

FALL 2025 NEWSLETTER FCJ REFUGEE CENTRE



FCJ REFUGEE CENTRE ADVOCATES BEFORE HOUSE OF COMMONS COMMITTEES FOR THE WITHDRAWAL OF BILL C-12

FCJ Refugee Centre has submitted a brief to both the Standing Committee on Public Safety and National Security (SECU), and the Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration (CIMM), at the House of Commons, recommending the withdrawn of Bill C-12 in its current form.

Bill C-12 is the successor to Bill C-2, the original so-called “Strong Borders Act,” which was introduced in June by the federal government. Bill C-2 was rejected by over 300 organizations from across Canada, including FCJ Refugee Centre, for whom this initiative posed a threat to human rights, refugee and migrant rights, and privacy of all residents of Canada.



Last month, the federal government decided to split the bill, hoping to get some of the border protection measures through Parliament and into law more quickly. The new legislation removes elements out of the old bill, including provisions around the immigration and refugee system, and put them into what’s now been introduced as Bill C-12.

The lawful access measures, which would give authorities more access to personal information, and triggered privacy concerns, remain in what’s left of Bill C-2.

The bills are now moving on two separate legislative tracks, with Bill C-12 going first.

Read the full brief submitted by FCJ Refugee Centre to the SECU and the CIMM:





November 14, 2025

Bill C-12: Strengthening Canada's Immigration System and Border Act

Brief Submitted by FCJ Refugee Centre to the Standing Committee on Public Safety and National Security (SECU)

For more than 30 years, the FCJ Refugee Centre has established itself as a leading provider of wide-ranging holistic settlement and integration support for all uprooted people. With an open-door and holistic approach, FCJ Refugee Centre helps uprooted people access justice and overcome the challenges of rebuilding their lives in Canadian society.

We serve and support precarious migrants including refugee claimants, refused refugee claimants, migrant workers, international students, survivors of human trafficking, overstayed visitors, people involved in sponsorship breakdown, and others seeking to regularize their immigration status.

The Centre's daily work includes providing summary advice and information to refugee claimants, helping claimants navigate the process of applying for legal aid and finding counsel, and to a more limited extent, direct representation by our own staff lawyer. The Centre also provides transitional housing for women and children. In 2024, our Centre supported a total of 1,805 refugees, including 925 refugee claimants at the Port of Entry and 865 inland claimants.

The Centre is a member organization of the Canadian Council for Refugees (CCR) and its Co-Executive Director, Diana Gallego, is the outgoing CCR President. The Centre's overarching concern is that Bill C-12 will undermine important guardrails in the Canadian asylum procedures, exacerbate precarity and legal limbo for vulnerable persons, and risk refoulement, contrary to Canada's domestic and international legal obligations. Accordingly, the Centre fully endorses CCR's recommendation that Bill C-12 be withdrawn. The Centre elaborates on the following key concerns about Bill C-12 in its current form:

• **One-Year Bar and Denial of Access to the IRB**

Many of the most vulnerable, complex, and compelling cases we see come from individuals who have been in Canada for more than a year before filing their claims for refugee protection. For example, women and girls escaping female genital mutilation, domestic violence, or labour and sex trafficking may fail to file within one year of arrival for many legitimate reasons, including Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) caused by their past persecution, fear of the authorities, or a misunderstanding of eligibility criteria exacerbated by lack of access to formal education as well as linguistic barriers.

For example, one of our clients, a survivor of domestic violence, arrived in Canada fleeing abuse, leaving her minor children with family members back in her country of origin. Due to a lack of understanding of the refugee claim process, as well as the mistaken belief that she was ineligible for protection because she did not immediately make a claim upon arrival in Canada, she did not make a claim for refugee protection until more than four years after her arrival. She

also had been incorrectly informed that making a claim would prevent her from ever seeing her children again. All this was exacerbated by mental health challenges related to her abuse, as well as a lack of English language skills. It was not until a chance encounter with our organization that she learned that she could still make a refugee claim in Canada. Her case, which was supported by ample evidence of the horrific abuse she suffered at the hands of her ex-partner, was accepted by the refugee protection division after a short hearing. Had the proposed one-year bar been in place, the outcome for her could have been extremely different.

