being held in a detention centre in eastern Türkiye, they were unable to travel to Ankara for their scheduled interview. Marjan Foundation repeatedly informed Canadian officials of the situation and requested assistance, including confirmation of the applicants' status and coordination that could help Turkish authorities permit them to attend their Canadian interview.

In our experience, the Canadian Embassy can play an important role in coordinating with UNHCR or relevant authorities in urgent protection situations, including confirming that applicants are actively in process for Canadian resettlement. In this case, however, despite repeated requests, no meaningful support or coordination was provided in time to prevent the missed interview.

This case demonstrates the practical danger of delay and non-response. Sponsorship approval and a scheduled interview do not protect refugees from detention or deportation while they wait overseas. Without timely confirmation letters, coordination with UNHCR or local authorities,

rescheduled interviews, or meaningful embassy engagement, refugees can miss critical processing steps for reasons entirely beyond their control.

Case Example 2: Deportation Warning Followed by Deportation to Iran

In another case, Marjan Foundation urgently contacted IRCC regarding an Iranian refugee whose private sponsorship application had been submitted nearly two years earlier. The letter warned that she had been arrested by Turkish authorities and was at imminent risk of deportation to Iran. Supporting court documentation was provided, and urgent processing was requested to prevent a life-threatening outcome.

No meaningful response or action was received before deportation occurred. The refugee was deported to Iran and was reportedly arrested. We no longer have reliable information about her current situation.

After her deportation, Marjan Foundation was forced to request withdrawal of the sponsorship application because she was no longer able to leave Iran and return to Türkiye to continue the process. IRCC responded quickly to confirm that the sponsorship application had been withdrawn and that the permanent residence application had been refused.

This sequence raises a serious concern: urgent warnings about deportation risk did not result in timely intervention, yet the later administrative withdrawal was processed quickly. For refugees at risk, this kind of delay can have irreversible consequences.

Case Example 3: Exhausted Legal Remedies and Refused Priority Processing

In another case, Marjan Foundation requested urgent processing for an Iranian family whose application had been submitted in 2023. The family included a mother, father, and young child. Their lawyer in Türkiye confirmed that the mother had exhausted all protection and appeal mechanisms, had no remaining legal status or protection mechanism, and faced an immediate risk of apprehension, detention, and removal.

The lawyer also warned that deportation would expose the mother to serious risk in Iran due to her conversion to Christianity and family circumstances, and that removal would cause immediate and irreparable family separation from her child. The lawyer described the situation as urgent and requested priority consideration of the Canadian sponsorship application.

Despite this documentation, IRCC replied that it was not able to prioritize the application and advised that the applicants could contact UNHCR for urgent protection. This response did not provide a practical solution, a timeline, or a case-specific pathway, even though the documented risk included detention, deportation, persecution, and family separation.

Case Example 4: Cancer Diagnosis and No Meaningful Response

In another case, Marjan Foundation submitted medical documentation for the spouse of a sponsored refugee who had been diagnosed with cancer. The urgency was clear: remaining in

Türkiye without timely resettlement created serious health and humanitarian concerns. The Foundation requested expedited processing and submitted the available medical evidence.

No meaningful response or action was received.

For refugees with serious medical conditions, delay can worsen the illness, increase suffering, and reduce treatment options. A medical crisis should not be treated as a routine processing matter.

Case Example 5: Severe Heart Disease and No Meaningful Response

In another case, Marjan Foundation submitted medical documentation, hospital records, and supporting reports for a refugee diagnosed with severe heart disease. The Foundation again requested expedited processing because of the seriousness of the medical condition and the risks associated with continued delay.

No meaningful response or action was received.

This case reflects a repeated pattern: even when medical documentation is provided, sponsors are often left without confirmation that the evidence was meaningfully reviewed or that the case was assessed for urgency.

A Repeated Pattern, Not Isolated Exceptions

These examples are not the full list of urgent cases. They are representative of a wider pattern involving refugees with serious medical conditions, detention and deportation risks, religious persecution, family separation, gender-based vulnerability, and other urgent protection concerns.

In many of these cases, the refugees had already done everything expected of them. Sponsors had raised funds. Applications had been submitted. Documents had been provided. Lawyers had issued warnings. Medical evidence had been sent. Yet the response from the system was too often silence, delay, or generic language.

This is why processing delay cannot be understood as a neutral administrative issue. Delay can mean that a refugee misses an interview because they are detained. Delay can mean that a deportation occurs before Canada acts. Delay can mean that a serious illness worsens. Delay can mean that a child is separated from a parent. Delay can mean that a refugee who fled persecution is returned to the country they escaped.

