

“Invisible Acts, Visible Change”: The Role of Philanthropy in Human Rights”

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Abstract

For centuries the concept of philanthropy has been used globally to attain equity regarding a multitude of social issues. It plays a consistent role in shaping the fabric of our world, and this research provides a snapshot of how that is happening both globally and in a Canadian context. Using immigration as an example, it shows how philanthropy is being asked to step in to fill gaps created by the unequal distribution of wealth within government structures.

Bias is used to illustrate its influence in both immigration and philanthropy, shaping and shifting the power dynamics of leadership and wealthy donors. Showing that bias influences donations and giving, it is what influences grant making and how funding is distributed among the nonprofit sector and beyond, and it is used by governments in the varying ways they respond to different humanitarian crises, and the decisions to pull back on immigration, both from a funding and a human lives standpoint. The link between bias and decision-making shows that if governments continue along their current path, human rights violations will become more prevalent.

It is through community foundations, which are the key to long-term policy innovation, that work is underway to embed human rights practices in how philanthropic dollars are allocated to the community. The work that community foundations across Canada are doing should serve as a model for government structures on how to effectively listen and learn from the communities they are elected to serve, and on the power of a trust-based approach to working with them going forward.

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Glossary of Acronyms

BVOR- Blended Visa Office-Referred

CLB- Canadian Language Benchmark

CUAET- Canada Ukraine Authorization for Emergency Travel

DEI- Diversity, Equity, Inclusion

GAR- Government Assisted Refugee

GDP- Gross Domestic Product

IRB- Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada

IRCC- Immigration, Refugee and Citizenship Canada

PSR- Privately Sponsored Refugee

RAP- Resettlement Assistance Program

SPO- Service Provider Organization

UNHCR- United Nation High Commissioner for Refugees

Introduction:

The concept of charity and giving to those facing hardships is embedded in society's social psyche. Often learned through various teachings in ideologies such as faith and religion, culture, and even political alignment, individuals are provided with a moral value system that depends on the means and intention of giving to others to achieve a semblance of equity. For centuries, philanthropy has been used globally to attain equity regarding a multitude of social issues, such as poverty, hunger/food insecurity, mental health and addictions, and to address the lack of safe and affordable housing available to vulnerable communities. Through the stewardship of charitable and non-profit organizations, which are often the recipients of philanthropic donations, as well as the use of global and community foundations as financial agents for monetary donations and investments, philanthropy has become the essential bridge between funding gaps and addressing the ever-growing list of social issues affecting various communities around the world. There are numerous examples, both domestically and internationally, that can be drawn on to show how this intricate network of giving has grown and evolved over time, remaining both operational and impactful while maintaining sustainability to secure long-term success.

A core example that demonstrates the depth and reaches of this philanthropic network is CARE Canada, a community organization founded in 1945 that works with women's rights organizations across the global community to support the empowerment and fight for social justice of women and girls. It is one of the largest and most influential charities in Canada, reaching over 53.6 million direct participants globally, and is active in 31 countries with 58 ongoing projects and initiatives to ensure the health, safety, and livelihoods of women and girls (CARE Canada, 2025). In 2024, CARE Canada maintained an annual operating budget of over

\$73 million, of which over 12 percent was procured through various donation types, including direct monetary donations to the organization, while 85 percent was raised through government funding programs (Canada Revenue Agency, 2025). This division of support is typical for non-profits and charities, as they rely heavily on government funding to support overall operations and the organization's sustainability.

Another important example is the role that community foundations such as The Winnipeg Foundation play in this network of giving. The Winnipeg Foundation is Canada's first community foundation and is an endowment-based organization. This means that donations and gifts received are collected and invested in a single source or foundation, allowing the income generated to support their communities through established grant programs. Donors are also given the opportunity to establish permanent endowment funds of their own, which the Winnipeg Foundation manages, to support social issues and causes that they care about in perpetuity, and are provided various levels of involvement in how these funds are managed and allocated out to the community. The Winnipeg Foundation also encourages charitable organizations to establish endowment funds of their own, using the Foundation to generate predictable revenue streams to support the ongoing operations of the organization. Currently, the Winnipeg Foundation holds approximately 5,097 funds, to which it adheres to a 4.5 percent spend policy set by the Canada Revenue Agency (The Winnipeg Foundation, 2025).

In 2024, The Winnipeg Foundation provided \$91.6 million of support to their communities and worked with an estimated 1,100 charities and community organizations. This was all made possible by the 8,347 gifts that they received that year from various donors and gifting opportunities (The Winnipeg Foundation, 2025). The Winnipeg Foundation is one of many community foundations across Canada and around the globe that are working to maintain

large influential donor bases and established granting programs to ensure long-term sustainability and continued support for various social causes. However, the resources this network of community foundations provides are often used to address funding deficits for particular social and community needs that the federal, provincial, and municipal governments neglect or underfund.

Both types of funding play a substantial role in ensuring that individuals and communities continue to receive the care and support needed to sustain, maintain, and thrive in perpetuity. However, their significant contribution to alleviating global social issues is not achieved without exposing them to certain levels of risk. One specific risk factor that has emerged and has shown precedence in recent years is the allowance of bias and impartiality from both donors and certain community organizations to influence decision-making and begin to tarnish the initial intended purpose and basis for this established network for giving. For example, Miles Howe and Paul Sylvestre present the argument that the emergence of donor bias and impartiality is shaping the role of philanthropy to act as a political pipeline for positions and value systems that may infringe against basic human rights and have begun to take precedence in the giving process (Howe & Sylvestre, 2025).

This paper explores bias as a risk factor in philanthropy and how it has been used in the past and present to address the rise in social issues pertaining to immigration and settlement in Canada. Along the way, I examine the effects of rapidly growing funding deficits across institutions such as healthcare and education, which have been exacerbated by neglect from our governments and charities more generally. It then explores the risks arising from prominent obstructive donor contributions to address these escalating gaps and examines the role of

community foundations in becoming the driving force that is needed to bring the charitable sector and philanthropy as a whole back to the intended origins of giving, helping, and equity.

