



Skilled Labour Shortage?

Through the Economic Mobility Pathway Pilot (EMPP) ORAT is partnering with Immigration Canada to address the skilled labour shortage facing Canadian employers by connecting them with talented refugee candidates eager to contribute to their workforce.

If you or someone you know is facing challenges finding skilled workers, we'd love to share more about this innovative program.

Reach out to us at empp-orat@archtoronto.org or call 647.494.5422. Visit www.empp-orat.ca for additional details.

Embracing Lent



Lent is a sacred season of prayer, fasting, and almsgiving, calling us to renew our hearts and grow closer to Christ. These 40 days reflect Jesus' time in the wilderness, where He fasted, prayed, and overcame temptation, preparing for His ministry. Likewise, Lent offers us an opportunity to reflect, repent, and realign our lives with His teachings.

Through prayer, we deepen our connection with God. Through fasting, we practice self-discipline, making room for His grace. Through almsgiving, we extend His love by serving those in need. Each of these pillars helps us journey toward spiritual renewal, leading us to the great joy of Easter—Christ's victory over sin and death.

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The Economic Mobility Pathways Pilot (EMPP)

Skilled Refugees, Ready for Your Workforce!



Canadian employers can access skilled refugees from abroad through Immigration Canada's Economic Mobility Pathways Pilot

For more information contact the Archdiocese of Toronto's Office for Refugees (ORAT)
w: www.empp-orat.ca | e: empp-orat@archtoronto.org | p: (647) 494-5422

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Embracing Lent

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As we walk this path, may we embrace its challenges and blessings, allowing the Lord to transform our hearts and strengthen our faith. And as Lent leads us to the celebration of Easter, may we rejoice in the promise of new life, sharing in the Alleluia of Christ's resurrection and the hope it brings to the world.

Wishing you a blessed Lent and a joyful Easter.



Jubilee 2025: A Call to Action



In December 2024, Pope Francis opened the Holy Doors of St. Peter's Basilica, marking the start of the Jubilee Year, which will run through 2025 until the Holy Doors are closed on the Solemnity of the Epiphany in January 2026. The theme of this Jubilee Year is "Pilgrims of Hope." In paragraph 13 of *Spes Non Confundit* (Hope Does Not Disappoint), the Bull of Indiction for the Jubilee Year, the Holy Father reflects on the plight of migrants who leave their homes in search of a better life. He emphasizes that:

"Exiles, displaced persons, and refugees, whom international tensions force to emigrate in order to avoid war, violence, and discrimination, ought to be guaranteed security and access to employment and education, the means they need to find their place in a new social context."

Pope Francis encourages the Christian community to be beacons of hope and welcome for the stranger, echoing Christ's words: *"I was a stranger, and you welcomed Me."*

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Get Ready for Tax Season!

Source: Excerpt from RSTP Bulletin January 31, 2025

Newcomers to Canada, including sponsored refugees, are required to file a tax return with the Canada Revenue Agency (CRA) even if they have recently arrived in Canada and do not have any income.

Filing a tax return will enable the CRA to determine whether the newcomers are eligible for the GST/HST Credit, the Canada Child Benefit (CCB) and any other tax rebates from provincial or territorial programs.

Question: Do newcomers sponsored under the Private Sponsorship of Refugees (PSR) program need to report the financial support provided by their sponsors as "income" on their tax return?

The financial support provided by sponsors to newcomers sponsored under the PSR program is generally considered to be a "gift" by the CRA and does not need to be reported as "income" on the newcomer's tax return. It is not considered to be taxable income if the money is given voluntarily and is not provided in exchange for any service, property or obligation.

[Statement of Benefits Form](#) (Printable)

[Statement of Benefits Form](#) (Digital)

Question: Is there anyone that can help sponsored newcomers with their tax return?

Newcomers can receive assistance with filing their tax return at free tax clinics. Free tax clinics are generally offered between March and April across Canada. Please click [here](#) to find the nearest free clinic or contact your [local settlement agency](#).



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Country Report: Iran

Iran is located in Western Asia, at the crossroads of the Middle East and Central Asia. It shares borders with Iraq to the west, Turkey to the northwest, Armenia and Azerbaijan to the north, Turkmenistan to the northeast, Afghanistan and Pakistan to the east. The country has a long coastline along the Persian Gulf and the Gulf of Oman to the south, providing strategic access to major maritime trade routes. Iran's geographical position places it as a key regional power, influencing both Middle Eastern and Central Asian affairs.