Similarly, many of our clients are survivors of gender-based violence, some of whom have arrived in Canada with an abusive partner and have remained in temporary or undocumented status for more than a year while trapped in the abusive relationship. These women, some of whom have Canadian-born children, face the risk of being deported back to their country of origin, where their abuser has already been deported after spending time in jail in Canada. The abuser often blames and threatens the survivor, compelling them to seek protection in Canada. Based on our experience working directly with this population, we have witnessed the complexity of cases involving gender-based harms and exploitation. Individuals affected by these situations often endure various forms of abuse for months and even years. In many instances, the trafficker is from the same country of origin as the survivor, putting both their lives and the lives of their families at risk. In some cases, survivors are required to testify against their traffickers, individuals who may have political or criminal connections in their country of origin, resulting in threats, acts of violence, and in the most severe instances, fatal attacks of family members abroad. These circumstances often force survivors to seek refugee protection in Canada to obtain the safety and protection guaranteed under the Convention.

This situation often impedes access to legal advice and representation. In our experience, it is not uncommon for this population of highly vulnerable asylum seekers to initiate contact with FCJ Refugee Centre's support services long after their arrival and well after 12 months. Survivors of gender-based harms need time, support, and access to a safe space to be ready to make the decision to leave the person causing harm and begin their protection claim.

During 2024, our team supported clients in submitting 20 inland claims, 26 PRRA applications, and 3 reopening or reinstatement applications. Via our in-house counsel, we also represented a number of individuals in oral hearings before the IRB. Reviewing the record of accepted claims as represented by our in-house counsel and referrals to the private bar, we can readily confirm that many of these cases are accepted by the Refugee Protection Division (RPD) after a hearing on the merits. However, denying these claimants access to a full oral hearing, particularly for unrepresented claimants, risks compromising the quality and fairness of decision making. The pre-removal risk assessment is not an adequate substitute for the RPD. Without a hearing asylum seekers will be unable to effectively present their evidence and provide important context through testimony. Meritorious claims that have been routinely accepted with the benefit of an oral hearing will likely be refused in the more restrictive paper process of the Pre-Removal Risk Assessment (PRRA).

Impact on Individuals from Moratorium Countries

The FCJ Refugee Centre represents many individuals from countries for which there is currently a moratorium on removal in place, in particular Haiti and Venezuela. Individuals from

moratorium countries who are barred from accessing the RPD due to the ineligibility provision currently set out in section 101 of the *Immigration and Refugee Protection Act* (IRPA), as well as individuals who would become ineligible under the regime set out in C-12, are generally unable to begin the PRRA until their removals become enforceable (meaning that the moratorium would have to be lifted). As a result, we are witnessing many of these applicants fall through the cracks as they await a chance to make their case. This results in lengthy separation from families as well as difficulties accessing the labour market and social supports. It also forces these individuals into the margins of Canadian society, where they are more likely to fall prey to predatory 'ghost consultants' and other unscrupulous actors in the immigration law space.

The proposed one-year bar will mean that claimants will no longer have access to an appeal on the merits of their refused claim or the right to have removal proceedings stayed pending review of their refused claims by a court. Because of this, the one-year bar provision in Bill C-12 will produce increased litigation and increase the size of the Federal Court's current backlog, which is already significant.

Overall, the one-year bar set out in Bill C-12 will subject more refugees to an inadequate, paper-based application process. If their PRRA is denied, they must request a review of their case from the Federal Court. If they do not receive a stay of removal from the Federal Court, they may face removal from the country without receiving a decision on the review of their protection claim. As framed, the one-year bar will penalize the most vulnerable claimants and does so in a manner that is arbitrary and unjustified.