1. What is Philanthropy?

1.1 Historical Context:

The origins of the term philanthropy stem from the Greek understanding of “friendship and the humans it addresses beyond the narrow circle of communities and nations” (Neri-Castracane & Ugazio, 2025, p.3). Philanthropy is often linked with the Judeo-Christian understanding of charity or humanism which encompasses having a natural kindness towards all and produces a duty to develop into a good person (Neri-Castracane & Ugazio, 2025). Further, with the introduction of the *Statute of Charitable Uses*, also known as the *Charitable Uses Act*, in 1601 in England, individuals were, for the first time, provided a list of causes deemed acceptable by societal standards as forms of charity/charitable giving (Astridge, 2024). This definition and the further association between philanthropy and charity remain present in many cultures today; however, it draws critique for the universalism it presents, which reinforces “secular problem solving,” specifically in the area of human rights (Neri-Castracane & Ugazio, 2025).

The modern-day understanding of philanthropy emerged in the 18th century, with the term associated with the prisoner reformer John Howard, known as “the first modern philanthropist,” and used primarily for political campaigning and influence (Astridge, 2024). Anti-slavery advocates such as William Wilberforce used philanthropy in the United Kingdom as a concept to address the underlying causes of social issues and provoke social change, such as policy and law reform through civil rather than governmental means (Astridge, 2024). This

concept is important because it draws on the intention behind efforts to incite change in social issues and seeks to address the fundamental root causes rather than simply alleviating them temporarily. Philanthropy in this form also provides vital support to marginalized groups and the causes they are associated with, opening the door to campaigns for the rights and freedoms of other groups and interests.

By the 19th and 20th centuries, philanthropy came to be associated with monetary giving and emerged, in part, due to the influence of wealthy industrialists in the United States, such as Andrew Carnegie, John D. Rockefeller, and J. P. Morgan (Astridge, 2024). In 1889, Carnegie published an essay in the *North American Review* titled “Wealth” that has now come to be known as the “Gospel of Wealth” which is considered a foundational document in the field of philanthropy today. The essay argues that the wealthy have “a moral obligation to distribute their wealth in ways that promote the welfare of society” and is famously quoted as saying “a man that dies thus rich dies disgraced” (Carnegie, 1962). This concept of the wealthy utilizing access to their surplus for the greater good of society has carried on into the present day with the establishment of foundations that are used to steward monetary investments to charities and maintain relations with prominent donor families and other investors to channel wealth to focus areas and humanitarian causes around the globe.

1.2 Global Contributions to Philanthropy:

Today, philanthropy has evolved into an intricate network of giving spanning the globe, working in both public and private sectors to address a multitude of social issues affecting the most vulnerable. According to the Charities Aid Foundation’s 2024 World Giving Index, 4.3 billion people, or the equivalent of 73 percent of the world’s adult population, actively engage in philanthropic endeavours (Charities Aid Foundation, 2024). Philanthropy globally is more than

just giving money to an individual or group; it has evolved to include contributions of time through volunteerism and various forms of activism to alleviate the root causes of systemic issues and to provide innovative, tangible solutions. This offers an alternative to the giving of smaller, singular gifts that are often intended to ease strain or stress on the individual or group temporarily and has served as a reference point for what the term charity is believed to encompass (Barman, 2017).

According to *The State of Generosity 2024-2025 Report*, produced by GivingTuesday, global financial gifts totalled an estimated \$2.3 trillion in 2024, with individual gift givers accounting for an estimated \$1.5 trillion of that total (GivingTuesday, 2025). Individual givers donating directly to organizations account for nearly \$600 billion worldwide, of which \$222 billion comes from individuals donating within their own countries to keep funding and resources local. However, the largest single channel of financial generosity worldwide is individuals providing financial support to other individuals directly, whether to family members or community members in their country of origin, estimated at close to \$905 billion in 2024 (GivingTuesday, 2025). Philanthropy is not just a made-in-Canada effort. In 2024, the United States operated a charitable sector that saw \$592.5 billion in total contributions flow through the country towards various charitable and philanthropic endeavours. The distribution of those funds includes \$392.5 billion from individuals, which accounts for two-thirds of all their charitable dollars; \$109.8 billion from foundations; \$44.4 billion from corporations; and \$45.8 billion from bequests or trusts/wills (CCS Fundraising, 2025).

The individuals contributing to this robust giving network vary in economic standing, meaning that even those in lower income brackets donate a portion of their earnings to philanthropic causes each year. This tremendous movement of wealth from individuals to causes

or philanthropic focus areas shows the willingness and power that reside not only in the ultra-wealthy but also in everyday citizens from around the world.

Philanthropy is a broad, interconnected network of sectors seeking varying levels of support and involvement from one another, different levels of government, and the broader community to remain operational and effective. The reach of philanthropy can be felt more in certain sectors than others, particularly when donors choose to prioritize allocating their wealth to personal strategic areas of focus. Those areas often include education, focusing on skills development and access; climate, addressing environmental sustainability; health, for medical research and global health trends; equity and democracy, for social justice and civic engagement; and technology, for ethical technology development and trends in artificial intelligence (CCS Fundraising, 2025).

One area that is often overlooked and chronically underserved in philanthropy is the immigration and settlement sector. Philanthropy and charitable giving may find their way to causes associated with the target group of newcomers, immigrants, and refugees; however, that support is only on a short-term or situational basis. For example, if a war or global humanitarian crisis emerges somewhere in the world, individuals may choose to donate money or items to an aid organization or a family member overseas to ensure it reaches those in need directly. Funding may also be temporarily allocated to programs and emergency services in countries receiving newcomers, immigrants, and refugees after forced displacement, temporary relocation, migration, or other humanitarian responses. However, that funding is provisional and unreliable for long-term operations, creating precarity for numerous non-profit and charitable organizations, as well as the staff supporting these individuals and families. As well, given that much of the philanthropic agenda focuses on local charities, funds for disasters and care overseas may be seen as a “government response” rather than an individual philanthropic response.

