



Dangerous Delays

Palestinian Students' Endless Wait for Canadian Study Permits

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Executive Summary

The purpose of this report is to raise awareness regarding the significant visa processing delays faced by Palestinian students from Gaza who have been accepted into Canadian higher education institutions. These delays by Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada (IRCC) are not only preventing students from commencing their studies, but are a breach of basic humanitarian and rule of law principles. This analysis is based on a review of standard visa application practices, media reports, correspondence with Palestinian students, and precedents from other countries and circumstances.

In the wake of Israel's crushing assault on the Gaza Strip, over 130 Palestinian students holding acceptances into Canadian universities have found their entry, and thus admissions, impeded by an immigration process whose rationales fail to stand up to scrutiny. The IRCC has not only failed to address the exceptional circumstances from which these students are applying, it has also added additional, opaque and unprecedented screenings that further delay the process without any clear guidelines as to what is required - predicaments for which Canada has a precedent of showing flexibility or making allowances, and which other countries have managed to mitigate. This contravenes the spirit, and letter, of international norms and agreements as well as Canada's own immigration regulations and legal principles. Palestinian applicants to Canadian universities are highly qualified, as evidenced by their admissions to prestigious programs. The report urges the Canadian government to take into account the exceptional urgency and adjust the immigration process, as has been done before in numerous similar cases. This not only reflects Canadian values and norms but also has potentially life-saving consequences for scores of students who can contribute to the reconstruction of their homeland as well as to the education, society and culture of Canada.

I. Introduction

The purpose of this report is to highlight, and call for action on, the issues facing Palestinian students from Gaza who have been accepted into Canada for higher education, but who are facing delays in visa processing from the Department of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada (IRCC). It is based on a review of standard visa application practices, media reports, correspondence with Palestinian students, and precedents from other countries and circumstances.

II. Background: Destruction of Gaza’s Education Sector

The war waged by Israel on the Gaza Strip in the past two years has provoked one of the worst crises in modern history. It has featured repeated massacres, widespread torture, mass bombardment, the worst enforced starvation on record and, according to some estimates, the deaths of at least a hundred thousand Palestinians.¹ It has also systematically wrecked infrastructure, from hospitals and shelters, to schools and universities. Many international human rights organizations, including credible Israeli organizations, and states have argued Israel’s actions in Gaza meet the legal requirements of genocide.²

Palestinians have valued education as a key component of their life and identity since the original upheaval of Palestinians from their homeland in the mid-twentieth century.³ Despite their decades-long status of enforced statelessness, Palestinians have still prioritized education, with literacy levels ranking among the best not only regionally but globally. The sharp improvement in literacy rates over the past two decades, even with Gaza under blockade before the assault of 2023, testifies to the particular importance of education and its infrastructure for Palestinians.⁴ The United Nations’ Relief and Work Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East’s (UNRWA) biggest programme in Gaza was education.⁵ In 2024, at the height of its assault, Israel banned UNRWA as an alleged “terrorist” organization on grounds widely recognized as specious.⁶

¹ For a range of estimates, see Canadians for Justice and Peace in the Middle East, *The Toll of Intent: Looking at the Genocidal Impact of Israel’s Assault on Gaza* (Montreal, QC: CJPME, November 2025), 16–22, https://assets.nationbuilder.com/cjpme/pages/18092/attachments/original/1762777369/EN-Report-Toll-Of-Intent-Nov-2025_pdf.pdf?1762777369

² United Nations Human Rights Council, Sixteenth Session, “Legal analysis of the conduct of Israel in Gaza pursuant to the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide,” September 16, 2025, <https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/documents/hrbodies/hrcouncil/sessions-regular/session60/advance-version/a-hrc-60-crp-3.pdf>; IAGS Resolution on the Situation in Gaza, August 31, 2025, <https://genocidescholars.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/08/IAGS-Resolution-on-Gaza-FINAL.pdf>; European Centre for Constitutional and Human Rights, “The ongoing genocide in Gaza,” December 10, 2024, https://www.ecchr.eu/fileadmin/O_As/ECCHR_O_A_Gaza_and_Genocide_20241210.pdf; B’tselem, “Our Genocide,” July 2025, https://www.btselem.org/sites/default/files/publications/202507_our_genocide_eng.pdf