Geo-history: Iran's geographical history is deeply tied to its position as a crossroads of civilizations. The land that makes up modern Iran has been inhabited for thousands of years, serving as a vital link between the East and the West. The Persian Empire, one of the world's earliest and most influential civilizations, emerged here in the 6th century BCE under Cyrus the Great. Its vast empire stretched from the Mediterranean to the Indus River, benefiting from Iran's diverse geography, which included fertile plains, mountain barriers, and desert expanses that shaped trade routes and military strategies. The rugged terrain of the Zagros and Alborz mountains provided natural defense, while Iran's central plateau fostered agricultural development and settlement growth. The Silk Road, which passed through Iran, further cemented its role as a hub for commerce and cultural exchange. Throughout history, Iran's geography has played a

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The Archdiocese of Toronto, through the Office for Refugees (ORAT), has long been committed to welcoming refugees from different countries and backgrounds in response to this same call of Christ. Through the Project Hope program, many parishes have joined this mission by forming refugee committees to help resettle families who have no relatives or friends in Canada to sponsor them.

This initiative could become part of your parish's Jubilee Year outreach program. In his November 2024 Jubilee Year Letter to Parishes, His Eminence, Frank Cardinal Leo extended an invitation to parish priests across the Archdiocese:

"...to help embrace the theme of 'Pilgrims of Hope' that is so central to the Holy Year, I would encourage you to discern how your parish might emphasize a ministry that reaches out to those in need as a sign of hope in 2025. This may be the formation of a refugee sponsorship committee (or encouraging new sponsorship if a committee already exists)..."

If your parish feels called to respond to this invitation from Cardinal Leo, Pope Francis, and ultimately, Christ Himself, we invite you to contact our office at orateducator@archtoronto.org or call 437.290.9333.

"May the Christian community always be prepared to defend the rights of those who are most vulnerable, opening wide its doors to welcome them, lest anyone ever be robbed of the hope of a better future." – Pope Francis, Spes Non Confundit



Country Report: Iran

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crucial role in its interactions with invading forces, from Alexander the Great to the Mongols. The Persian Gulf and the Caspian Sea granted Iran access to maritime trade, enhancing its economic influence. Iran's location made it a battleground for empires, including conflicts between the Persian and Roman empires, and later, between the Safavid and Ottoman dynasties. The discovery of oil in the early 20th century transformed Iran into a focal point of global geopolitics, drawing the attention of colonial powers like Britain and Russia. Today, Iran's geography continues to shape its political and economic strategies, particularly due to its control over the Strait of Hormuz, a critical passage for global oil shipments.

Religious Affiliation: Iran is an Islamic Republic where the majority of the population, around 90–95%, adheres to Twelver Shi'a Islam, which is also the official state religion. Sunni Muslims, mainly from Kurdish, Baloch, and Arab ethnic minorities, make up around 5–10%. Religious minorities include Zoroastrians, Christians (primarily Armenians and Assyrians), and Jews, who have official recognition but face restrictions. The Bahá'í community, the largest non-Muslim minority, is not recognized and faces severe persecution. While Iran's constitution upholds Islam as the foundation of governance, religious freedom is highly restricted, especially for those outside of state-sanctioned faiths.

Refugee Outflow: Iran's refugee outflow includes a growing number of Muslim converts to Christianity, who face severe persecution under the country's strict Islamic laws. Conversion from Islam is considered apostasy, which can result in imprisonment, torture, or even the death penalty. Many converts practice their faith in secret, often gathering in underground churches that are frequently raided by authorities. Those caught face harsh consequences, including lengthy prison sentences and harassment by the intelligence services. As a result, many Christian converts flee Iran, seeking asylum in countries such as Turkey, Germany, and the United States, where they can practice their faith freely.

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A Journey of Resilience

By Caroline R.

In February 2013, my family and I fled from Sri Lanka to Malaysia, leaving behind our home and lives as we knew them. It was a decision born of desperation and a will to survive. Threats loomed over us, threats to kidnap my daughter and end my husband's life. The fear became unbearable after receiving a life-threatening call, and with the guidance of a kind Catholic bishop, we made the decision to leave.



When we arrived in Malaysia, we found ourselves without a place to live. We took refuge in the storeroom of a house, a bare space with no fan, no bed, just four walls. It was a harsh welcome to a foreign land. My children were young, my daughter was just 12, and my son, 10. On the first morning, we had no food. My husband and I left early to find something for our children to eat, and when we returned, they were crying from hunger and fear. We brought fried rice for them, only enough for the two of them. That day, my husband and I went without food.