1.3 The Canadian Philanthropic Sector:

In Canada, the nonprofit sector is the largest in North America, comprising over 170,000 non-profit and charitable organizations that provide essential services and undertake philanthropic endeavours. The sector contributes an estimated \$225 billion in economic activity for the country, which accounts for 8.2 percent of Canada's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and employs an estimated 2.7 million people, 70 percent of whom identify as women, 26.6 percent being internationally born, and 28.4 percent identifying as part of a racialized group (Imagine Canada. 2025). These statistics emphasize the mosaic of diversity that Canada is often associated with and highlight that newcomers and various ethnocultural communities are at the helm of sustaining operations and shaping the evolving cultural landscape of the charitable and philanthropic sector in Canada as a whole.

In the global philanthropic sector, countries such as Indonesia, Nigeria, and Singapore are leading in the global volunteering of people's time to charities, nonprofit organizations, and community groups (Charities Aid Foundation, 2024). However, Canada is not far behind, with a heavy reliance on a network of 13 million volunteers who give over 2 billion hours of their time each year to ensure that organizations can continue to provide adequate levels of support and resources to communities (Imagine Canada, 2025). Canada's first volunteer centre was established in 1937 in Montreal to help match volunteers with agencies that needed their support, and by the late 1960s, volunteer centres were established in many urban areas across the country and played an important role in recruiting, training, and referring volunteers to organizations and causes (McClintock, 2004). Today, Canada has 86,000 registered charities, of which an estimated 59 percent are entirely volunteer-run, and 90 percent have 10 or fewer full-time paid staff (CanadaHelps, 2025). Without the giving of time through volunteerism, the philanthropic

sector would not be able to sustainably operate and support the vast number of individuals and communities that are being cared for both in Canada and around the globe.

In terms of monetary giving, in 2024, Canadians contributed an average of \$18.8 billion annually through personal donations to community foundations, and charitable, nonprofit, and religious organizations, accounting for eight out of every ten Canadian adults participating in philanthropic giving (Imagine Canada, 2025). According to Statistics Canada in 2023, among donors, 35 percent identify as seniors aged 65 or older, with an average annual donation of \$3,620. It is also reported that they accounted for nearly half of the total donation of dollars given in 2023 (Statistics Canada, 2025). This trend of older generations donating their wealth to charitable and philanthropic causes is not uncommon and is often associated with factors such as income. For example, in 2023, the median total income of donors was \$74,660, and the 75th percentile was \$113,530 (Statistics Canada, 2025). Younger generations, statistically speaking, tend to earn less, with the average income of donors aged 25-34 around \$56,100, meaning they have less disposable income to allocate to charitable endeavours (Statistics Canada, 2025). For those in the younger age brackets, they may lean towards volunteering to participate in philanthropy and gain valuable work experience and skills needed for future career opportunities.

1.4 The Manitoba Philanthropic Sector:

Among all the provinces and territories in Canada, Manitoba has often been named the most generous province, with the highest percentage of tax filers donating to charity (19.3 percent) during the 2022 tax year. Manitobans also donated the highest percentage of their aggregate income to charity among all provinces and territories, at 0.71 percent (Fuss & Munro, 2024). In 2024, Manitobans donated \$306 million in personal donations to the philanthropic sector and contributed 63 million hours of volunteerism to ensure the sector remained operational and

communities continued to be resourced (Imagine Canada, 2025). In Manitoba, donations and volunteerism span many areas, with the top recipients being the health sector (39 percent of monetary donations and 7 percent of volunteers), social services (32 percent of donations and 15 percent of volunteers), and religion (27 percent of donations and 13 percent of volunteers). It is worth noting that the arts, culture, and recreation sector receives only 12 percent of monetary donations but accounts for 15 percent of volunteers (Imagine Canada, 2025).

The nonprofit sector in Manitoba employs 136,000 people, about 5.5 percent of the province's total labour force. Of that total amount, 71 percent are women, 14.5 percent identify as Indigenous peoples, 38.1 percent are racialized, and 26.3 percent are internationally born. As with the data presented on Canada's non-profit sector, a significant portion of non-profits in Manitoba are sustained and remain operational through the contributions of marginalized and racialized groups. However, the average annual salary for these groups ranges from \$41,424 to \$48,226. A lower income salary in Canada for a single person is considered under \$30,000 to \$35,000 before tax, while for a family of four, is \$50,000 to \$55,000 (Imagine Canada, 2025). This data shows that while we rely on marginalized groups to sustain the operations of the non-profit and charitable sector, they are paid salaries that place them at or below the poverty line, and in turn, they rely on themselves and their families for the services they offer others. In particular the settlement and immigration sector works to create opportunities for newcomers to gain valuable work and volunteer experience through training programs and language services at the organizations they used during resettlement however, without a standard of providing a basic livable income in nonprofits, it fails to take into account the extensive debt load that many newcomers obtain in the resettlement journeys and how much of their salary it will be consumed by it.

2. Refugee Resettlement in Canada:

Newcomers, immigrants and refugees are some of the most marginalized and vulnerable populations around the globe. Facing significant barriers on their journey to resettlement, whether it be psychosocial, cultural, language-related, or socioeconomic. Measures are in place to support newcomers upon arrival, alleviating some of these stressors, including financial support through government assistance programs and resource allocation through settlement service provider organizations. However, not all settlement journeys are the same, nor are all response plans created equal. In Canada, depending on the category or status under which a newcomer arrives and the geographic region they are migrating from, their experiences and opportunities can vary widely.