³ Ibrahim Abu-Lughod, “Palestinian Higher Education: National Identity, Liberation, and Globalization,” *boundary 2*, 27, 1 (February 1, 2000): 75–95, <https://doi.org/10.1215/01903659-27-1-75>

⁴ Rasa Evrensel, “Palestine sees 85% drop in illiteracy rates in last 2 decades,” Anadolu Agency, September 8, 2023, <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/middle-east/palestine-sees-85-drop-in-illiteracy-rates-in-last-2-decades/3324692>

⁵ United Nations’ Relief and Work Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East’s (UNRWA), “What We Do,” <https://www.unrwa.org/what-we-do/education>

⁶ Ramzy Baroud, “‘Terrorist Organization’? What’s Behind the Israeli War on UNRWA,” *Counterpunch*, 26 July 2024, <https://www.counterpunch.org/2024/07/26/terrorist-organization-whats-behind-the-israeli-war-on-unrwa/>

Indeed, despite being under blockade since 2007, Gaza maintained a dozen well-regarded universities. Palestinians have been termed the world's "best-educated refugees:"⁷ a fact reflected in the large proportion of Palestinian professionals, doctors, engineers and teachers employed within the region, as well as further afield.

By 2025, Israel has destroyed or damaged beyond operability all twelve universities and other educational facilities.⁸ Thus Israel has demolished Gaza's once-distinguished education sector, which had been strained already from the effects of an eighteen-year blockade. Experts have referred to this as scholasticide: "the deliberate erasure of memory and the destruction of a people's capacity to teach, learn, and produce knowledge."⁹

The Gaza Strip's beleaguered populace qualifies for humanitarian support of the most urgent nature. While there is a strong humanitarian case to be made for the support of Palestinians in general, this report restricts itself to the Canadian context. It asks simply that the Canadian government facilitate entry for students whose aptitude has already been demonstrated, to complete their education and enrich Canadian educational institutions, and enjoy their basic right to pursue their education without discrimination. The ruin of Gaza's educational sector, which is expected to take at least a decade to rebuild, underscores the urgency of providing alternative educational outlets and renders more acute the need for Canada to remove the exceptional impediments that have been raised against Palestinian students seeking to study in Canada.

Indeed, rebuilding this educational sector is a priority for many of the Palestinian students who have been accepted in Canadian universities; for instance Alaa, who was accepted to a doctoral programme in Canada, aims "to complete my PhD, to return to Gaza, to enrich and contribute to rebuild our academic establishment."¹⁰

⁷ Anne Irfan, "Why Palestinians are known as the World's 'Best-Educated Refugees,'" Columbia University Press blog, August 23, 2023, <https://cupblog.org/2023/08/23/why-palestinians-are-known-as-the-worlds-best-educated-refugeesanne-irfan/>

⁸ CJPME, "The Toll of Intent."

⁹ Henry Giroux, "Scholasticide: Waging War on Education from Gaza to the West," *Journal of Holy Land and Palestine Studies*, Vol. 24 (1), 2025. Wade Alarabed, "Education in a time of genocide: scholasticide and the duty of humanitarians," *ODI Humanitarian Practice Network*, September 18, 2025, <https://odihpn.org/en/publication/education-in-a-time-of-genocide-scholasticide-and-the-duty-of-humanitarians/>; Christina Savvidou, "What is a University for, After Gaza?" *Social Science Space*, December 23, 2025, <https://www.socialsciencespace.com/2025/12/what-is-a-university-for-after-gaza/>

¹⁰ Raffy Boudjikian, "As Palestinian students await Canadian visas, some are welcomed by France," *CBC News*, July 18, 2025, <https://www.cbc.ca/news/politics/france-palestinian-students-1.7587948>

III. Issues Facing International Palestinian Students Applying for Study Permits

To study in Canada, an international student who has been accepted into an educational institution in Canada must apply for a study permit through Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada (IRCC). The application usually requires an acceptance letter from a Designated Learning Institution (DLI), proof of financial support, identity documents, and often biometrics such as fingerprints and photographs.

Prior to October 7, 2023, hundreds of Palestinian students (from Gaza and the West Bank) had been enrolled at Canadian universities. After receiving study permits, students pursued fields ranging from engineering and medicine to humanities, often through merit scholarships. Canada provided higher education opportunities to Palestinian students via a number of other programs.

