

TOOLKIT FOR ENGAGING MPS ON THE GAZA TRV REUNIFICATION PROGRAM

**Action Day:
Tuesday, November 19, 2024**



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Purpose

This toolkit provides key information, talking points, and action steps for engaging Members of Parliament (MPs) on the deficiencies of the Temporary Residence Visa (TRV) program for Palestinians from Gaza. Its aim is to equip individuals and organizations with resources to encourage their representatives to advocate for swift fulfillment of commitments that will enable Palestinian families to reunite with loved ones in Canada.

Key Background

1. What is the Gaza TRV Program?

- In December 2023, Immigration, Refugees, and Citizenship Canada (IRCC) launched the Temporary Residence Visa (TRV) Program for Gazans with Canadian family ties in response to the ongoing violence in Gaza.
- Despite nearly 9,000 applications submitted to the Gaza TRV program, almost a year later, the Canadian government has yet to facilitate the exit of any Palestinians from Gaza. Those who have managed to leave have done so independently, despite the government having received names and profiles of applicants with family connections in Canada. In contrast, the Canadian-Ukraine Authorization for Emergency Travel (CUAET) successfully facilitated the arrival of nearly 300,000 Ukrainians - without requiring family connections - within two years. This stark disparity underscores Canada's unequal and inadequate response to the urgent needs of Palestinians fleeing violence, compared to its swift and broad support for other displaced groups.

2. Specific Unreasonable Barriers to the TRV Program

- **Travel Documents:** Requires a passport, which is often inaccessible due to the destruction of civil infrastructure in Gaza. People are displaced with only the clothes on their backs as residents and non-military objects have been directly targeted.
- **Biometrics:** Applicants must travel to Egypt for biometric data collection, which is dangerous, costly and impossible for many fleeing Gaza.
- **Limited Scope:** Initially, the program accepted only 1,000 Temporary Resident Visa (TRV) applicants. However, in late May 2024, Immigration Minister Marc Miller announced that the cap would expand to 5,000 - a limited increase that still falls far below the urgent need.
- **Lack of Adequate Government Support:** Palestinians do not receive adequate financial support or other settlement services as others fleeing conflict would receive under the Refugee Resettlement program, leaving them to rely on family or community funds.

- **Invasive security measures:** Requiring detailed histories of employment back to the age of 16 and providing explanations for scars disproportionately burden Palestinian applicants. Social media handles of extended family members were also retrieved.
- **Inhumane treatment:** Applicants had to sign an attestation agreeing to have their application shared with Israeli and Egyptian authorities, who are actively involved in the occupation of Gaza, which poses security and safety risks for applicants.

Key Statistics

- Since the program's launch in January 2024, a total of 334 family applicants under this program have arrived in Canada "under the temporary policy," according to an IRCC media release from October 16, 2024. However, it remains unclear whether this figure includes individuals under the formal TRV program or others. The arrivals consist of individuals who independently reached Egypt, with no facilitated exits from Gaza itself, highlighting the program's systemic failure to adequately support those most in need.
- For Ukrainians, Canada accepted over 900,000 applications, with 28.7% of applicants arriving safely in Canada. In contrast, less than 2.4% of the Gaza TRV applications have been approved, and none have successfully exited Gaza
- The latest projections estimate that over 186,000 Palestinians have died as a result of the ongoing conflict in Gaza, based on an analysis by [The Lancet](#). This estimate, dating back to July 2024, accounts for both direct and indirect deaths, with indirect casualties often outnumbering those from direct violence.
- 1.9 million people in Gaza have been displaced, making up over 85% of the population. With approximately 50% of Gaza's residents being children, and an average age of just five years old, the overwhelming majority of the population is extremely vulnerable. Tragically, women and children account for around 70% of the deaths in Gaza, according to the latest UNOHCHR report. These figures reflect the disproportionate and devastating impact on the youngest and most vulnerable, as the ongoing crisis continues to devastate families and communities.
- **66% of Gaza's infrastructure** has been destroyed or severely damaged, affecting 164,000 structures, including **70,000 homes**.
- **31 out of 36 hospitals** have been damaged or rendered inoperable, severely impacting healthcare services