2.1 Canada's Response Plans for Ukrainian and Syrian Newcomers:

On February 24, 2022, Russia invaded Ukraine and caused one of the most serious migration crises in Europe in the twenty-first century, resulting in over 4 million Ukrainians being internally displaced and 2.5 million fleeing the country by the mid March 2022 (Garnier & Labman, 2025). Canada, which is home to the second-largest Ukrainian diaspora in the world after Russia, created the Canada-Ukraine Authorization for Emergency Travel (CUAET) and described the program as an exceptional measure to rapidly welcome displaced Ukrainians into the country. CUAET allowed Ukrainian citizens and their immediate families to obtain a 3-year temporary stay in Canada and provided work and study exceptions during this period. Contrary to other temporary or permanent admission programs, including regular refugee admissions, the government did not impose a limit on the number of CUAET admissions, with applications needing to be received by July 15, 2023 and approved CUAET holders had to arrive in Canada by March 31, 2024, to benefit from federal support measures. Processing times were a mere 14

days, and it is estimated that between 2022 and 2024, over 300,000 CUAET holders arrived in Canada under the program (Government of Canada, 2024). Of that number, Manitoba received 30,000 CUAET holders during that period, with 80% of those indicating Winnipeg as their intended destination. In addition, Ukrainians with family ties to Canadian citizens or permanent residents were made eligible to obtain permanent residence if they applied before October 22, 2024, and Ukrainians already in Canada on temporary visas were also able to extend their temporary residence status for 3 years (Garnier & Labman, 2025).

Once in Canada, CUAET holders were eligible for emergency financial assistance of \$3,000 per adult and \$1,500 per child upon arrival, and received free accommodation for 14 days after arrival (Government of Canada, 2024). They eventually received access to federally funded settlement services (after the government received numerous complaints), which are normally reserved only for permanent residents; these services are no longer available to CUAET holders as of March 31, 2025 (Garnier & Labman, 2025). This financial assistance has been greatly debated as not being sufficient to support the new Ukrainians in their resettlement journeys by some, and argued by others that it is substantial for an individual who is only staying in the country temporarily and who also has immediate access to work permits and other benefits that could sustain them economically in the short term (Garnier & Labman, 2025).

In comparison, a single person who arrives as a Government Assisted Refugee (GAR), which refers to those who have been referred for resettlement to Canada by the UNHCR and other partners with which Canada has an agreement, is eligible to receive access to financial assistance from both the federal and provincial governments through the Resettlement Assistance Program (RAP). This financial assistance is generally for a maximum of one year and is tied to provincial social assistance rates. For example, in Manitoba, the province provides GARs with a monthly

\$245 basic needs allowance, a \$638 shelter allowance, and \$79.07 for communication needs. GARs are also provided a singular start-up allowance by the federal government of \$3,244.81 for an individual without dependants, and a similar amount to CUAET holders (Refugee Sponsorship Training Program, 2026). It is important to note that those who arrive under the Blended Visa Office Referred (BVOR) program or through the Private Sponsorship of Refugees (PSR) program have different eligibility for government financial assistance. Under the BVOR program, which matches refugees with private sponsors in Canada through the Refugee Sponsorship Training Program, costs are shared between the private sponsor and the Canadian government, with each party providing six months of financial support (UNHCR, 2026). Under the Private Sponsorship of Refugees (PSR) program (now temporarily suspended as of 2025), private sponsors are composed of groups of Canadians or organizations, including faith-based associations, ethnocultural groups or settlement organizations, and the sponsoring group provides refugees with settlement assistance and financial support for up to one year from the day they arrive in Canada (UNHCR, 2026). Asylum Claimants who are seeking protection in Canada may be able to access some provincial social assistance as they await their hearing with the Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada (IRB), they generally do not receive specialized federal income upon arrival (Refugee Sponsorship Training Program, 2026). All refugees, regardless of their entry category, are also responsible for beginning repayment of any transportation loans provided to assist with travel expenses to Canada 30 days after arrival. These loans can amount to up to \$15,000 per loan per family or non-dependant aged 22 or older (Refugee Sponsorship Training Program. 2026). Together, they represent a significant “resettlement cost” which can be next to impossible to repay, at least in the short term.

The immediate “responsiveness” of Canada to the humanitarian needs of Ukrainians has been the subject of debate among many in the settlement and immigration community. The main critique stems from the exceptions and considerations made in the response plan for Ukrainian arrivals, which, in other humanitarian responses, were not presented as options. The Canadian Council for Refugees is quoted as saying, “It is crucial that we adopt an equitable framework for responding to crises, based on humanitarian principles. The forgotten crisis must not continue to be forgotten by Canada” (Canadian Council for Refugees, 2022). A comparison often made is that the response plan for Ukrainian arrivals differed significantly from that provided to Syrian arrivals to Canada in 2015.

Since 2011, the humanitarian needs in Syria have reached unprecedented levels, with approximately 70 percent of the country’s population being in urgent need of humanitarian assistance. It is estimated that well over 250,000 people have died in the civil war, which has led to the internal displacement of over 7.2 million Syrians and created over 6.2 million Syrian refugees, the majority of whom are in the neighbouring countries of Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, and Turkey (Government of Canada, 2025). In response to this humanitarian crisis, the Government of Canada enacted a plan titled #WelcomeRefugees, which has resulted in the resettlement of 44,620 Syrian refugees since November 4th, 2015, with 25,000 arriving by the end of 2016 and into early 2017 through government-specified programs. The number provided reflects 21,745 GARs, 3,945 BVORs, and 18,930 PSRs that arrived in Canada as part of the Syrian Refugee Resettlement Initiative (Government of Canada, 2024).

Much like the Ukrainians in 2022, the government processed the resettlement applications of Syrian refugees who arrived in January and February 2016 on an expedited basis. A report commissioned by the Senate Standing Committee on Human Rights provided examples of how

sponsorship applications could be approved within 24 hours for some refugees under the BVOR stream. They also noted that for six weeks in May and June 2016, there was another round of rapid processing in Beirut, Lebanon in order to meet the government commitment to process all applications received for privately sponsored Syrian refugees before 31 March 2016 by early 2017 due to the government imposed deadline, which resulted in the redeployment of additional staff to the country to support (Standing Senate Committee on Human Rights, 2016, p.20-22).