Since October 7, 2023, the Canadian government has introduced additional screening requirements for anybody who had been present in Gaza after July 2023, without public disclosure of what those criteria or measures are.

IV. Delays in Biometrics

In over a hundred cases collected by the Palestinian Students and Scholars at Risk (PSSAR) organization, the number one issue facing international students from Gaza is delays in biometrics, usually a digital photograph of the face and fingerprinting. This in turn delays their receiving a visa. At present, there are 136 students who have been given admission offers or scholarships from 26 Canadian universities. For some students, these delays have lasted 18 months and counting. Eighty-eight accompanying family members are also awaiting visa decisions.

It is worth pointing out that the question at issue is not whether or not the students are qualified. As Nada El-Falou, director of student services at PSSAR, points out, "their acceptances have been after multiple interviews and making sure that the professor wants them in their lab and that they're the best candidates for their research...These are students who have been accepted purely on merit not receiving charity at all."¹¹ These students have qualified for acceptance into Canadian institutions despite

¹¹ Merve Aydogan, "Gaza student, accepted to Canadian university, trapped by visa delays," *Anadolu Agency*, July 7, 2025, <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/middle-east/gaza-student-accepted-to-canadian-university-trapped-by-visa-delays/3644004>

severe hardships in a historic crisis. PSSAR estimates that these students have research stipends, scholarships and awards amounting to CAD \$15 million.

V. Difficulties with the Biometrics Process

The biometrics requirement is currently impossible for applicants in Gaza to fulfil. The IRCC does not have a biometrics office in Gaza; instead, applicants are to proceed to Amman or Cairo.

Yet Amman has no border with Gaza. Getting to Amman requires travel through the Israeli-controlled West Bank, which is saturated with checkpoints. In addition, at present, Israel allows only a tiny fraction of Palestinians in Gaza to travel to the West Bank.¹² By the Canadian government's own account on their travel advisory website, "the government of Israel may also establish additional checkpoints without warning and increase the intensity of vehicle checks. Additional measures may include frequent and extended closures of checkpoints at the discretion of the Israeli security forces...There is no guarantee that you may pass through security checkpoints even if you have a valid visa and authorization to enter."¹³

The route to Cairo meanwhile requires passing through the Rafah border into Sinai. Again, the Canadian government recognizes how difficult such travel is: "There are no options other than the Rafah border crossing, controlled by Egypt, to enter or exit the Gaza Strip. Due to the ongoing conflict, entry to and exit from the Gaza Strip is currently extremely limited."¹⁴

Moreover, having destroyed the city of Rafah, Israel also seized the Palestinian side of the Rafah border in May 2024; it has remained mostly shut since. Although not quite as perilous as northern Gaza, this route itself is fraught with danger, once more according to the Canadian government, which describes it as "dangerous due to military operations and smuggling activities...The security situation can also deteriorate rapidly due to instability and the risk of terrorist attacks [sic] in northern Sinai."¹⁵

¹² United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), "Movement in and out of Gaza: update covering January 2022,"

<https://www.unocha.org/publications/report/occupied-palestinian-territory/movement-and-out-of-gaza-update-covering-january-2022#:~:text=Palestinians>

¹³ Government of Canada, "Israel and Palestine travel advice," November 1, 2025,

<https://travel.gc.ca/destinations/israel-and-palestine>

¹⁴ "Israel and Palestine travel advice."

¹⁵ "Israel and Palestine travel advice."

“Many of us are unable to leave Gaza at all,” Sondos explained to us, “our programs are being delayed, and we cannot access Cairo or Amman to complete the biometrics requirement.”¹⁶

VI. Discriminatory Background Checks

Even when a Palestinian applicant succeeds in obtaining biometrics in Amman or Cairo, there remain delays in processing visas. According to El-Falou, director of student services at PSSAR, the IRCC has “introduced a new biased and prejudiced process. The background checks have been taking longer than they would in any normal situation.”¹⁷ This is underscored by the fact that even the students who managed to make the trip to Cairo before the May 2024 border closure, and completed the biometrics process, have been left in an interminable wait. El-Falou stressed, “These delays are not due to Palestinian students’ inability to provide their biometrics in Gaza, as IRCC claims. There are many [27] Palestinian students who were able to evacuate to Egypt and have provided their biometrics but still face these delays.”¹⁸ In addition, PSSAR reports that 25 applicants via the embassy in Jordan have passed eligibility, but have still not received their visa.