Amid this hardship, we were blessed to find support at St. Joseph's Central parish. Father Alan



Pereira, the parish priest, extended a helping hand, offering me a job as a sacristan. For more than a year, I worked there, and it allowed us to put food on the table. With the help of kind church members, my husband also managed to find some work, though as refugees, we were not legally permitted to work. Those jobs paid little, but they sustained us.

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The Iranian government views Christian conversion as a political threat, often accusing converts of acting against national security. This has led to increasing crackdowns, with reports of mass arrests and harsh prison sentences for those accused of evangelizing. Many asylum seekers cite religious persecution as their main reason for fleeing, and international human rights organizations have documented widespread abuses. Turkey, which shares a border with Iran, has become a primary destination for fleeing converts, though many continue on to Europe or North America through refugee resettlement programs. Despite the risks, the number of converts continues to rise, driven by dissatisfaction with the regime and the underground spread of Christianity within Iran.

ORAT's Support: ORAT has submitted sponsorship applications for 48 Iranian refugees, the majority of whom are converts to Christianity. So far, 24 have successfully arrived in Canada, while the remaining cases are still being processed by Immigration Canada.



It is important to note that since Canada does not have diplomatic relations with Iran, we are unable to process refugee sponsorship applications for refugees who are currently reside in Iran.

ORAT Website

Please visit ORAT's website: www.orat.ca to learn more about Canada's Private Sponsorship of Refugees Program.

Eventually, we registered with UNHCR, which gave us some semblance of hope. It allowed our children to attend a school for underprivileged students, though even then, we faced hurdles. We couldn't afford the fees, and there were days when my children were asked to stand outside the classroom. They often cried, and so did I, seeing their struggles.

As the years went by, my husband and I became increasingly worried about our children's future, particularly their education. They were growing older, and as teenagers, they had never experienced a life of stability or rightful opportunities. We carried a heavy burden, constantly questioning how we could provide them with a life that would allow them to thrive and pursue their dreams.

It was during these reflections that I discovered Our Lady of Good Health parish. By that time, the parish priest was Father Peter, who introduced me to the late Mr. Anton Phillip. He was a true gentleman; a great man whose kindness and compassion left a lasting impact. The process formally began in 2016. Mr. Anton Phillip organized and arranged a five-member team under the Constituent Group (CG) of Our Lady of Good Health parish. He also introduced me to the Office for Refugees Archdiocese of Toronto (ORAT), where I connected with the Director, Deacon Rudy.

Deacon Rudy became an emotional guide for me and taught me how sponsorship works. His guidance, combined with the efforts of the Constituent Group, set things in motion. However, it wasn't until 2021 that things truly gained momentum. Father George Harrison, a Malaysian priest, came forward as a co-sponsor, generously contributing 80% of the required funds. With his help, the resettlement process moved forward. By October 2021, our case was submitted for processing to the Canadian embassy in Singapore, and in 2023, we completed our biometrics, medical examinations, and received final approval.

In late November 2024, after years of waiting and enduring hardships, we departed Malaysia and arrived in Canada the following day. The Constituent Group from Our Lady of Good Health parish welcomed us warmly,

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with smiles and open arms at the airport in Toronto, including Mrs. Debbie, who represented her late husband, Mr. Anton. Even in his final days, bedridden, Mr. Anton had entrusted his dear friend, Mr. Angelo, with the responsibility of ensuring our journey was successful.

Mr. Anton's unwavering dedication to helping our family will forever remain in our hearts. Even as he faced the end of his life, he thought of us, showing his true greatness as a human being. Alongside him, the ORAT staff, together with Deacon Rudy, were there for us from the very beginning. Their support went

beyond official matters. They made us feel welcomed and treated us like their own family. In the end, we were finally able to put faces to the names we had been in contact with for so many years.

Today, as I reflect on this long and difficult journey, I am filled with immense gratitude. Our story is one of hardship, resilience, and hope. It is also a testament to the power of compassion and the strength of a community that came together, with the grace of the Almighty, to change our lives.

Supporting ORAT

Our work is supported by the generosity of the Archdiocese of Toronto, ShareLife, various collaborating organizations and the faithful. If you would like to donate to support the work of this office, please click the donate button.

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