The differential treatment of Ukrainian and Syrian refugees by the Canadian government has caused a hierarchy of “need” in the resettlement system. The Government of Canada accelerated the processing of applications for private sponsorships of Syrian refugees, but did not do so for refugees from other countries during this time. Processing times for applications received by the end of March 2016 for Syrian refugees were approximately six months to a year, while other refugee populations were facing wait times of up to five years (Standing Senate Committee on Human Rights, 2016, p.22-26). However, as noted, this falls short of the accelerated fourteen-day processing time frame that CUAET holders received for their applications. This also reveals that even the Canadian government recognizes problems within Canada's resettlement system. Had they not expedited the approvals of the Syrian and Ukrainians, many would have died.

Moreover, the Government of Canada waived transportation loans for Syrian refugees who arrived between November 4, 2015 and February 29, 2016, however, those who arrived before and after these dates, as well as those who arrived from countries other than Turkey, Lebanon, and Jordan were still required to repay their travel costs (Standing Senate Committee on Human Rights, 2016. p. 31). These mass discrepancies between response plans creates what has been described as a refugee tier system, in which the priority of one group of individuals is placed above another, exasperating tensions and potential conflicts among newcomer groups.

For these response plans to truly be effective, they require consistency, cooperation and adequate allocation of resources and time by all levels of government and those in the nonprofit sector that support the resettlement of newcomers. However, recent changes to the Canadian Immigration Levels Plan and budgetary cuts to Immigration, Refugees, and Citizenship Canada (IRCC) are showing the opposite effect.

2.2 Current Changes to Canadian Immigration and Resettlement Policies:

On October 24, 2024, the Government of Canada announced the 2025-2027 Immigration Levels Plan, which included a massive reduction in resettlement to the country over the next three years. IRCC claims the reduction is to “pause population growth in the short term to achieve well-managed, sustainable growth in the long term” (Government of Canada, 2024). For the first time, the levels plan includes controlled targets for temporary residents, specifically international students and foreign workers, as well as for permanent residents, even though temporary residents are not eligible to receive government services and are rarely the subject of charity giving. IRCC maintains that the reduction will help an already overloaded and backlogged system process the current permanent resident applications in the queue, which have been waiting months for review.

The 2025–2027 Immigration Levels Plan has reduced permanent resident targets from 500,000 to 395,000 in 2025, to 380,000 in 2026, and to 365,000 in 2027. The plan also reduces targets for other immigration categories, such as international students, which will drop 10 percent from 2024 to bring in 305,00 annually, and temporary foreign workers, which will drop 16 percent from 2024 to bring in 367,750 (Government of Canada, 2024). Furthermore, IRCC has stated that it plans to cut spending by 30 percent by 2027-28, including downsizing department jobs by 10 percent, the equivalent of 3,300 jobs. Their 2025-26 departmental plan

states total planned expenditures are forecasted to decrease by \$1.6 billion, with cuts across all department functions, and plans to further reduce expenses to a forecasted budget of \$3.59 billion by 2027-28 (Glass, 2025).

How do immigration levels and processing times affect the philanthropic sector? Funding for settlement organizations has also drastically declined in recent years. The 2024-25 fiscal year was the final year of the current multiyear commitment made by IRCC to Settlement Service Provider Organizations (SPOs) across the country, with many of those agreements reaching completion on March 31, 2025. Negotiations for the next multiyear funding began in September 2024 and saw significant changes that brought a multitude of concurrent challenges. One major change is that, due to cuts in the Immigration Levels Plan, funding renewals were granted for a maximum of three-year terms rather than the usual five-year terms, with no increases projected for the duration of those terms. The five-year funding cycle was an improvement long advocated by the settlement and immigration sector, as it enabled sustainability, and was implemented by IRCC in 2019. This two-year reduction will mean no allowance for cost-of-living increases, putting SPOs in a precarious situation that ultimately results in cutting staffing and other operational costs while still maintaining a level of service delivery that meets the growing needs of the community (United Way Greater Toronto, 2025).

Another change included was that all Canadian Language Benchmark (CLB) programs that support Level 4 or higher learners received some of the most significant cuts to their programs and services. This cut will notably affect employment rates in provinces such as Manitoba, as newcomers require these levels to maintain work permits, enter job-readiness programs, and obtain employment, even at entry-level positions. According to the February 2023 Immigration Advisory Council report, Manitoba is estimated to need about 15,550 workers per year until

2025 to meet labour demands. These cuts to immigration have significantly reduced the province's capacity to support programs and services for the individuals who would help alleviate this deficit (Zell, 2024). These language programs are vital for many workers as they are required to enter the professions in the first place. These language training programs are only available through the settlement programs, and they are already oversubscribed. When they cease to exist, our economies will be further short of workers in many undersubscribed and vital occupations.

Immigration is often seen as the sole responsibility of the federal government; it can be argued that it is a multi-level government issue that requires coordinated partnership to ensure no one falls through the metaphorical cracks. Provincial governments allocate funding to support economic growth; however, they are failing to account for how changes in immigration levels and the loss of federal funding support will directly affect their local economies. Cuts to immigration mean fewer skilled workers entering each province to supplement the job market and fill vacancies, and fewer international students to support academic institutions. Provincial governments need to work with the federal government to fill funding gaps and advocate for the importance of immigration for our overall economy.