The additional screenings are conducted under an unexplained and opaque rubric, with no rationale or reasons provided to which the screened students might respond. PSSAR only learned about the additional screenings through an Access to Information and Privacy (ATIP) request. Such screenings have not been required of students from *any other country*, and are *prima facie* discriminatory as well as damaging. This opacity contravenes the Federal Court’s repeated findings that “a blanket statement that security checks are pending” is inadequate in these circumstances.¹⁹

The Standing Committee on Immigration and Citizenship released a public policy update in May 2024. It said that a “multi-stage security screening approach” helps “IRCC and our public safety partners to initiate security screening in advance of applicants’ exit from Gaza.”²⁰ This measure, added without explanation or consultation with affected parties, does not explain what threat Palestinians fleeing a war might pose to “the safety and security of Canadians.” In practice, the measure

¹⁶ Correspondence with Sondos, December 6, 2025.

¹⁷ Aydogan, “Gaza student, accepted to Canadian university.”

¹⁸ Correspondence with Nada El-Falou, December 1, 2025.

¹⁹ See *Almutadi v. Canada*, (*Kanthasamyiyar v Canada* (Citizenship and Immigration), 2015 FC 1248 at paras 49–50, citing *Abdolkhaleghi v Canada* (Minister of Citizenship and Immigration), 2005 FC 729 at para 26). We are indebted to Dania Kassim for this information.

²⁰ Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration, “Gaza Public Policy,” May 27, 2024, <https://www.canada.ca/en/immigration-refugees-citizenship/corporate/transparency/committees/cimm-may-27-2024/gaza-public-policy.html>

ensures another barrier to an immigration process that was already heavily skewed against Palestinians even before the war broke out.

Malik Samara, a Palestinian PhD candidate and journalist studying IRCC cases from *before* October 2023 found that “[b]etween 2019 and 2021, IRCC approved 21.3% of the study permit applications submitted by Palestinian students (as opposed to 91% of Israeli applications).”²¹ The introduction of additional screening in the period since 2023 – amid a widely recognized genocide and scholasticide – calls into question the equity of the process. “It is clear,” El-Falou said, “that Palestinian nationals are subject to different security processes compared to other nationals, despite their applications being processed in the same centres. This process is biased and prejudiced.”²²

VII. Impact on Palestinian Applicants

The severest, and most tragic, impact on Palestinian applicants facing visa delays is loss of life. Twin sisters Dalia and Sally Ghazi were accepted to a PhD program at the University of Waterloo in October 2024.²³ They were still in the process of filling out the required documentation for a visa into Canada when an Israeli airstrike killed them in December 2024.²⁴

PSSAR reports that four students have been injured while waiting for their visa.

Other less lethal consequences of visa delays is withdrawal of the admissions or scholarship offer from the Canadian institution concerned. PSSAR notes that nine students lost their admission offers because their study permits were not issued in time.

For example, Sondos in Gaza, who has been in limbo since submitting her visa application in December 2024, pointed out: “These months are passing from our lives, delaying our academic and professional futures. Students are trapped and at risk of losing their scholarships...I know a friend who is on the verge of losing her scholarship after being forced to postpone her program more than four times.”²⁵

²¹ Data extracted from IRCC figures in Malik Samara’s PhD research paper for the University of Alberta, “Deracializing the Study Permit Policy in Canada: Remarks on Colonialism, Neoliberalism, Race, and Class,” PhD research paper, University of Alberta.

²² Correspondence with Nada El-Falou, December 1, 2025.

²³ Karis Mapp, “Twin sisters from Gaza killed after being accepted into University of Waterloo PhD program in Ontario,” *CBC News*, December 18, 2024, <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/kitchener-waterloo/university-waterloo-gaza-twins-killed-war-1.7412330>

²⁴ Raffy Boudjikianian, “Palestinian students say visa delays have stranded them despite admission to Canadian schools,” *CBC News*, July 4, 2025, <https://www.cbc.ca/news/politics/university-students-gaza-visa-applications-1.7576935>

²⁵ Correspondence with Sondos, December 6, 2025.