The purpose of private sponsorship is protection. When refugees with sponsors and documented urgent risks remain trapped overseas for years, the system is not fulfilling that purpose. The human cost is carried by refugees, by their families, and by the organizations trying to protect them.

IRQR and the Marjan Foundation are asking Members of Parliament to recognize these cases as evidence of a systemic failure that requires immediate attention. A functioning refugee

protection system must have a clear mechanism for urgent review when credible evidence shows that a person faces detention, deportation, severe illness, violence, or other serious harm. Without such a mechanism, the system may continue processing files, but it fails to protect lives.

Section 6: Financial and Operational Burden on Sponsors

Canada's private sponsorship system depends on the willingness of civil society to share responsibility for refugee protection. Sponsors raise funds, prepare applications, communicate with refugees overseas, support newcomers after arrival, and help them integrate into Canadian society. This is a significant commitment under normal circumstances. When processing delays stretch for years, that commitment becomes increasingly difficult to sustain.

For a small grassroots organization like the Marjan Foundation, private sponsorship requires major financial, administrative, and emotional investment. Before an application is submitted, sponsors must identify vulnerable refugees, assess eligibility, gather documents, prepare settlement plans, raise the required funds, and ensure that the application is complete. After submission, sponsors must continue communicating with refugees, responding to changing circumstances, updating expired documents, answering IRCC requests, and providing emotional support during prolonged uncertainty.

When the system functioned more predictably, the Marjan Foundation was able to grow its capacity and improve services. We hired staff, created employment opportunities, and worked with experts, social workers, and community members to provide stronger support to refugees before and after arrival. This was not only humanitarian work; it was also community-building work. It allowed us to provide more professional, consistent, and effective settlement support.

However, IRCC's sudden pause on the intake of new Group of Five and Community Sponsor applications, announced with immediate effect in November 2024, placed small sponsorship organizations in a very difficult position.¹⁰ Organizations like ours were not given meaningful time to prepare, adjust staffing, plan financially, or explain the impact to donors and communities. The work did not disappear, but the pathway became uncertain. Applications already submitted remained pending, urgent cases continued, costs continued, and yet the ability to plan future sponsorship work was severely disrupted.

This had real consequences for our organization. When sponsorship activity slows or becomes uncertain, donations also become more difficult to secure. As a non-profit organization, we rely heavily on individual donations. Donors want to see results: refugees arriving in Canada, families being supported, and lives being rebuilt. When applications remain stuck for years and arrivals slow down, it becomes harder to demonstrate visible outcomes, even though the need and workload remain. In this way, prolonged IRCC delays and sudden policy changes harm not only refugees, but also the small organizations that Canada depends on to make private sponsorship possible.

10 IRCC, Temporary pause on intake of refugee sponsorship applications from Groups of Five and Community Sponsors, November 2024. <https://www.canada.ca/en/immigration-refugees-citizenship/news/notices/temporary-pause-intake-refugee-sponsorship-applications-groups-five-community-sponsors.html>

The financial burden continues even when processing slows. For each sponsorship application, funds must be held and managed responsibly. In many cases, separate bank accounts must be maintained to hold the required sponsorship funds for the applicant or family, which will later be used to support them during their first 12 months in Canada. These accounts carry monthly banking fees. Based on the 82 applications still in process, even a minimum banking fee of \$5 per month per account results in approximately \$410 per month, or nearly \$5,000 per year, in banking fees alone. This does not include accounting, bookkeeping, compliance, administration, staff time, communication costs, document updates, or emergency case support.

These ongoing costs are not optional. Sponsors cannot simply abandon pending applications because IRCC processing is slow. We must continue to maintain records, preserve funds, update files, answer questions from refugees, respond to new risks, and remain ready for arrivals whenever IRCC eventually moves the file forward. Yet without a clear timeline, organizations cannot properly budget, staff, or plan.

The burden is not only financial or administrative. It is also relational and reputational. Every day, refugees contact us asking for updates, explanations, and reassurance because their lives in Türkiye are becoming more dangerous and uncertain. We are placed in the painful position of trying to answer for delays we did not create and decisions we do not control. Without clear timelines or meaningful updates from IRCC, we cannot provide refugees with honest answers about when their cases will move forward. As a result, sponsors are left carrying the emotional burden of government delay. We are expected to preserve hope, explain silence, and absorb frustration, even when the cause of the delay lies outside our organization.