Why You Need to Engage and How You Can Do It Effectively

It is crucial to engage with your MP to ensure that Canada takes meaningful action to support the TRV Program and Palestinian families. Your voice can make a difference in pushing for the reforms needed to reunite families and facilitate safe exits from Gaza. Here's how you can engage effectively:

Suggested Actions for Engaging MPs

1. **Schedule Meetings:** Request a meeting with your MP to discuss the TRV Program. Use the talking points to guide your conversation.
2. **Write Letters:** Draft a personalized letter to your MP expressing your concerns about the TRV Program and urging them to advocate for the reforms outlined above (see sample letter template below). **Physical letters are often more impactful than emails, as they convey a sense of urgency and personal commitment.**
3. **Call or Email:** Contact your MP's office directly. A phone call or email can convey urgency and allow for immediate dialogue.
4. **Social Media Engagement:** Utilize platforms like Twitter or Facebook to tag your MP and share key facts about the TRV Program, using relevant hashtags (e.g., #GazaTRV, #FamilyReunification).

Mobilize Your Network: Encourage friends, family, and community members to engage with MPs. Collective action amplifies our message. Engaging with your MP is your civic right.

Talking Points for Meetings or Communications with MPs

1. **The TRV Program's Structural Barriers Must Be Reformed**
 - Emphasize that the program's current design is discriminatory and fails to account for the harsh realities Palestinians face in Gaza. For further insights, refer to the CJPME report, which outlines the program's shortcomings in detail: [CJPME Report - Intended to Fail \(PDF\)](#).
 - Unlike the Canadian-Ukraine Authorization for Emergency Travel (CUAET), which successfully facilitated the entry of hundreds of thousands of Ukrainians, [the Gaza TRV program is intentionally restrictive](#) and has not facilitated the exit of a single Palestinian from Gaza itself.
2. **Canada Can and Should Use Diplomatic Pressure**
 - Canada has the diplomatic capacity to put pressure on Israel and Egypt to stop obstructing the exit of Palestinians on the TRV list. We have seen no evidence that Global Affairs Canada officials have used diplomatic channels to help facilitate the exit of applicants. If such measures are being taken, GAC must be transparent about what is being done and the impact so far.
 - As of October 2024, 4,245 applications for the Gaza TRV program had been accepted for processing, with 733 approved. However, it is unclear whether these approvals have been sent to Israel's COGAT for further action. Despite this, Canada has failed to apply diplomatic pressure on Israel and Egypt to facilitate exits for Palestinians on the TRV list.

- Highlight the inconsistency between Canada's humanitarian commitments and its inaction on this issue. Specifically:
 - i. Canada has long emphasized its commitment to humanitarian values and international law, including support for refugees and displaced persons.
 - ii. Despite these commitments, Canada has not used its diplomatic influence to push for Palestinian exits from Gaza under the TRV program.
 - iii. The Canadian government has failed to hold Israel and Egypt accountable for blocking the safe passage of Palestinians on the TRV list.
 - iv. Canada's swift and robust response to other humanitarian crises, such as the Ukrainian refugee resettlement, contrasts sharply with its inaction in facilitating the safe exit of Palestinians.
 - v. This discrepancy undermines Canada's credibility on the international stage when it comes to upholding human rights and protecting vulnerable populations.

3. Anti-Palestinian Racism is Embedded in the Program's Design

- Palestinians are subjected to unnecessary and discriminatory barriers, such as invasive security screenings and demands for documents that are nearly impossible to obtain due to the destruction caused by war. The TRV program treats Palestinians as inherent security risks, in stark contrast to the far less restrictive and more welcoming measures offered to Ukrainians.
- The TRV program is viewed as being embedded in anti-Palestinian racism, treating Palestinians as security threats while providing Ukrainians with much easier pathways to safety. This systemic bias manifests through excessive social media scrutiny, detailed security vetting, and bureaucratic obstacles, amounting to bureaucratic cruelty that disproportionately targets Palestinians.
- Frame the issue as part of a broader problem of anti-Arab and anti-Palestinian racism within Canada's immigration policies, which unfairly restrict access for marginalized groups.