VIII. Impact on Canada

Canada is suffering reputational damage from its inability to solve the visa processing delays for Palestinian students. This is in addition to the loss of qualified students who will enhance scholarship in Canada, contribute to classrooms and research, and become part of a network of international students. It is well known that international students benefit Canada's business, trade and diplomatic relations in the globalised world.²⁶ One such example is Meera, an engineering student working for Oxfam International and her family's only breadwinner due to a serious sickness that had afflicted her father. "I applied for the scholarship in a very harsh condition," she said. "I was living in a tent. I was displaced with my family, living in a tent in Rafah in a very hard condition. But this did not stop me from dreaming and believing that one day, I will reach my dream and make it come true."²⁷

In April 2024 Meera received a Masters' scholarship from the University of Regina. Her family were among the last to cross into Egypt, so that her father could receive medical care, before Israel seized the Rafah border in May 2024, leaving her behind in Rafah. Since receiving the scholarship, she has been forced to repeatedly defer her admission because of the delay in obtaining a student visa. Meera chose Canada as a destination because of its sterling reputation as a welcoming country, but to her disappointment "didn't find this in my experience" with the delays.

"To be honest," Meera admitted, "I'm losing hope by time [sic] because there's been no response from the Canadian government... Every time when I'm feeling depressed and I'm feeling exhausted, I remember that there's something waiting for me. I have to stay strong and keep imagining that good days will come."²⁸

IX. Precedent: Other Jurisdictions

Another student accepted by a Canadian university was eventually forced to look elsewhere: Ihab's first choice to study biomedical engineering was the University of Alberta, which accepted him in the early spring of 2025. Though he preferred Canada as a destination, the wait forced Ihab to opt instead for Marseilles' Centrale Méditerranéenne university. The French government helped him evacuate to Jordan where he was able to complete the biometric tests. "I feel the government of France

²⁶ Isaac Garcia-Sitton, "Why international students could be a critical factor in bolstering Canada's economic resilience," *The Conversation*, March 19, 2025, <https://theconversation.com/why-international-students-could-be-a-critical-factor-in-bolstering-canadas-economic-resilience-251985>

²⁷ Boudjikianian, "Palestinian students say visa delays have stranded them."

²⁸ Aydogan, "Gaza student, accepted to Canadian university."

makes a lot of effort,” he remarked.²⁹ PSSAR reports that 16 students have been forced to act similarly – withdraw their acceptance to a Canadian university in favour of a European offer.

Underscoring the possibility of evacuating students, and indeed others, through diplomatic means, countries such as France, Germany, Ireland and Italy have leveraged their links to get applicants out of Gaza. French diplomats, for instance, negotiated a deal where dozens of students were able to leave the Gaza enclave by bus, pass through Israeli checkpoints where they were vetted, and then travel to Amman from where they could take flights. This process was conducted by the government in league with PAUSE, an emergency program organized by Collège de France.³⁰ The Irish government similarly cooperated closely with eleven universities in extracting Palestinian students by bus to Amman, by plane to Istanbul and then to Dublin.³¹ Sondos told us: “I personally follow the cases of many friends who were evacuated by France and Italy and it is clear that there are multiple pathways to evacuate students.”³²

The gulf between Canada’s reputation as a country that champions human rights and its neglect of Palestinian students was also referenced by another disappointed student. “Granting us special consideration would not only reflect Canada’s values,” said Bashar, “it would give hope to young people with no clear paths left.” A law student, he believes “deeply in the spirit of the law – that laws exist not to trap people in impossible situations, but to uphold justice, protect dignity and respond humanely to exceptional realities.”³³

For Oweida, who researches cancer treatment at Sherbrooke University, seeing qualified candidates go to non-Canadian universities is disappointing: “The heartbreak is that they did not come to us.”³⁴

The fact that other countries have managed to evacuate their students underlines the fact that the principal challenge lies with the Canadian government’s commitment to assisting these Palestinians. “They could be on a plane tomorrow and

²⁹ Boudjikianian, “Palestinian students welcomed by France.”

³⁰ Marie Seder, “More than 100 Gaza Strip residents evacuated to France: ‘You can’t imagine what we’ve been through,’” *Le Monde*, April 26, 2025, https://www.lemonde.fr/en/international/article/2025/04/26/more-than-100-gaza-strip-residents-evacuated-to-france-you-can-t-imagine-what-we-ve-been-through_6740656_4.html

³¹ Nicholas Cuthbert, “Ireland successfully evacuates and enrolls Gazan students,” *The Pie*, October 2, 2025, <https://thepienews.com/ireland-successfully-evacuates-and-enrolls-gazan-students/>

³² Correspondence with Sondos, December 6, 2025.