This also affects the reputation of sponsorship organizations. We raise funds, submit applications, communicate with refugees, and promise them that Canada offers a pathway to safety. When the process stalls for years without clear explanation, refugees may understandably lose trust in the sponsor, even though the sponsor has done its part. It is unfair for small non-profit organizations to carry the reputational damage caused by a government system that provides no clear timeline, no meaningful communication, and no effective urgent-response mechanism.

This burden is especially difficult because organizations like the Marjan Foundation are not acting as paid representatives or private law offices. We do not treat refugees as clients, and we do not profit from their applications. We undertake this work because the refugees are in danger and because Canada's private sponsorship system invites community organizations to be partners in protection. However, that partnership cannot function properly if sponsors are expected to carry responsibility indefinitely while government processing remains slow and communication remains limited.

Private sponsorship also provides a significant benefit to Canada. Sponsors, not the federal government, provide the first year of settlement support.¹¹ Sponsors help newcomers find

11 IRCC, Guide to the Private Sponsorship of Refugees Program. <https://www.canada.ca/en/immigration-refugees-citizenship/corporate/publications-manuals/guide-private-sponsorship-refugees-program.html>

housing, access healthcare, enroll children in school, search for employment, understand Canadian systems, build community connections, and begin rebuilding their lives. When private sponsorship works properly, it reduces pressure on government-funded settlement and income support systems.

Our experience demonstrates this clearly. Before the Marjan Foundation began private sponsorship work, IRQR had supported many refugees who arrived through the government-assisted refugee pathway. In our experience, many government-assisted refugees struggled after their initial twelve months of government support ended and often had to apply for social assistance. By contrast, among refugees privately sponsored through the Marjan Foundation since 2019, only **one person** has applied for social assistance after completing the initial twelve months of sponsor support.¹² This shows that private sponsorship can lead to strong settlement outcomes when refugees are supported by prepared sponsors and connected communities.

This is an important policy point. Private sponsorship does not simply bring refugees to Canada; it helps them succeed after arrival. Refugees sponsored through the Marjan Foundation have benefited from direct community support, practical settlement planning, and long-term connection. Many have found employment, become self-sufficient, and begun contributing to their communities. These outcomes should encourage the government to strengthen private sponsorship, not allow the system to become so delayed and unpredictable that sponsors and refugees lose confidence in it.

Instead, prolonged processing delays undermine the very model that Canada should be supporting. When sponsors see that applications take years, urgent requests go unanswered, and refugees remain in danger despite having sponsors ready in Canada, it becomes harder to ask communities to participate. Donors may hesitate to contribute when there is no clear timeline. Volunteers may become discouraged. Refugees may lose hope. Small organizations may be forced to downsize, lay off staff, reduce services, or suspend planned activities simply to survive.

The burden is not only financial. It is also emotional and ethical. Sponsors are often the primary point of contact for refugees overseas. When a refugee is detained, diagnosed with a serious illness, threatened with deportation, or unable to survive financially, they turn to the sponsor for help. The sponsor then turns to IRCC or Canadian officials. When no meaningful response comes, the sponsor is left trying to support a person in crisis without the authority or tools to resolve the situation.

This creates an impossible position. Sponsors are expected to be responsible, responsive, and prepared, but they are not given the information, timelines, or cooperation needed to manage urgent cases effectively. They carry the human consequences of delay while having little control over the processing decisions that cause or prolong those delays.

For this reason, the current delays should not be viewed only as a problem for refugees overseas. They are also a threat to Canada's private sponsorship infrastructure. If small, experienced,

¹² Marjan Foundation internal sponsorship and settlement records, 2019-2026.

community-based organizations are pushed beyond capacity, Canada risks losing some of the very partners that make the private sponsorship system possible.

IRQR and the Marjan Foundation remain committed to refugee protection. We continue this work because we believe in Canada's humanitarian values and because we have seen private sponsorship save lives. But the system must be repaired. Sponsors need timely processing, meaningful communication, urgent review mechanisms, and practical cooperation from IRCC and Canadian visa offices when lives are at risk.

A system that relies on sponsors must also respect sponsors. It must recognize the financial, administrative, and human responsibility they carry. Most importantly, it must ensure that when sponsors have done their part — raising funds, preparing applications, supporting refugees, and documenting urgent risks — the government does its part by processing cases in a timely, transparent, and humane manner.

Section 7: Escalating Risk, Regional Conflict, and Canada’s Unequal Urgency

The risks facing Iranian refugees in Türkiye have become more urgent because of the worsening security and human rights situation in Iran and the wider region. Refugees who fled Iran are not waiting in a neutral environment. They are waiting while the country they escaped from becomes more dangerous, more unpredictable, and more repressive.