• **Restrictions on Arrivals Between Ports of Entry**

Under Bill C-12, a person entering Canada from the United States is ineligible to seek refugee protection if they make their claim 14 days or more after arriving between Ports of Entry. Under the Safe Third Country Agreement (STCA), people who make a claim within 14 days of crossing from the United States between Ports of Entry are already denied the right to seek protection in Canada and are returned to the United States, unless they meet an exception in the STCA. This means that, under the regime set out in C-12, individuals entering Canada between Ports of Entry would effectively be banned from making a refugee claim, regardless of the potential merit of their case. The right to asylum should not be arbitrarily constrained by the manner of arrival. How an individual arrives in Canada has no bearing on the merit of their claim for refugee protection.

As with the one-year-bar, the proposed restrictions on arrivals between Ports of Entry increase the refugee system's reliance on the PRRA as the sole tool for assessing the merit of an individual's risk of persecution in their country of origin, raising a number of the same issues: the inadequacy of the PRRA process, which does not guarantee an oral hearing and relies on decision-makers without the resources and training of the IRB, no right of appeal or automatic stay of removal pending judicial review, likely increasing the Federal Court's already heavy caseload, and leaving individuals from moratorium countries in a state of legal limbo, hindering their ability to participate in the labour market or obtain vital forms of social support and pushing them into the margins of Canadian society, while extending indefinitely separation from family.

• **Suspension and Termination of Applications/Automatic Abandonment**

Bill C-12 includes new provisions that authorize the Minister or delegated officials to unilaterally cancel entire categories of immigration applications or to suspend processing of them, without providing individual hearings or recourse to review. The Centre is concerned that these new discretionary powers significantly undermine individual due process and the right to a fair hearing.

Bill C-12 also expands the grounds on which protection claims may be declared abandoned, including prior to formal referral to the Immigration and Refugee Board. This is accomplished through provisions that impose strict deadlines for providing documents or attending eligibility reviews, with little flexibility or accommodation for the realities facing refugees—such as

unstable housing, limited access to communication tools, and mental health crises. The Centre is particularly concerned that these provisions will result in an unwieldy and unnecessary increase in abandonment proceedings and more precarity for vulnerable claimants in the face of simple mix-ups. For example: not receiving a notice to appear due to a change of address reported after the notice was issued. These are frequent occurrences in the lives of newly arrived claimants who struggle to find adequate support in their first weeks in Canada. As proposed, claims must be referred abandonment for every missed deadline or missed appointment.

These provisions completely overlook the vulnerabilities faced by refugees from equity-seeking populations. They fail to recognize the risks faced by victims of SOGIESC (sexual orientation, gender identity and expression, and sex characteristics) and Gender Based Violence. Many of these individuals struggle with unstable housing and often lack access to the technology needed to follow up on the initial steps of a complex refugee claim.

The Centre has supported many of these vulnerable clients to reopen an abandoned IRB claim. Our process focuses on ensuring our clients have access to legal support and supporting clients to obtain the necessary supporting evidence to demonstrate how the client's intersecting vulnerabilities have hindered their ability to meet IRB deadlines. In one file, FCJ staff were able to coordinate with the client's mental health support specialist and their Legal Aid Ontario representative to submit medical reports to the IRB and obtain a reopening of the file.

In our experience, access to the IRB ensures that all the client's intersecting vulnerabilities are evaluated when their claims are considered for reopening.

In addition, Bill C-12 introduces a new step, authorizing the Minister to obtain specific information and documents required to support a claim for refugee protection and to evaluate whether a claim is ready to move forward to the IRB, an extra hurdle that is going to be managed by bureaucrats and will certainly add to existing processing delays rather than resolve them.

Concluding Recommendation: This bill should be withdrawn in its current form

WE'RE BETTER TOGETHER: OUR CANADA INCLUDES IMMIGRANTS AND REFUGEES



FCJ Refugee Centre is proud to support We're Better Together – a new national campaign led by the Canadian Council for Refugees (CCR) and partners to boost Canada's support for immigrants and refugees.

In Canada, we speak many languages, come from many places, and across our differences, we look out for each other.

While we see politicians abroad spread lies to turn neighbour against neighbour, here in Canada we reject those who use divide and conquer tactics to distract us while chipping away at the healthcare and services we all need and letting housing prices spiral.

We are proud to be a country that welcomes newcomers, and we expect our leaders to carry on that legacy and make this a place where all families can thrive. Because in Canada, we know we're better off together.

Stand with us. Show your support for immigrants and refugees.

Get involved in the campaign and sign up for updates at BetterTogetherCanada.ca.

This Message Guide is intended to help you create and share messaging that will win over Canadian public opinion in support of newcomers.



STANDING WITH TEMPORARY FOREIGN WORKERS

The Anti-Human Trafficking (AHT) team at FCJ Refugee Centre participated in the second annual Asian Migrant Farm Workers Health and Information Fair, held on November 16 at the W.I.S.H. (Woodstock Institute Sertoma Help Centre) Centre in Chatham. The event brought together over 200 migrant agricultural workers and more than twenty community organizations dedicated to improving the well-being of Temporary Foreign Workers (TFWs). Throughout the day, 74 TFWs from Thailand, the Philippines, and Mexico visited FCJ's table to seek information, resources, and support. Many shared their concerns about labour practices, recruitment issues, and workplace vulnerabilities, topics that remain central to our frontline work.

As part of the fair's programming, our team delivered a multilingual workshop titled *Protecting Yourself from Labour Exploitation and Abuse*. The session was offered in English, Spanish, and Thai, ensuring that participants could access critical information in their own language. The workshop focused on early warning signs of exploitation, rights under Canadian labour law, and pathways to support, including the Open Work Permit for Vulnerable Workers.

Our participation in this event reinforces FCJ Anti-Human Trafficking Area's commitment to supporting TFWs and other precarious migrants who face high risks of labour exploitation. By continuing to meet workers where they are, in community events, and in the spaces they trust, we strengthen our collective capacity to identify abuse, offer timely intervention, and expand access to safety and justice.



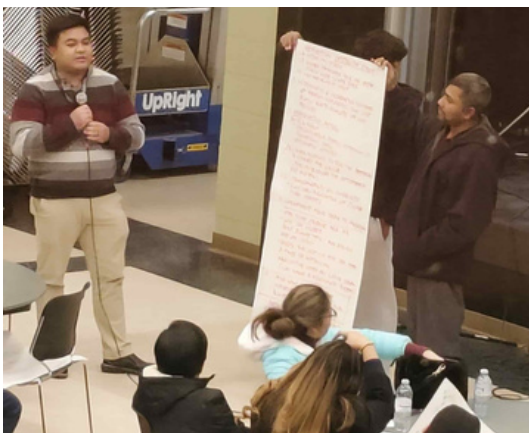
VOICES OF RESISTANCE: SHAPING THE FUTURE OF MIGRANT WORK

On November 16, partners, advocates, and migrant workers came together in Winnipeg for the Canadian Council for Refugees (CCR) Precarious and Exploited Migrant Committee Forum: *Voices of Resistance: Shaping the Future of Migrant Work*.

We spoke about the urgent harms that can be created by Bill C-12, the impact of tied/closed work permits, the rise in deportations and workplace exploitation, barriers to healthcare and legal protection, and the growing fear caused by regressive immigration policies.

Together, we highlighted migrant workers' crucial contributions, challenged anti-migrant narratives, and built strategies for real change—stronger rights, open work permits, permanent residency pathways, and collective action.

Thank you to our incredible partners: Canadian Council for Refugees; RHW/DTMF (Association for the Rights of Household and Farm Workers); Migrante Manitoba; Regional Connection; Neepawa Settlement Services; Legal Assistance of Windsor; Calgary Catholic Immigration Society; Catholic Social Services; Mary Ward Centre.





BUILDING THE COMMUNITIES WE NEED

The FCJ Refugee Centre participated at the Canadian Council for Refugees' Fall Consultation 2025 in Winnipeg, Manitoba this November 18-20 as well as the Migrant Workers Forum on November 16. The theme of the consultation was *Better Neighbours: Building the Communities We Need*, with the goal of curbing the rhetoric around refugees, precarious migrants and newcomers through building and strengthening relationships with allies across the country.

We were involved in the planning, moderation and delivery of different workshops and sessions. The closing plenary marked the completion of our Executive Director, Diana Gallego's two year term as President of the CCR.

'DRAW THE LINE': NATIONAL DAY OF ACTION

We joined today the National Day of Action in Toronto, where thousands of people took to the streets to draw the line and protest the current anti-migrant, anti-Indigenous, and fossil fuel-driven policies, calling for climate and economic justice worldwide.



ACCESS TO EDUCATION IN ONTARIO: IDENTIFYING PROBLEMS, TRYING TO FIND SOLUTIONS

Over the summer months, we conducted a series of focus group discussions to gather experiences of folks with precarious immigration status (such as refugee claimants, temporary resident status, and non-status individuals) at the intersection of the education system in Ontario at the following levels: Secondary 18+ and/or Post-Secondary. These levels include programs such as EdVance (age 18-21), Adult School (21+), Sanctuary Scholars Programs, and Colleges/Universities all within the province of Ontario. Participants had the opportunity to share their experiences, provide their insights, and discuss areas for improvement.



As a planned follow-up to these focus group discussions, we held a roundtable with various stakeholders, followed by a community organization consultation for additional inputs.

A compiled report will be produced and shared with decision makers by the end of the calendar year and will be accessible for folks to use as an advocacy resource.

The goal of this roundtable process is to strategize around pathways to the suggested solutions on all problem areas and challenges articulated.

A BIG THANK YOU TO THE GROVE COMMUNITY SCHOOL

A heartfelt thank you to Grove Community School for organizing a wonderful fundraiser, the Sufi Music and Whirling Dervish Concert — in support of the FCJ Refugee Centre. Your solidarity, generosity, and commitment to community spirit made this event truly special.

Together, we're helping make a real difference for refugees and newcomers.





A GREAT AUTUMN FOR THE FCJ YOUTH NETWORK!

This autumn is proving to be intense for the FCJ Youth Network, with many activities, gatherings, group dinners... The Halloween party was an absolute blast! The room was buzzing with energy, and laughter from the moment everyone arrived. One of the youth even prepared a delicious homemade meal for the whole group, which made the night feel extra special and brought everyone together. We carved pumpkins, some spooky, some silly, and turned the space into a creative pumpkin gallery. We snapped amazing photos, shared jokes, and enjoyed every moment. It was truly a night filled with fun, connection, and unforgettable memories.



On October 22, the youth went to see a movie in the Hot Docs cinema, in Toronto: *Shining Light: A Vietnamese-Canadian Legacy*. The film, a powerful look into a legacy shaped by courage, hope, and migration, is a moving documentary that tells the remarkable true story of Mui Nguyen Bui, a Vietnamese woman who fled Vietnam in April 1975 while nine months pregnant. She escaped on an overcrowded refugee ship, where she gave birth to her daughter at sea. Their journey eventually led them to Canada, where they rebuilt their lives as part of the early wave of Vietnamese refugees.

SUPPORT REFUGEES WITH SOMETHING UNIQUE: GET EXCLUSIVE ARTWORK AND HELP US KEEP OUR DOOR OPEN



This holiday season, we are thrilled to announce a special, in-person holiday shop, made possible with the support of two incredible artists: Carolina Gajardo and Loly Rico. Carolina, a community artist and educator with extensive experience in inclusive art projects for immigrant and refugee women, uses art as a tool for healing, empowerment, and belonging. She has been a long-time friend of the FCJ Refugee Centre, generously donating her artwork over the years. Loly, our Founder, brings her dedication and talent through beautifully handmade creations.

Our holiday shop is not just about shopping, it's about coming together as a community. Each piece, whether a painting or a handmade item, is unique and carries the spirit of giving. By purchasing these works, you're not only finding meaningful, one-of-a-kind gifts for your loved ones, but you're also directly supporting the Centre and the programs that make a difference in people's lives every day.

This initiative celebrates creativity, community, and generosity. If you'd like to support the Centre while taking home a beautiful work of art, please [visit our website for details](#), and treat yourself with something unique!

Every purchase helps us continue our work and spreads the joy of giving in a truly personal way.

Scan the code to access our holiday shop



CELEBRATING THE BEAUTY OF AUTUMN WITH CREATIVITY



Our first *Art for Everyone - Fall Season* workshop gathered seven participants for a creative afternoon celebrating the beauty of autumn. We explored techniques for painting fall leaves, transforming the experience into a meditative and relaxing activity that fostered creativity, mindfulness, and mental well-being. We extend our sincere thanks to the workshop facilitator, Carolina Gajardo, and to everyone who joined us this season. Your creativity and enthusiasm made the workshop truly special.

LEARNING, CONNECTING

We were at the Homeless Connect Toronto One-Stop-Shop event (HCT12) at Mattamy Athletics Centre, where we connected with various community service providers and learned about local resources and support. Thank you for stopping by, it was great to see you all!



DON'T MISS



The **FCJ Youth Network** is a Brave Space that combines camaraderie, empowerment, and advocacy into an inspiring journey. The FCJYN is dedicated to championing the rights of newcomer youth regardless of status or situation.

Every Wednesday, we gather in person from 4pm-6 pm, engaging in a wide array of activities that encompass both fun and purpose, such as movie nights, research, workshops, art classes, family dinner, advocacy work and outings, as well as discussions about human rights and the challenges that migrant youth face.

Whether you're looking for a way to enhance your advocacy skills or simply want to be part of a movement that's making a difference, the FCJ Youth Network has a place for you.

Connect with us on WhatsApp or send us a text at 1(437) 833-2427.



Our Settlement and Integration Programs include the **Food Security Program**, an initiative implemented since our origins.

At FCJ Refugee Centre, we strongly believe in the importance of food security and sustainability.

The primary goal of the food security program is to provide **access to nutritious food to refugee claimants and families**, and to people with precarious status, to alleviate one of the fundamental rights, and to support their settlement and integration into their new home.

Food distribution takes place every other Thursday, from 2:00pm to 4:00pm, at FCJ Refugee Centre: 208 Oakwood Ave., Toronto.



If you are a refugee claimant, you are invited to participate in the Virtual Ready Tours. This is a great opportunity to meet RPD (Refugee Protection Division) officers, who **will explain what is going to happen during your refugee hearing and how to be ready.**

Ready Tours take place **twice a month**. Here is how to register:

- ✓ Please **check the calendar** to see the next Virtual Ready Tour available and fill in and send us the register form: <https://www.fcjrefugeecentre.org/events/categories/refugee-hearing-orientations/>
- ✓ You will receive a confirmation email with the date and the time of the Ready Tour you are registered for.
- ✓ The Virtual Ready Tour is facilitated in English. If you need an interpreter, please let us know in the register form.

THANK YOU TO OUR VOLUNTEERS

To our incredible volunteers — thank you for showing up with heart, dedication, and compassion. Your time, energy, and care have made a real difference in the lives of those we serve. Whether supporting events, offering interpretation, assisting with programs, or simply lending a listening ear, you have been an essential part of our community. Your commitment reminds us that solidarity is built through action, and we're so grateful to walk this path with you. From all of us at FCJ Refugee Centre — thank you for being part of our journey.

We truly appreciate your support



Testimony

I work as a volunteer teaching English at the FCJ Refugee Centre. I have had the privilege of meeting people from different countries; persons who have been uprooted and who have taken the risk to find a home in a new country. I admire their courage and perseverance as they try to overcome many obstacles especially the challenge of learning English. Some parents come with their children, which I think is wonderful, since it creates a family atmosphere.

During the class I cover aspects of grammar, including lessons that focus on real-world tasks. For example: identifying parts of a grocery store, asking for help when looking for a specific item and understanding the sales person's response. In this way, they practice skills that will be useful in their daily lives. Depending on the topic, I try and incorporate their culture into the lesson plan. Everyone is eager to participate and share, which adds to the learning experience of the group.

I would like to thank the FCJ Refugee Centre for the opportunity to be of service to these people, who walk in hope as they try to build a brighter future for themselves and their loved ones.

Karen Corera, FMM



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