



RESPONSE TO PETITION

Prepare in English and French marking 'Original Text' or 'Translation'

PETITION No.: **421-01399**

BY: **Ms. KWAN (VANCOUVER EAST)**

DATE: **MAY 30, 2017**

PRINT NAME OF SIGNATORY: **THE HON. AHMED HUSSEN**

Response by the Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship

SIGNATURE

Minister or Parliamentary Secretary

SUBJECT

Refugees

ORIGINAL TEXT

REPLY

Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada acknowledges that the Immigration Loans Program should be better aligned with the Government's integration and policy objectives for refugees. The Department is looking into possible reforms and policy changes to the Immigration Loans Program, while taking into consideration the financial priorities of the Government of Canada.

The existing Immigration Loans Program is a funding source available to refugees who are selected for resettlement, but have few personal financial resources and are unable to access traditional lending institutions. Loans under the Program are used to cover travel expenses, and may be sought, once in Canada, to assist with settlement costs. Loan recipients who face hardship in making payments may request a deferral of payment which can extend up to 24 additional months, and may at any time, request a review of their repayment arrangement. The rate of interest is low, currently 1.14%.

The Government views refugees of all nationalities equally with regard to how they are assisted via government programs. The Government has taken special measures in the past to effectively respond to exceptional circumstances, or to welcome populations who have particularly acute needs. For example, transportation costs were covered for the Syrians who arrived under Operation Syrian Refugee, many of whom took specially chartered flights. In addition, travel costs have been waived for survivors of Daesh brought to Canada for resettlement in 2017.

Further, services offered to refugees vary from country to country. While some countries do not require transportation loans to be paid back, Canada offers assistance which many do not. For example, not all countries provide refugees with direct financial support through monthly income support as does Canada. Nor do all countries provide access to the types of health care and free language training that is available in Canada.

As part of the Government's commitment to renew and expand Canada's refugee resettlement program, the Interim Federal Health Program (IFHP) was restored to its pre-2012 levels of coverage on April 1, 2016. Subsequently, the program was expanded on April 1, 2017, to cover selected pre-departure medical services. These services include coverage of the immigration medical examination, and some vaccinations and medical support in transit, for refugees identified for resettlement to Canada. The cost of immigration medical examinations and medical support in transit used to be previously added to the refugee's loans. The expanded coverage helps ease the financial burden of resettled refugees as they no longer have to pay for these services. In Canada, the IFHP provides basic, supplemental and prescription drug health-care coverage for all eligible beneficiaries, including resettled refugees, until they become eligible for provincial/territorial health insurance.

In terms of increasing funding for integration supports for refugees (including mental health services, language training, and child care), all protected persons and permanent residents, including refugees, can avail themselves of the wide range of supports and services funded through the Settlement Program. Services are delivered by a diverse network of over 500 service provider organizations across Canada, outside of Quebec. In 2017-18, the Department is investing over \$690 million to support settlement needs of newcomers (outside of Quebec), including refugees. Furthermore, additional settlement funding is expected throughout the fiscal year. The goal of the program is to support the full participation of newcomers in the economic, social, cultural and civic life of Canada.

In addition to the IFHP, refugees also receive mental health supports through the Settlement Program, including mental health programming for women, youth, seniors and refugees, which promotes health and well-being, independence, and community integration. Settlement service providers also offer support and referrals to local services to assist newcomers in crisis situations. In addition, programming is in place to train settlement workers to identify mental health issues and to make the appropriate referrals.

The Department engages and collaborates with provinces and territories as well as with organizations such as the Canadian Mental Health Association and the Centre for Addictions and Mental Health to develop resources to help settlement, social service and health care providers in the provision of services to refugees. The Department also engages with the Public Health Agency of Canada and the Mental Health Commission of Canada, to support the improvement of mental health supports by and for immigrant, refugee, ethno-cultural and racialized groups.

Approximately 36% of federal settlement funding is spent annually on language training delivered through Language Instruction for Newcomers to Canada. Further, an additional \$67 million was spent on federal settlement services in 2016-17, which included language training. Over 7,300 language training seats have been added across Canada (outside Québec) to meet the needs of the increased number of refugees. In addition, the Department has increased support services, such as childcare that facilitates newcomers' participation in language training. The Department continues to work closely with provinces and territories to develop a coordinated national approach to the delivery of settlement language programming for adult immigrants.

The Settlement Workers in Schools Program has also increased the number of workers in place across the country to over 500 workers in 3,000 locations. The number of Arabic-speaking settlement workers supporting youth and families has also increased.