In February 2026, Iran’s Supreme Leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, was killed in a U.S.-Israeli attack. His death created a leadership crisis at the centre of an already repressive state, raising serious concerns about how the IRGC, intelligence agencies, and other security forces would act to preserve power.¹³

This uncertainty matters directly for refugees. Iran’s legal and political system was already deeply repressive and unjust before this crisis. In moments of regime instability, the danger can become even greater. Security forces, intelligence agencies, the IRGC, and other state actors may act more aggressively to preserve power, suppress dissent, and punish anyone perceived as disloyal, foreign-connected, or supportive of regime change.

The internal crackdown has already intensified. Human rights reporting has documented unlawful use of force, beatings, mass arbitrary arrests, deadly violence, enforced disappearances, internet shutdowns, and severe restrictions following renewed protests and conflict-related instability. Human Rights Watch reported that Iranian authorities continued to criminalize freedom of expression, association, and assembly, and that protests beginning on December 28 were met with lethal force, mass arrests, enforced disappearances, and threats of a “firm” response.¹⁴

Iran International also reported that, according to the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, Iran executed at least **21 people** and arrested more than **4,000 people** on national-security-related charges after the start of the war with the United States and Israel. The same report stated that those executed included people linked to protests, opposition groups, and espionage accusations.¹⁵

These developments matter directly to Iranian refugees waiting in Türkiye. Many of the people supported by IRQR and the Marjan Foundation belong to groups that are especially vulnerable

13 CNN transcript, February 28, 2026; Iran International, February 28, 2026.

<https://transcripts.cnn.com/show/cnr/date/2026-02-28/segment/13> ;
<https://www.iranintl.com/en/202602281568>

14 Human Rights Watch, World Report 2026: Iran. <https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2026/country-chapters/iran>

15 Iran International, Iran executed 21, arrested over 4,000 since start of war, UN says, April 29, 2026.
<https://www.iranintl.com/en/202604291260>

under Iran’s security apparatus: LGBTQ+ people, converts from Islam to Christianity, Baha’is, women fleeing violence, single mothers, survivors of abuse, and people connected to communities that the regime views with suspicion. In an atmosphere of protest repression, regional war, leadership uncertainty, and national-security paranoia, these individuals may face even greater danger if returned to Iran.

The current environment also increases the risk that ordinary refugees may be accused of political or security offences simply because they left Iran, sought asylum, converted religion, associated with minority communities, communicated with foreign organizations, participated in solidarity demonstrations abroad, or posted support for protests or regime change on social media. Iranian authorities have a long history of using vague national-security accusations to punish perceived opponents. In the current climate, accusations such as “espionage,” “collaboration,” “propaganda,” “enmity against God,” or “corruption on earth” may carry catastrophic consequences, including torture, imprisonment, or execution.

For Iranian refugees in Türkiye, uncertainty is not a reason to wait. It is the reason to act.

This risk is not limited to activity inside Iran. Iranian authorities have also targeted and monitored diaspora communities abroad. Human Rights Watch reported that Iran’s transnational repression of dissidents abroad escalated, including threats and intimidation targeting journalists and family members. HRW also reported that UN experts raised concerns about credible threats by Iranian authorities against Iran International journalists in several countries, including Canada, as part of efforts to silence reporting and intimidate diaspora voices.¹⁶

This is directly relevant to refugees in Türkiye. Many Iranian refugees and asylum seekers have participated in solidarity protests, contacted international organizations, spoken publicly about the regime, or used social media to support protests, women’s rights, LGBTQ+ rights, religious freedom, or regime change. Iran International reported that Iranians abroad staged at least **168 protests across 30 countries and 73 cities** in support of protests inside Iran, including major gatherings in North America, Europe, Asia, Australia, and Türkiye.¹⁷

For refugees who may later be detained, deported, or forced to return to Iran, such visibility can become dangerous. A social media post, a protest photo, a connection to a Canadian organization, or public support for regime change may be used by Iranian authorities as evidence of disloyalty or foreign collaboration. Refugees in Türkiye are especially exposed because they

16 Human Rights Watch, World Report 2026: Iran; World Report 2026: Canada. <https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2026/country-chapters/iran>; <https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2026/country-chapters/canada>

17 Iran International, 168 protests, 73 cities: Iranian diaspora takes uprising message worldwide, January 21, 2026. <https://www.iranintl.com/en/202601211223>

may not have permanent legal protection, citizenship, or the same level of institutional support available to diaspora communities already settled in Canada, Europe, or the United States.

For refugees in Türkiye, this is not an abstract geopolitical issue. It affects their ability to remain safe, maintain contact with family, obtain documents, avoid deportation, and plan for the future. It also increases the danger of return to Iran at a time when the regime is more likely to treat dissent, difference, foreign contact, religious conversion, minority identity, or diaspora activism as a security threat.

In this context, Canada should be treating Iranian refugee cases with greater urgency, not less. Yet refugees and sponsors have not seen a meaningful emergency response for Iranian refugees stranded abroad. In some cases, refugees or sponsors have been told that decisions may be delayed because of uncertainty in the region. But uncertainty should not become a reason for inaction. When instability increases the risk of detention, deportation, persecution, or execution, the humanitarian response should accelerate, not pause.

Canada has shown in other conflicts that it can act quickly and creatively when it chooses to. After Russia's invasion of Ukraine, Canada created the Canada-Ukraine Authorization for Emergency Travel (CUAET), which offered Ukrainians and eligible family members extended temporary status and allowed them to work, study, and remain in Canada until it was safe to return. IRCC stated that CUAET had no cap on the number of visa, work, and study applications accepted under the program.¹⁸ Canada also extended certain temporary measures for Ukrainians while recognizing that the war and instability continued.¹⁹

We do not question Canada's support for Ukrainians. On the contrary, that response showed that Canada can mobilize extraordinary immigration tools when civilians are displaced by war and when urgent protection is treated as a national priority. The concern is that Iranian refugees waiting abroad — including people already sponsored, already documented, already in danger, and already in Canada's processing system — have not received comparable urgency.

Canada has introduced some special measures for Iranian nationals, but those measures have largely focused on Iranians already in Canada, such as temporary residents seeking to extend their status or remain lawfully in Canada. They do not provide a comparable emergency pathway

18 IRCC, Canada-Ukraine Authorization for Emergency Travel, March 2022.

<https://www.canada.ca/en/immigration-refugees-citizenship/news/2022/03/canada-ukraine-authorization-for-emergency-travel.html>

19 IRCC, Canada extends some temporary measures for Ukrainians, February 27, 2025.

<https://www.canada.ca/en/immigration-refugees-citizenship/news/2025/02/canada-extends-some-temporary-measures-for-ukrainians.html>

or meaningful acceleration for Iranian refugees stranded in Türkiye whose private sponsorship applications are already in process and who may face detention, deportation, or serious harm.²⁰

This creates a perception of unequal urgency. Canada has demonstrated that it can create special measures, dedicate operational capacity, and provide flexibility when war creates urgent displacement. Yet Iranian refugees facing escalating repression, detention threats, deportation, and return to a dangerous country are still being processed through ordinary timelines. In some cases, those timelines stretch for years.

The purpose of refugee protection is to respond before harm becomes irreversible. For Iranian refugees, the danger is not hypothetical. Iran continues to execute people, punish minorities, target religious converts, criminalize LGBTQ+ people, monitor diaspora activism, and use national-security accusations to silence perceived enemies. The 2026 conflict, leadership uncertainty, transnational monitoring, and continuing internal crackdown make these risks more severe, not less.

The private sponsorship applications discussed in this briefing are not new or speculative requests. Many have already been submitted. Many have sponsors ready in Canada. Some have sponsorship approval. Some have interviews scheduled or pending. Some involve medical emergencies, detention, or deportation risk. In this context, Canada should be expediting protection, not allowing files to remain stalled.

IRQR and the Marjan Foundation are asking Members of Parliament to recognize that the risk environment for Iranian refugees has changed. Ongoing repression inside Iran, regional conflict, leadership uncertainty, diaspora monitoring, and instability involving Iran, Israel, and the United States have made return more dangerous and waiting more harmful. The government should not treat these cases as routine backlog files. At minimum, Iranian refugees with approved or pending private sponsorship applications who face detention, deportation, serious illness, religious persecution, gender-based violence, or LGBTQ+ persecution should be reviewed through an urgent risk-based mechanism.

Canada has already shown that it can build humanitarian immigration responses when it chooses to. The question now is whether that same urgency will be applied to Iranian refugees whose lives are at risk.

²⁰ IRCC, Situation in Iran: Temporary immigration measures for workers in Canada.
<https://www.canada.ca/en/immigration-refugees-citizenship/services/iran.html>

Section 8: A Troubling Inconsistency — The Mehdi Taj / IRGC-Linked Visa Case

While vulnerable refugees fleeing the Iranian regime wait for years in Türkiye, a recent incident involving Mehdi Taj, the president of Iran’s football federation, has raised serious questions about consistency, screening priorities, and public confidence in Canada’s immigration system.

In April 2026, media reports stated that Iranian soccer officials, including Mehdi Taj, were denied entry into Canada ahead of the FIFA Congress in Vancouver. The Associated Press reported that Canada’s Foreign Affairs Minister, Anita Anand, said it was her “understanding” that Iranian soccer officials had been denied entry, and that permission for entry had been revoked. AP also reported that Iran International had first reported that Taj had been granted a visa and then removed from Canada because of his connections to the IRGC, which Canada lists as a terrorist entity.²¹



Other media reports similarly identified Taj as a former member of Iran’s Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps. Sky News reported that the Iranian football federation delegation included its president, Mehdi Taj, describing him as a former member of the IRGC.²² The Guardian also

21 Associated Press, Canadian official backs up report that Iranian soccer chief was denied entry for FIFA event, April 29, 2026. <https://apnews.com/article/fifa-world-cup-canada-iran-c110e73dadfdfe9aae55e2e64bde98ac>

22 Sky News, Iranian officials denied entry into Canada for FIFA meeting, April 30, 2026. <https://news.sky.com/story/iranian-officials-denied-entry-into-canada-for-fifa-meeting-just-weeks-before-start-of-world-cup-13538253>

reported on the controversy surrounding Taj’s denied entry and noted concerns about Iranian officials with ties to the IRGC, which Canada has designated as a terrorist organization.²³

We recognize that Canadian officials cannot publicly comment on the details of individual visa cases because of privacy laws. We also recognize that a person being denied entry may indicate that Canadian authorities ultimately took steps to prevent inadmissible individuals from entering the country. However, the central concern remains: **how did a person publicly reported to have IRGC ties reach the point of receiving travel authorization or permission to come to Canada at all, while refugees fleeing the Iranian regime remain stuck in processing for years?**

This issue is especially troubling because the IRGC is not an ordinary institution. Canada listed the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps as a terrorist entity under the Criminal Code in June 2024.²⁴ Canada had also previously announced that senior Iranian regime officials, including senior IRGC officials, are inadmissible to Canada under the Immigration and Refugee Protection Act.²⁵

For refugees who fled Iran, this contradiction is painful. Many of the refugees sponsored by IRQR and the Marjan Foundation escaped the same regime and security apparatus that the IRGC represents. Some fled because of LGBTQ+ persecution. Others fled because of religious conversion, Baha’i identity, gender-based violence, or other forms of vulnerability. Some face detention or deportation in Türkiye. Some are ill. Some have been waiting for years despite having sponsors ready in Canada.

The Taj case creates a serious public confidence problem. It suggests that Canada’s immigration system may be capable of moving quickly and issuing travel authorization in some cases, while vulnerable refugees with documented risks and completed sponsorship steps remain in prolonged uncertainty. Even if Taj was ultimately denied entry, the fact that the case reached that stage raises legitimate questions about screening, priorities, and urgency.

The contrast is difficult to ignore. Refugees at risk are told to wait because processing takes time, screening is complex, and backlogs are large. Sponsors are told that urgent requests cannot easily be prioritized. Yet a regime-linked public figure was reportedly able to obtain permission to travel to Canada before being stopped. This does not mean that refugee screening should be weakened. On the contrary, it means that Canada must ensure its immigration system is both

23 The Guardian, Gianni Infantino tells FIFA congress that Iran will play at World Cup in US as planned, April 30, 2026. <https://www.theguardian.com/football/2026/apr/30/iran-world-cup-gianni-infantino>

24 Public Safety Canada, Government of Canada lists the IRGC as a terrorist entity, June 19, 2024. <https://www.canada.ca/en/public-safety-canada/news/2024/06/government-of-canada-lists-the-irgc-as-a-terrorist-entity.html>

25 Canada Border Services Agency, Senior officials of the Iranian government officially banned from Canada, November 2022. <https://www.canada.ca/en/border-services-agency/news/2022/11/senior-officials-of-the-iranian-government-officially-banned-from-canada.html>

secure and humane: rigorous toward regime-linked individuals, but responsive toward refugees fleeing persecution.

This is not a partisan point. It is a question of consistency and accountability. If Canada has the capacity to review, authorize, revoke, and deny travel in high-profile cases involving regime-linked individuals, then Canada must also have the capacity to review urgent refugee sponsorship cases where lives are at risk. Refugees facing detention, deportation, serious illness, or return to Iran should not be treated as ordinary files waiting indefinitely in a backlog.

For Iranian refugees, the message created by this case is devastating. They see that someone publicly reported to have links to the IRGC can come close to entering Canada, while they — the victims of the regime — remain trapped in Türkiye. They see their sponsors write urgent letters, submit medical records, attach deportation documents, and request intervention, only to receive generic responses or silence. This damages trust not only in IRCC, but in Canada's promise of refugee protection.

IRQR and the Marjan Foundation are not asking Canada to lower security standards. We are asking Canada to apply urgency and scrutiny in the right direction. Regime-linked individuals should not benefit from administrative speed while refugees fleeing that same regime are left waiting for years. Canada's immigration system must be capable of protecting national security while also protecting vulnerable people whose lives are in danger.

The Mehdi Taj case should prompt Members of Parliament to ask urgent questions: How was travel authorization reportedly issued in the first place? What safeguards exist to prevent regime-linked individuals from receiving permission to enter Canada? Why are refugee cases involving serious medical needs, detention, deportation risk, or persecution not receiving comparable urgency? And what will IRCC do to restore public confidence in the fairness and humanitarian purpose of Canada's refugee protection system?

Section 9: Recommendations for IRCC and the Government of Canada

The concerns outlined in this briefing require more than general acknowledgement. Refugees are facing serious and immediate risks, sponsors are carrying growing financial and operational burdens, and Canada's private sponsorship system is losing public confidence. IRQR and the Marjan Foundation respectfully request that Members of Parliament urge IRCC and the Government of Canada to take the following actions.

1. Apply urgent-protection principles to high-risk private sponsorship cases

Canada already recognizes that some refugee cases require urgent intervention. Under the Urgent Protection Program, refugees facing immediate threats to life, liberty, or physical well-being may be processed on an expedited basis following referral by UNHCR or another recognized referral organization. This principle should not be ignored when a privately sponsored refugee is already in Canada's processing system and faces documented detention, deportation, serious illness, family separation, or immediate risk of harm.

IRCC should create a clear urgent review pathway for private sponsorship cases where credible evidence shows immediate danger. This should include cases involving detention or deportation risk, serious medical conditions, LGBTQ+ persecution, religious persecution, gender-based violence, or other serious vulnerability. Sponsors should be able to submit urgent evidence through a defined channel and receive confirmation that the evidence has been reviewed.

2. Provide case-specific responses instead of generic replies

Generic responses are not sufficient when sponsors submit evidence of serious risk. IRCC should provide case-specific responses to urgent requests, including confirmation of whether the new evidence was reviewed, whether the case was assessed for urgency, whether additional documents are required, and what steps, if any, will be taken.

This does not require IRCC to disclose confidential internal decision-making. It requires basic transparency and accountability when a person's safety may depend on timely action. A refugee facing deportation, detention, or a medical crisis should not receive the same generic language as a routine status inquiry.

3. Create a direct urgent communication channel for experienced sponsorship organizations

IRCC should establish a direct communication channel for experienced sponsorship organizations handling high-risk cases. This channel should be limited to urgent matters, not routine status inquiries.

Organizations that have submitted multiple sponsorship applications, maintained settlement funds, supported arrivals, and demonstrated experience with vulnerable refugees should have access to a designated contact or urgent case unit when detention, deportation, medical crisis, or serious safety concerns arise. This would help IRCC receive accurate information quickly and help sponsors understand what steps are required.

4. Develop and publish a Türkiye-specific backlog reduction plan

IRCC should develop and publish a specific backlog reduction plan for privately sponsored refugee applications being processed through Türkiye. Türkiye is a major location for Iranian refugees and other vulnerable populations waiting for resettlement, and the current risk environment requires focused attention.

This plan should include measurable targets, staffing or operational changes, expected timelines, and regular public updates. It should also include separate information on sponsorship assessment, overseas processing, interview scheduling, final decision, and travel readiness. Sponsors and refugees should not have to rely on informal estimates or archived sources to understand whether the system is improving.

5. Restore a predictable and functional private sponsorship pathway

The sudden pause on new Group of Five and Community Sponsor applications has created serious uncertainty for refugees and small sponsorship organizations. IRCC has stated that applications already submitted will continue to be processed, but processing delays remain a major concern. Community Sponsors can currently only apply through the Blended Visa Office-Referred Program, while new private sponsorship applications remain paused.