4. Humanitarian Impact

- Estimates in July 2024 indicated that over 186,000 Palestinians have been killed since the escalation of violence, with countless more injured or displaced. The urgency for family reunification has never been more pressing as families grapple with loss and uncertainty.
- The UN has reported that Gaza's infrastructure is in ruins, with access to basic necessities like food, water, and healthcare severely restricted. The TRV Program fails to account for these dire conditions, leaving families trapped in a humanitarian crisis.

5. Canada Must Uphold Its Moral and Legal Obligations

- The Canadian government has an obligation to ensure that Palestinians fleeing the occupation and bombardment in Gaza are given the same opportunities for safety as other populations fleeing conflict.
- Highlight the discrepancy in Canada's response to other crises, such as the rapid approval of Ukrainian refugee applications, which underscores the systemic inequalities faced by Palestinians seeking refuge.

6. Proposed Solutions and Urgent Demands

- Reform systemic barriers (passport and biometric requirements)
- Provide an option to waive medical exams until 90 days after arrival
- Lift the cap on accepted entrants and accelerate processing
- Facilitate the exit of Palestinians through diplomatic efforts
- Ensure TRV applicants receive settlement services and health coverage.
- Ensure recognition of anti-Palestinian racism in Canada's anti-racism strategy, addressing how systemic biases affect applicants' chances of approval
- Establish a permanent residency pathway for Palestinians with family ties in Canada to prevent further trauma and uncertainty

Action Steps for Meetings with MPs

1. **Prepare for the Meeting:** Research your MP's stance on Gaza, immigration, and family reunification. Use the talking points provided and personalize them based on your MP's interests or recent statements.
2. **Key Messages to Deliver:** Frame the TRV program as a failure that contradicts Canada's commitments. Emphasize the urgency: Thousands of lives are at risk, and family reunifications must be prioritized. You can also express your personal concerns and what is disturbing you in relation to its failures. Personalize the approach accompanying the concrete actions.
3. **Ask for Concrete Actions:** Ask your MP to publicly support reforms to the TRV program. Request that they raise the issue in Parliament, directly with the Immigration Minister and the Minister of Global Affairs and through caucus discussions. Encourage your MP to sign onto any statements or letters advocating for changes to the TRV program.
4. **Follow Up:** After the meeting, send a follow-up email thanking your MP for their time and reiterating the key points discussed and ask for a follow-up on actions which were committed to in your meeting. If no actions were committed, reiterate this in writing. Always cc more than one person.

Resources to Share

- CJPME's Full Report on the Gaza TRV Program:
https://assets.nationbuilder.com/cjpme/pages/9076/attachments/original/1726604311/Intended_to_Fail_-_2024-09_-_EN_-_FINAL.pdf?1726604311
- Use updates from the [United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs \(OCHA\)](#) on the latest humanitarian impacts and statistics in Gaza, including infrastructure damage, displacement, and casualty number
- [Updates directly from Gazan Canadians](#) on their experiences and ongoing advocacy efforts
- Sample Letter to MPs: see Appendix I

APPENDIX I: Sample Letter Template

MP's Name
MP's Office Address

Dear (MP's Name),

I am writing to you as a concerned constituent regarding the Temporary Residence Visa (TRV) Program for Gazans with Canadian family ties. While I appreciate the Canadian government's intention to provide a pathway for vulnerable populations, the current TRV Program is fraught with barriers that effectively prevent Palestinians from being reunited with their families in Canada.

As you may know, this program has yet to facilitate the exit of a single Palestinian from Gaza, despite the dire circumstances faced by those awaiting approval. The requirement for a passport, along with the need to travel to Egypt for biometrics, places an undue burden on applicants who are already in a precarious situation.

I urge you to advocate for the following reforms:

1. Immediate elimination of the passport requirement and biometric restrictions.
2. Increased diplomatic pressure on Israel and Egypt to facilitate safe exits.
3. Establishment of a permanent residency pathway for Palestinians with family in Canada.

Immediate processing and approval of the 5,000 applicants under the program, or an expansion of the program to accommodate a greater number of reunifications.

It is imperative that Canada honors its humanitarian commitments and acts swiftly to support Palestinians fleeing violence and oppression. I appreciate your attention to this critical issue and look forward to your response.

Sincerely,

Name:
Title:
Address: