



Immigration, Refugees
and Citizenship Canada

Immigration, Réfugiés
et Citoyenneté Canada

Associate Assistant
Deputy Minister
Operations

Sous-ministre
adjoint délégué
Opérations

Ottawa K1A 1L1

F- 01192964

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MEMORANDUM TO THE DEPUTY MINISTER AND THE ASSOCIATE DEPUTY MINISTER

CLIENT SUPPORT CENTRE STRATEGY- SITUATION AFGHANISTAN

FOR APPROVAL

SUMMARY

- The purpose of this memorandum is to seek your approval for Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada (IRCC)'s Client Support Centre (CSC) to establish a dedicated telephone line in response to the ongoing situation in Afghanistan. The Department was instructed to explore this option given the ever-increasing volume of calls on Afghanistan.
- A dedicated telephone line could be operational as of Monday, August 23, 2021, at 7:30 a.m. EST, but would require client support agents to be temporarily re-allocated from other lines of business in order to ensure accessible and timely support to clients affected by this crisis situation. Aside from the 7:30 a.m. launch time on August 23, the line would be open Monday to Friday from 6:30 a.m. to 7:00 p.m. EST.
- It is anticipated that all lines of business at the CSC will be impacted due to the reallocation of resources. The CSC will prioritize urgent enquiries which means that non-urgent enquiries across all lines of business will be affected.
- As of August 19, 2021, the call answer rate at the CSC had fallen to below 19% and the email inventory has grown to over 93,000 emails (email processing times is at 10 business days). Further redirecting resources to a dedicated telephone line on Afghanistan will likely worsen our response rate.
- By selecting the "I concur" box and signing this memorandum as soon as possible, the Department will proceed to implement the dedicated telephone line on Monday August, 23, 2021.

BACKGROUND:

- On July 23, 2021, IRCC announced that it was implementing special immigration measures (SIMs) that offer a path to protection in Canada for those who assisted the Government of Canada in Afghanistan.

- To help address the growing humanitarian crisis, on August 13, 2021, IRCC announced a special humanitarian program for a total of 20,000 vulnerable Afghans. Many of those identified are expected to be those from groups that are already welcomed to Canada through existing resettlement streams, including those dedicated to women and girls, persecuted religious minorities, human rights defenders, and Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Intersex (LGBTI) refugees, as well as family members of previously resettled Afghans who assisted the Government of Canada. The program will welcome government-supported and privately sponsored refugees, along with those sponsored by family already in Canada.
- The CSC provides personalized, human assisted, client support for clients seeking immigration information, case status, technical support and other services through three primary channels: telephone (in-Canada only), email (via a webform), and the Information Centre for Members of Parliament and Senators (ICMPS).
- Following the August 13 announcement, IRCC's CSC established a dedicated email inbox (IRCC.SituationAfghanistan.IRCC@cic.gc.ca) to allow clients to contact IRCC with questions regarding: the humanitarian program to resettle Afghans outside of Afghanistan, and/or reuniting Afghan nationals with their families in Canada.

CURRENT STATUS:

- Since the implementation of the dedicated email inbox for Afghanistan, IRCC has received more than 35,000 emails. In addition, Global Affairs Canada (GAC) has advised IRCC that they have received in excess of 220,000 emails from individuals around the world seeking information on IRCC's special humanitarian program and other facilitative measures.
- Given this demand for support, following engagement with Shared Services Canada (SSC), as of Monday, August 23, 2021, 7:30 a.m. Eastern Standard Time, IRCC will introduce a dedicated local telephone number (613-321-4243) which can receive collect calls from clients residing around the world. A local number is being used in lieu of a toll-free (1-800) number because the latter would require permission from participating countries
- The demand for client support through the CSC is continuing to grow at a significant rate as more clients across all lines of business have questions and face uncertainty; particularly as the COVID-19 global pandemic continues to impact clients and IRCC's processing capabilities.
- As of August 19, 2021, the call answer rate at the CSC had fallen to below 19% and the email inventory has grown to over 93,000 emails (email processing times is at 10 business days). The CSC's published service standard is to maintain a 50% call answer rate and email response times within 3 business days. This decline in the level of service at the CSC, the result of record high intake volumes, has resulted in increased client complaints and dissatisfaction (including through social media).

- In order to ensure accessible and timely support for clients affected by the crisis in Afghanistan, the CSC will have to temporarily re-allocate resources from regular operations to support the dedicated telephone line and email inbox; reducing the number of agents available to support IRCC clients in other lines of business which will result in a further decline in the level of service at the CSC. It is anticipated that all lines of business will be impacted due to the reallocation of resources. The strategy will prioritize urgent enquiries which means that non-urgent enquiries across all lines of business will be affected.