³³ Correspondence with Bashar, December 5, 2025.

³⁴ Boudjikianian, “Palestinian students welcomed by France.”

in a lab if the Canadian government could process their visas,” said Aaron Shafer, who teaches at Trent University and is in contact with some of the students. He added, “I am aware of some students who have had their biometrics since 2023 and are still waiting for it to be processed. They have desks waiting for them.”³⁵

“It’s not a bureaucratic problem,” said El-Falou. “It’s not a technical problem. It’s a lack of political will and the betrayal of Canada’s tradition of supporting the right to education.”

X. Precedent: Ukraine

Canada has fast-tracked applications from peoples in other crises, including Afghans, Syrians and Ukrainians. The Ukrainian case is worth a closer look because it directly preceded the Palestinian crisis.

The Canada-Ukraine Authorization of Emergency Travel (CUAET) was instituted in the aftermath of Russia’s invasion of Ukraine in spring 2022, and continued to accept applicants until July 2023 – just three months before the assault on Gaza. This permitted Ukrainians fleeing the war to enter Canada with their families as temporary residents for up to three years. Similarly, then-Immigration Minister Sean Fraser granted a public policy to “exempt Ukrainian nationals from various immigration requirements in support of the Canada-Ukraine authorization of emergency travel. This policy explicitly stated the “urgency to provide safe haven to those fleeing the conflict.”³⁶

Similarly, in waiving requirements for a medical exam for Ukrainian students, the policy noted “the limited availability of IRCC designated panel physicians in the region affected by the conflict.”³⁷ Thus in response to the war in Ukraine, the Canadian government recognized the exceptional circumstances and demonstrated its ability to act with urgency and flexibility in responses to humanitarian crises. It waived standard requirements – including mandatory medical tests during the height of the COVID-19 pandemic – to prioritize humanitarian protection. Yet for Palestinian

³⁵ Heather Wright, “Lengthy visa delays preventing dozens of Palestinian students from studying in Canada, group says,” *CTV News*, June 26, 2025, <https://www.ctvnews.ca/canada/article/lengthy-visa-delays-preventing-dozens-of-palestinian-students-from-studying-in-canada-group-says/>

³⁶ Department of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship, “Archived – Temporary public policy to exempt Ukrainian nationals from various immigration requirements in support of the Canada-Ukraine authorization of emergency travel,” March 16, 2022, <https://www.canada.ca/en/immigration-refugees-citizenship/corporate/mandate/policies-operational-instructions-agreements/public-policies/ukr-nationals-exemption-3.html>

³⁷ Department of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship, “Temporary public policy to exempt Ukrainian nationals.”

students facing an internationally recognized genocide and the systematic destruction of their educational infrastructure, the response has been the opposite of humanitarian facilitation – adding, not removing, barriers – making for a stark policy contrast.

XI. Precedent: Coronavirus Workers

Where the Canadian government exempted Ukrainians from typical entry requirements for humanitarian reasons, economic reasons prompted another route – postponing the requirements – during the 2020 coronavirus outbreak in order to facilitate the entrance of temporary foreign workers into Canada. This policy, again underlining the ministry’s discretion for such unusual measures, exempted these workers from having to provide biometrics before Canada in case the collection site closest to them in their home countries had been closed because of the coronavirus emergency. Reflecting the exceptional circumstances, the IRCC emphasized “policy measures and flexibility to accommodate foreign workers.” Instead, the adjusted policy stated that temporary foreign workers “may be asked to provide their biometrics at a Point of Entry (POE) in Canada: “here the biometrics collection was not waived, but deferred to the end of the process because of practical considerations.”³⁸

XII. Policy Considerations

Commitment to Education

Canada acceded to the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, which recognizes the universal right to education in Article 13.³⁹ Moreover, Canada has ratified the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination, which includes the obligation to eliminate racial discrimination and promote equality before the law in Article 5.⁴⁰ These principles must be taken into account in this case of Palestinian students, as paragraph 3(3)(f) of the Immigration

³⁸ Kareem el-Assal, “Canada exempts foreign workers from giving biometrics overseas,” *CIC News*, June 5, 2020, <https://www.cicnews.com/2020/06/canada-exempts-foreign-workers-from-giving-biometrics-overseas-0614585.html>