As a result of decreased government support, settlement service providers have now been turning to community foundations and other funding revenue sources to detail how significant the cuts have been to their organizations and what it will mean for future support and resources they can provide to the newcomer, immigrant, and refugee communities across the country. Some family resource centers in the prairie regions lost all of their IRCC funding on April 1, 2025, forcing the organization to let go of designated staff positions, while scrambling to find alternative funding to support those salaries, or close altogether. Although family resource

centers serve a diverse community, they also provide tailored support to their newcomer participants, including information sharing in the first language and access to cultural programming. It has also been reported that across the country, RAP organizations have seen substantial reductions in funding upwards of 50% for some, as their funding is often associated with the number of newcomers being resettled in the city or province where they are located (United Way Greater Toronto, 2025).

While the budget for IRCC is based on future projections for immigration levels, the effects of these cuts and reductions are affecting people who are here now, and those who are awaiting arrival. The cuts are happening alongside proposed legislation in Bill C-2, *The Strong Borders Act*, which will make it even harder for people who enter Canada via the United States to have their claim for refugee protection fairly assessed in Canada. At present, because of the *Safe Third Country Agreement*, refugee claimants must cross irregularly and avoid detection for 14 days to have their claim heard by the IRB. Bill C-2 would prevent this from occurring. The bill also blocks anyone who has been in Canada for more than one year from seeking refugee status, even if their home country becomes dangerous after their arrival. This applies retroactively to anyone who has arrived since June 2020. This measure is intended to target international students and migrant workers, yet it is fundamentally inconsistent with international humanitarian law (Ontario Council of Agencies Serving Immigrants, 2025). What would be offered to asylum seekers instead is a pre-removal risk assessment administered by IRCC, which would further add to the backlog the department is facing. The latest IRB data shows a backlog of 300,163 pending applications as of December 2025, a historic high that has nearly tripled since 2023 (Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada, 2025). Complicating matters is that IRCC will not provide funding for persons whose immigration status is under review. This would include asylum

seekers. This means that charitable organizations must support them, but few charities are willing to take this group on.

Moreover, refugees who are seeking to be privately sponsored by Canadian citizens can face wait times of over three years in the Private Sponsorship Refugee Program, which has been further exacerbated with the announcement on November 29, 2025, of IRCC temporarily pausing the intake of new applications for the group of five and community sponsor streams. IRCC claims the pause is to address the backlog of applications and has extended it for new applications until December 31, 2026 (Government of Canada, 2025). For CUAET holders who are trying to extend their residency in Canada past the three-year time frame, they may be eligible to apply for humanitarian and compassionate considerations. The current wait times are between 6 and 10+ years for applications to be processed and decisions to be made (Government of Canada, 2026). Continued cuts, specifically to IRCC staffing, will only further delay these processing times and create greater pain and anguish for the individuals and families awaiting to learn their fate of resettlement both inside and outside Canada. Again, these are major issues that most Canadians remain unaware of.

Without adequate funding for programs and resources offered by organizations working with newcomer, immigrant, and refugee communities, the country faces a ripple effect across multiple sectors. Funding cuts to resource centres, after-school programs, and employment and language services, as well as the lack of adequate funding opportunities to most refugee claimants by IRCC, put these vulnerable communities at high risk of experiencing situations of food insecurity, homelessness, mental health crises, gang recruitment for youth, and many potential human rights violations.

2.3 Role of Community Foundations in Resettlement:

As government funding bodies cut essential services across numerous sectors, including the settlement and immigration sector, organizations facing the repercussions of these cuts are seeking alternative solutions to ensure they can continue supporting their communities.

Community foundations across Canada and around the globe have been stepping in to pick up the pieces and fill gaps being left behind in the wake of these massive government funding cuts and lack of supportive funding from provincial governments, while continuing to offer support to emerging humanitarian and local needs and providing capacity-building opportunities for charities and nonprofits in their area.

It is these “ignored people” who inspired the creation of public philanthropy and encouraged the formation of community foundations. The first community foundation was created in 1914 in the United States by Frederick Goff, a lawyer and banker at the Cleveland Trust Company in Cleveland, Ohio. He expressed concerns about wills and trust funds lacking provisions for changing circumstances and desired an alternative for philanthropists to transfer and utilize wealth. As a result, he developed what is now a revolutionary idea that was based on Sir Arthur Hobhouse's philosophy of a community trust model by which “property was to be managed by the *living hand* through public tribunal rather than by the *dead hand*” (Case Western Reserve University, 2026). To achieve community trust, Goff proposed that philanthropists in the area pool their charitable resources into a single, permanent endowment to be used for the betterment of the city or region in perpetuity. Community leaders would then distribute the income accrued by the trust to fund “such charitable purposes as will best make for the mental, moral, and physical improvement of the inhabitants of Cleveland” (Case Western Reserve University, 2026).

From this concept of community trust introduced by Goff with the Cleveland Foundation, a global movement emerged, leading to the establishment of the first community foundation in Canada in 1921 in Winnipeg, Manitoba. William Forbes Alloway, a prominent banker, established The Winnipeg Foundation with his initial gift of \$100,000 and fulfilled his vision of an organization built by everyday Winnipeggers that would support the community forever (The Winnipeg Foundation, 2026). Today, there are 208 community foundations in Canada, operating in urban, rural, and northern areas that cover 90 percent of Canada's geography and hold over \$7.4 billion in combined assets (Community Foundation of Canada, 2026).

In 2015, Community Foundations of Canada, the national leadership organization for all the community foundations in Canada, worked with the government of Canada and corporate donors from large Canadian companies to establish *The Welcome Fund for Syrian Refugees*. The fund raised \$5.5 million in contributions from the corporate sector and, in just six weeks, began making strategic contributions to communities struggling to support the 25,000 Syrian arrivals (Community Foundations of Canada, 2016). By working with local organizations and partners, the fund supported efforts focused on housing, job training, and skills development, and helped increase community coordination to address the long-term resettlement needs of Syrian refugees. A key example of the fund's effectiveness is in Toronto, where the community foundation partnered with the city and a leading local charity working with refugees to launch an innovative program that used contributions from the Welcome Fund to create leverage with landlords and incentivize them to lower rental rates, effectively creating new, lower-cost housing units. The approach was used as a prototype around housing solutions for the city and informed other successful initiatives across the country (Community Foundations of Canada, 2016).