Client Support Strategy (recommended)

- Public-facing messaging to advise that client support resources are being temporarily dedicated to support clients impacted by the crisis or facing vulnerable circumstances (including the situation in Afghanistan) in priority. Clients who do not presently find themselves in these circumstances will be directed to existing self-serve options or advised to expect significant delays in receiving a response.
- The CSC will continue to respond to all urgent or complex enquiries for all IRCC lines of business (including technical enquiries, requests for withdrawal or refunds, change in circumstance, etc.); however, clients seeking simple case status information for applications which are in process will be asked for their continued patience as we address more urgent client enquiries in priority.
- Service at the Information Centre for Members of Parliament and Senators (ICMPS) will be reduced to only respond by telephone, to urgent matters only. Consistent with the approach for IRCC clients, enquiries related to case status will not be prioritized for a response.
- The regular email inventory will be triaged so that emails received within 48 hours which meet the criteria for processing, will receive a response; however, all other email enquiries not deemed urgent will be responded to using other strategies (such as bulk responses, etc.) within a longer processing time.

RISKS AND CONSIDERATIONS:

- The proposed client support strategy does include some risks and considerations, including:
 - ***Risk that the dedicated telephone line for Afghanistan may not be accessible from within Afghanistan:*** IRCC has communicated _____ and with SSC, and there is a risk that _____
MITIGATION: Individuals would continue to have access to the dedicated email inbox.
 - ***Risk that the dedicated telephone line for Afghanistan is overwhelmed:*** Given the volume trend that we've observed with email enquiries, it is possible that the telephone line volumes surpass our capacity to respond to clients in a timely manner. In turn, this could create _____

reputational risks and further frustrate clients due to the lack of information. MITIGATION: for clients that will be unable to reach an agent, they will receive a notice on the availability of the email address as an alternate approach for client support.

- ***Risk that public-facing messaging may not be successful and clients will continue to contact the CSC in record numbers; worsening service levels at the CSC:*** IRCC will publish messaging on its website which will encourage clients to only contact the CSC with urgent enquiries (specific examples will be provided). There is a risk that this messaging may not be successful and clients will continue to contact the CSC with non-urgent enquiries, resulting in a further decline in the call answer rate and email response time as intake volumes will exceed agent capacity. MITIGATION: IRCC will monitor intake trends daily and re-adjust the strategy as required.
- ***Risk that clients in other lines of business will be dissatisfied with a perceived lack of support:*** Given the strategy to prioritize certain enquiries and client groups, clients not in these priority groups may be dissatisfied with what they will perceive as a lack of support and may escalate through complaint mechanisms, ATIP requests, or through social media. MITIGATION: Clients will continue to have access to a range of self-serve support options, and their enquiry will receive a response, even if delayed. Communication messaging can be prepared to help explain the rationale for the proposed client support strategy.
- ***The Employee Assistance Program (EAP) will be engaged to ensure ongoing support of agent wellbeing and mental health:*** IRCC anticipates that the nature of the calls on the dedicated telephone line may be difficult for CSC agents. As such, the EAP resources will be engaged and communicated widely to mitigate any impacts for agents.

CONSULTATIONS:

- Client Experience Branch will consult Communications Branch and other internal partners (including Networks) to ensure understanding of the approach.

COMMUNICATIONS IMPLICATIONS:

- The situation in Afghanistan, including Canada's response, has been the subject of much media attention over the last few weeks. This is expected to continue for some time. Media stories have been critical of the government's response and the delay in implementing special measures as well as applicants' ability to contact IRCC.
- Although a dedicated email inbox for the special immigration measures was established, the department has been overwhelmed with requests for information since the special immigration measures were announced.
- Introducing a dedicated telephone line will help the department provide timely assistance and address inquiries for clients affected by the crisis in Afghanistan, but clients in other streams, including their representatives, are likely to be vocal with their criticism on social media.

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- Communications products, such as the web and key messages will be updated once the phone number is activated. It will also be communicated in media call responses.

RECOMMENDATION:

- By selecting the “I concur” box and signing this memorandum as soon as possible, the Department will proceed to implement the dedicated telephone line on Monday August, 23, 2021.

NEXT STEPS:

- The Department will implement the dedicated telephone line as of August 23, 2021. During the weekend of August 21-22, 2021, the CSC will have agents working overtime exclusively to respond to enquiries received via the dedicated email inbox for Afghanistan.
- The Department’s external website and public-facing messaging (including our Interactive Voice Response system) will be updated to ensure transparency of the client groups and enquiries which will be prioritized.
- The Department will also send a message to MPs and Senators to advise of the temporary changes in service at the ICMPS.
- The Department will monitor intake volumes and CSC performance daily, along with client reaction and behaviours and adjust the strategy as required.

e-approved August 21, 2021

Dr. Nicole Giles

I concur We will regroup to setup more effectively but this responds to the immediate need while we organize

I do not concur

I concur

I do not concur

Caroline Xavier
Associate Deputy Minister

Catrina Tapley
Deputy Minister