³⁹ “International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights.” Adopted December 16, 1966. *United Nations Office of the High Commissioner* (Entered into force, January 3, 1976), <https://www.ohchr.org/en/instruments-mechanisms/instruments/international-covenant-economic-social-and-cultural-rights>

⁴⁰ “International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination.” Adopted December 21, 1965. *United Nations Office of the High Commissioner* (Entered into force, January 4, 1969), <https://www.ohchr.org/en/instruments-mechanisms/instruments/international-covenant-economic-social-and-cultural-rights>

and Refugee Protection Act (IRPA) requires the act to be interpreted in line with applicable international human rights treaties.⁴¹

Furthermore, in 2010 Canada co-sponsored a resolution for the Right to Education in Emergency Situations at the United Nations General Assembly: its tenth operative paragraph urged “all parties to an armed conflict...to respect civilians, including students and educational personnel, [and] to respect civilian objects such as educational institutions.”⁴² Israel has contravened these principles repeatedly in its destruction of Gaza’s universities and schools. Canada should step up to fill the educational gaps that now exist for Palestinian students.

As Bashar told us: “We look to Canada not just for a permit but for recognition – recognition of our right to education, and of Canada’s role, under international human rights principles, to support those whose access to education has been violently disrupted.”⁴³ Indeed, Canada is party to, and has supported, international norms and resolutions for human rights principles related to education. These include the aforementioned treaties and 2010 resolution, as well as the Safe Schools Declaration that Canada endorsed in 2017, which expresses support for educational institutions and personnel in armed conflict.⁴⁴

While Palestinians from Gaza could unambiguously qualify for humanitarian refugees, given the level of bloodshed, the Palestinian students in this case are not even applying as refugees, simply as students awaiting a study visa. Said Robyn Paul, a professor at the University of Calgary: “We’re not asking for shortcuts. We’re just asking for these students to be treated fairly so they can come to Canada and study in the great research programs that we have here...Everyone has the right to education. Canadians should be proud to bring them here.”⁴⁵

Indeed, the Palestinian students stress the connection between their educational aspirations in Canada and the reconstruction of their own institutions in Palestine. Bashar is worth quoting at length: “For us, applying for a study permit is not a luxury. It is a heavy burden we carry while living through war, displacement, and loss. Yet we

⁴¹ Government of Canada, “Immigration and Refugee Protection Act,” November 1, 2001, <https://laws.justice.gc.ca/eng/acts/i-2.5/page-1.html>

⁴² Vernor Munoz, *Right to Education in Emergency Situations*, U.N. General Assembly, A/HRC/8/10, May 20, 2008, http://www.right-to-education.org/sites/right-to-education.org/files/resource-attachments/UNSR_RTE_in_Emergencies_Situations_2008.pdf

⁴³ Correspondence with Bashar, December 5, 2025.

⁴⁴ Global Affairs Canada, “Canada Endorses Safe Schools Declaration,” February 21, 2017, https://www.canada.ca/en/global-affairs/news/2017/02/canada_endorses_safeschoolsdeclaration.html

⁴⁵ Wright, “Lengthy visa delays preventing dozens of Palestinian students.”

persist, because our goal is bigger than ourselves: to rebuild a higher education system that has been shattered, and to foster meaningful academic bridges between Canadian and Palestinian institutions.”⁴⁶

Similarly, Meera described her aim thus: “I want to be a person who has impact to Canada [sic] and also one day to return back to my country and help to rebuild the Palestinian academic system.”⁴⁷ And Sondos added, “We are all students and scholars seeking to contribute to Canada academically and scientifically.”⁴⁸

The objectives of the IRPA include “to facilitate the entry of visitors, students and temporary workers for purposes such as trade, commerce, tourism, international understanding and cultural, educational, scientific activities” and “to promote international justice and security by fostering respect for human rights...”⁴⁹ The delays to Palestinian students clearly contravene both objectives.

“Not only is Canada missing out on these students’ talent, intellect and contribution to our academic communities,” said El-Falou, “it is shameful that Canada is purposefully delaying visas and discriminating against Palestinian students.”⁵⁰

Immigration Policy Options

Section 12.1 of the Immigration and Refugee Protection Regulations (IRPR),⁵¹ outlines which types of immigration and refugee applications must provide biometrics, including applications for study permits. Section 12.8 of the IRPR provides an exemption through which applicants under section 12.1 are “not required to provide, with respect to the claim, application or request in question, [photographs or fingerprints], as the case may be, if the collection is impossible or not feasible.”⁵²

Moreover, the Minister has been equipped with other tools to exempt requirements under IRPA and the IRPR. Specifically, section 25.1 allows the Minister to grant a foreign national “an exemption from any applicable criteria or obligations of this Act if the Minister is of the opinion that it is justified by humanitarian and compassionate

⁴⁶ Correspondence with Bashar, December 5, 2025.

⁴⁷ David Baxter, “Academics call on Ottawa to speed up Palestinian student visas,” *Canadian Press*, July 4, 2025, <https://www.ctvnews.ca/politics/article/academics-call-on-ottawa-to-speed-up-palestinian-student-visas/>

⁴⁸ Correspondence with Sondos, December 6, 2025.

⁴⁹ Government of Canada, “Immigration and Refugee Protection Act,” November 1, 2001, <https://laws.justice.gc.ca/eng/acts/i-2.5/page-1.html>

⁵⁰ Correspondence with Nada El-Falou, December 1, 2025.

⁵¹ Government of Canada, “Immigration and Refugee Protection Regulations (SOR/2002-227),” 12.1, <https://laws-lois.justice.gc.ca/eng/regulations/sor-2002-227/section-12.1.html>

⁵² Government of Canada, “Immigration and Refugee Protection Regulations (SOR/2002-227),” 12.8, <https://laws-lois.justice.gc.ca/eng/regulations/sor-2002-227/section-12.8.html>

considerations relating to the foreign national.”⁵³ Section 25.2 similarly provides the Minister discretion to exempt “any applicable criteria or obligations of this Act if the foreign national complies with any conditions imposed by the Minister and the Minister is of the opinion that it is justified by public policy considerations.”⁵⁴

The perilous conditions facing Palestinian applicants, particularly students who have received admission offers from Canadian universities, clearly warrant the use of special measures to expedite the proceeding of their study permits, including the waiving or postponement of biometrics collection. There is ample precedent to demonstrate the discretion that the IRCC and the Minister of Immigration possess and have exercised in providing exceptions even for biometric collection (such as during the Covid-19 pandemic). Failing to exercise the same discretion for Palestinians not only overlooks this established legal capacity in immigration law, but also contravenes Canada's humanitarian values, its commitments under international law, and the fundamental rights of Gazan students to life, security and education.

XIII. Recommendations

Based on the foregoing, this report recommends that:

1. The Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship, Lene Metledge Diab, uses her prerogative under the Immigration and Refugee Protection Act (IRPA) and Immigration and Refugee Protection Regulations (IRPR) to facilitate visa processing for Palestinian applicants from Gaza with admissions letters to universities.
2. The Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship, Lene Metledge Diab, use her discretionary authority under the Immigration and Refugee Protection Act and the Immigration and Refugee Protection Regulations to grant a biometrics exemption for student visa applicants from Gaza who hold valid admission letters from recognized post-secondary institutions.
3. Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship, alternatively to #2, delay the requirement for biometrics and other unfeasible requirements, issue students their study visa and allow them to complete the immigration requirements at a Point of Entry in Canada, as was done with temporary foreign workers during the 2020 coronavirus.

⁵³ Government of Canada, “Immigration and Refugee Protection Act,” November 1, 2001, <https://laws.justice.gc.ca/eng/acts/i-2.5/page-1.html>

⁵⁴ “Immigration and Refugee Protection Act.”

4. Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship, as well as any partner bodies, organizations and agencies should provide transparency regarding any enhanced or special background screening measures being applied to Palestinian applicants, and take immediate steps to address the resulting backlog and unreasonable processing delays.

XIV. Conclusion

The war on Gaza marks one of the gravest humanitarian crises of our age. It calls for Canadian and international support to the afflicted. Of special note is the plight of Palestinian students, not even claiming refugee status, who require Canada to facilitate the process of their entry into the country to enter educational programs for which they have qualified on merit under severe hardship. The situation calls for Canada to use policy provisions applied previously to other peoples, to help, not hinder, the students and lend weight to the values of inclusion and support on which Canadians pride themselves.





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