This is just one example of how community foundations are used to create bridges among government, corporate sponsors, private donors, and charities and non-profits to address funding gaps and the evolving needs of communities. The current funding deficit created by cuts to the immigration levels plan and IRCC is yet another place where community foundations are being pulled to step in and steward funds. However, there is only so much input community foundations have on the intended purpose of these funds and how donations to them can be allocated.

3. Donor Stewardship and Influence:

As registered charities, community foundations manage all administrative duties for donors, providing guidance through their deep knowledge of their communities to connect donors to charitable organizations in their areas of interest. Community foundations offer a range of options tailored to each donor's needs, including their charitable interests, their impact timeline, and their desired degree of involvement. For example, donors create a fund within their chosen community foundation and donate directly to their community trust/fund, which entrusts the foundation with identifying community priorities and the charitable organizations best able to meet them. Donors may also choose to use a designated fund, allocating donations to a specific charity identified by the donor, which provides the charity with a dependable source of annual support. Finally, donor-advised funds provide donors with an opportunity to play an active role in recommending support for organizations and the causes that are important to them (Community Foundations of Canada, 2018). Donor-advised funds are popular among wealthy donors because they allow them to ensure their substantial gifts and ongoing donations are allocated to areas and causes that align with their specific values and interests.

In immigration, with limited sustainable funding opportunities and widening funding deficits in the sector, donor-advised funds could help alleviate the growing strain on community organizations and charities working in this area. However, in order for that funding to reach them directly, donors need to be aware of how chronically underfunded this sector, particularly refugee claimants, is, and how their needs far surpass what the government is willing or not willing to provide.

3.1 High and Ultra High Net Worth Philanthropists:

Over one-third of all charitable contributions worldwide come from individuals, including a growing population of high-net-worth and ultra-high-net-worth philanthropists. High Net Worth individuals are those with a net worth of \$1 million, and Ultra High Net Worth individuals are those with a net worth of \$30 million or more. According to the Altrata World Ultra Wealth Report 2025, the number of ultra high net worth individuals globally rose in 2025 reaching a record population of 510,810 individuals who have a collective wealth of \$59.8 trillion (Altrata, 2025, p. 6). North America continues to lead in the highest level of wealth concentration growing to 208,090 individuals, representing 40.7 percent of the global total with a staggering \$24 trillion in assets (Altrata, 2025, p.11). This wealth concentration from this demographic of individuals holds with it a great deal of power and influence in the way that it may be utilized and dispersed globally.

Currently, the largest intergenerational wealth transfer is underway, with traditional donors from the Baby Boomer and Gen X generations shifting a staggering \$85 trillion to Millennials and Gen Z, resulting in changes to the fabric of philanthropic engagement going forward. This transfer of wealth has led to an increase in Millennial and Gen Z participation in philanthropy, at a rate of 16-22 percent since 2021 (CCS Fundraising, 2025).

With the shift in wealth from one generation to another, so do priorities and giving preferences. Traditional donors, or those from the Baby Boomer and Gen X population, lean towards institutional loyalty, in which they repeat giving to the same organizations or causes they or their families have always supported in larger sums. They place importance on board governance and actively participate in, or choose to serve on, the board of directors of an organization or committee that aligns closely with their values. Moreover, they will plan their legacy and create wills or trusts to ensure that their wealth is transferred in ways that align with their future giving interests (CCS Fundraising, 2025). For Millennials and Gen Z, there is a greater focus on direct, immediate impact, meaning that long-term planning and endowment funds are not a priority because returns on investment can be slow to materialize. They seek authentic digital engagement via social media and an online presence, which can be difficult for some smaller community organizations that lack the digital capacity to achieve the level of engagement they desire. Finally, they are very keen to align their causes of support with their personal values and with current global events (CCS Fundraising, 2025).

This shift in wealth also means a shift in power from one generation to the next, in which priorities and values intertwine with how these donors disperse their wealth and to whom or what. The age-old saying “with money comes power” becomes more evident as philanthropy and politics become increasingly intertwined and as wealth and incentivized giving continue to grow.

3.2 Bias in Philanthropy:

Bias in the world of philanthropy is not a new concept. When personal wealth is attached to donations and the giving process, the desire to have input to ensure alignment with personal values and principles is imminent. As mentioned, donor-advised funds in philanthropy allow donors to determine where and how much of their wealth is distributed to the community and to

focus on areas that align with their interests, giving them control over how their wealth is managed through certain foundations. Direct donations to causes or institutions also allow donors, particularly wealthy donors, to have a legacy attached to their gifts through the rebranding of buildings to bear their names, or by establishing funds that allocate scholarships and grants to a specified field of study, research initiative, or particular. However, this type of philanthropic giving creates power dynamics and exposes recipients to various forms of bias that begin to blemish the spirit and the originally intended purpose of philanthropic giving for the greater good of the community. Moreover, it raises the question of what happens if those prominent donors find themselves associated with controversy after having contributed significant wealth back into society?

When ‘tainted money’ or ‘tainted donors’ are exposed publicly for controversial association with either criminal or morally grey activities, it places the institutions and organizations that have benefited from their charitable giving in a precarious position. One example of this, and there are many more, is the Sackler family in the United States, who have made sizable donations to major arts institutions around the world in addition to other philanthropic endeavours, and are the recipients of numerous wings and buildings donned with the family name as part of their living legacy. However, in recent years, they have found themselves on the receiving end of controversy following the association of their company, Purdue Pharma, makers of the highly addictive painkiller OxyContin, with aggressive marketing of the drug despite having awareness of the dangers it poses to the public, leading to their complicity in profiting from and fueling the deadly opioid epidemic. This has prompted institutions to remove their names from infrastructure to distance themselves from the controversy, and has led organizations

and individuals that once benefited from their donations to look elsewhere for financial support (Moody & Pratt, 2020).