IRCC should restore a predictable and functional private sponsorship pathway, with clear annual planning, transparent intake rules, and sufficient processing capacity. The government should also consult small and community-based sponsorship organizations before making future changes that affect intake, processing, quotas, or sponsorship capacity. Sponsors cannot responsibly fundraise, plan, hire, or support refugees if the system can stop suddenly and remain uncertain for years.

6. Introduce targeted special measures for Iranian refugees stranded abroad

Canada has introduced special measures for some Iranian nationals, but those measures have largely focused on Iranians already in Canada. They do not provide a comparable emergency pathway or meaningful acceleration for Iranian refugees stranded in Türkiye whose private sponsorship applications are already in process and who may face detention, deportation, serious illness, or return to persecution.

IRCC should introduce targeted special measures for Iranian refugees abroad, especially those with pending or approved private sponsorship applications and documented risk. These measures could include expedited processing, priority interviews, temporary confirmation letters, emergency travel facilitation, or other mechanisms designed to prevent deportation and irreversible harm.

Canada has shown that it can build humanitarian immigration responses when it chooses to. The same urgency should be applied to Iranian refugees whose lives are at risk.

Section 10: Conclusion — A Call for Urgent Parliamentary Action

Canada's private sponsorship system is one of the most respected refugee protection models in the world. It is built on a partnership between government and civil society, and on a promise that when communities step forward to help people in danger, the system will respond in a timely, humane, and accountable way.

That promise is now at risk.

The cases and evidence outlined in this briefing show a clear and troubling pattern. Vulnerable refugees in Türkiye — including LGBTQ+ refugees, converts from Islam to Christianity, Baha'is, survivors of abuse and violence, single women and mothers, and people facing medical emergencies, detention, or deportation — are waiting far too long for protection. Many already have sponsors in Canada. Funds have been raised. Applications have been submitted. Some cases have received sponsorship approval. Some have interviews scheduled or pending. Yet they remain trapped in uncertainty, often in conditions that grow more dangerous every day.

This is not only an administrative problem. It is a humanitarian crisis.

IRQR and the Marjan Foundation have followed the proper channels. We have submitted applications, raised settlement funds, supported refugees, contacted IRCC, written urgent letters, provided documentation, sought meetings, worked with MPs, and pursued the parliamentary petition process. Too often, the response has been generic, delayed, or non-specific. In the most urgent cases, silence or inaction can have irreversible consequences.

The growing delays also undermine the private sponsorship system itself. Small organizations like the Marjan Foundation cannot continue indefinitely without timelines, communication, or a functioning pathway. Sponsors are left to manage refugees' fear, donors' frustration, administrative costs, bank accounts, documentation, and emergency situations while having little control over the decisions that determine whether refugees reach safety.

At the same time, the wider risk environment for Iranian refugees has deteriorated. Regional conflict, leadership uncertainty in Iran, internal repression, transnational monitoring, and the regime's use of national-security accusations have made return to Iran more dangerous. For many refugees, waiting is not neutral. Waiting increases risk.

Canada has shown that it can act with urgency when it chooses to. It has created emergency responses in other crises. It has recognized the need for urgent protection in principle. It has the tools, institutions, and humanitarian tradition to respond. What is missing is the political and operational will to apply that urgency to vulnerable Iranian and other refugees stranded in Türkiye through Canada's private sponsorship system.

We are therefore asking Members of Parliament to act.

We ask you to raise these concerns directly with the Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship and with IRCC officials. We ask you to request a clear plan for urgent private sponsorship cases, especially those involving detention, deportation, medical crisis, religious persecution, gender-based violence, LGBTQ+ persecution, or return to Iran. We ask you to press for case-specific communication, a Türkiye-specific backlog reduction plan, and a direct urgent channel for experienced sponsorship organizations.

Most importantly, we ask you to remember that behind every application number is a human life.

Every delayed file is a person waiting. Every unanswered urgent request is a risk carried by someone in danger. Every missed opportunity for intervention may become another preventable tragedy.

The Marjan Foundation was named after Marjan Mohammadi because she died before safety arrived. Her story should not be repeated. Canada's refugee protection system must not become a system where vulnerable people are accepted in principle but abandoned in practice.

IRQR and the Marjan Foundation remain ready to work constructively with Members of Parliament, IRCC, the Canadian Embassy in Ankara, UNHCR, and other partners to find practical solutions. We are not asking for shortcuts that compromise safety or security. We are asking for urgency, accountability, transparency, and humane action.

Canada can do better. Canada must do better.

No one should become another Marjan because the system knew the danger but failed to act.