Stanford University professor Rob Reich presents the argument that philanthropy is dependent on power and is an "artifact of the state" when tax incentives lead to public spending tailored to the preferences of donors (Reich, 2018, p.20). In Canada, the federal tax program allows individuals to claim a maximum of 75 percent of their net income and allows the application of a 15 percent credit of the first \$200 donations and 29 percent of donations above the first \$200. This means that of the \$18.8 billion donated in Canada in 2024, up to \$5.4 billion was received in tax incentives for donors (CanadaHelps, 2026). This type of incentive-driven giving to charities opens the door to a range of donor demographics, offering insight into how the philanthropic landscape is evolving. Moreover, it provides wealthy donors with an opportunity to use the philanthropic and charitable sector to secure deep tax breaks while exerting power and influence within the community.

Bias in philanthropy also appears when the giving process engages with marginalized and equity-seeking organizations. The Network for the Advancement of Black Communities and Carlton University produced a 2020 report that examined the relationship between the Canadian philanthropic sector and Black communities, highlighting chronic underfunding and the allocation of grants and donations to Black and equity-led organizations. The report shows that in Canada, the top 10 public and private foundations, which represent over \$10 billion in assets, distributed 0.03 percent of those funds to Black-led organizations and 0.13 percent to organizations serving Black communities. The top 15 community foundations disbursed 0.07 percent of their funds to Black-led organizations and 0.7 percent to organizations serving Black communities (Foundation for Black Communities, 2020). Chronic underfunding of Black-led,

racialized, and underserved community organizations by the philanthropic sector is the result of inadequate data, a lack of representation of Black communities in philanthropic leadership, and systemic barriers, including anti-Black racism, that lead to minimal understanding of the significant contributions that these communities play in our society, as well as the specific needs and barriers they face. For example, in immigration, currently there is a rise in Black refugees crossing over to Canada from the United States, such as the Somali refugees fleeing Minnesota for Winnipeg or Haitians who are about to be displaced due to the ending of the temporary protected status in the United States. All of these groups have specific needs for which the Canadian federal and provincial governments have no effective support plans in place. This example is only one of the many reasons representations at decision-making levels is often advocated across sectors and at all levels of leadership, whether in a board of directors or a government entity. When a position of power lacks the understanding of a group's specific needs, they inadvertently underserve them through resource allocation and fund deprivation.

4. Role of Philanthropy in Facilitating Change:

Philanthropy plays a crucial role in this ecosystem of giving by providing flexible financial support, fostering cross-sector partnerships, promoting equitable trust-based relationships, and investing in community resilience. Philanthropy has a unique position outside traditional governance structures that allows it to promote mission-driven innovation by collaborating across sectors and to centre the voices of vulnerable communities, driving meaningful social change. As innovation thought leader Tim Dramer states, “a strong relational infrastructure can enable organizations and communities to overcome challenges, build resilience, and create sustainable social, economic, and environmental value and outcomes” (Community Foundations of Canada, 2024). In addition to fostering community engagement and collaboration,

philanthropy plays a vital role in building the capacities needed for systemic change. Traditional governance structures and policy tools fall short of addressing complex social challenges, and philanthropy can help fill this gap by fostering leadership development and empowering communities with the skills and resources needed to drive long-term impact.

Trust-based philanthropy is an approach to grant-making and funding that seeks to shift power dynamics between funders and grantees by emphasizing trust, transparency, and mutual respect. It is based on the belief that nonprofit organizations, especially those working at the grassroots level, are best positioned to understand their communities' needs. By reducing the administrative burden and restrictive conditions often associated with traditional granting and donations, trust-based philanthropy allows organizations to focus on their mission and impact (Community Foundations of Canada, 2021).

Moreover, the growing number of grant-makers and community foundations is focusing on equity by implementing value statements that explicitly address diversity, equity, and inclusion within their organizations and by making a conscious effort to incorporate diversity and equity considerations into how they deliver their current and future grant programs. By focusing on successful DEI strategies, foundations and philanthropic institutions open themselves to a broader donor base that reflects the communities they serve. It also appeals to younger donors who are more socially minded and value clear impact reporting. Finally, it enhances collaboration and trust-building, leading to stronger community partnerships and more diverse donor engagement (CCS Fundraising, 2025).

Conclusion:

GivingTuesday CEO Asha Curran says, “Generosity is an antidote to isolation, fear, and division...The very act of being generous itself changes people, changes communities and changes the world” (Giving Tuesday, 2025). Philanthropy is embedded in all aspects of society, through the time individuals offer through volunteering in their community or even simply helping an individual in need, it is shown in the act of sharing skills, knowledge and experiences to develop innovative programs, policy and research, and is it practiced in the giving of any increment of wealth to causes and social issues that individuals and organizations both private and public feel a connection towards. Philanthropy plays a consistent role in shaping the fabric of our world, and this research provides a snapshot of how that is happening both globally and in a Canadian context. Using immigration as an example, it shows how philanthropy is being asked to step in to fill gaps created by the unequal distribution of wealth within government structures.

Bias is used to illustrate its influence in both immigration and philanthropy, shaping and shifting the power dynamics of leadership and wealthy donors. The research found that bias influences donations and giving, it is what influences grant making and how funding is distributed among the nonprofit sector and beyond, and it is used by governments in the varying ways they respond to different humanitarian crises, and the decisions to pull back on immigration, both from a funding and a human lives standpoint. The link between bias and decision-making in this research shows that if governments continue along their current path, human rights violations will become more prevalent. Through community foundations, which are key to long-term policy innovation, work is underway to embed human rights practices in how philanthropic dollars are allocated to the community. The work that community foundations across Canada are doing should serve as a model for government structures on how to effectively

listen and learn from the communities they are elected to serve, and on the power of a trust-based approach to working with them going forward.

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