# OP-ED: Canada's deportation backlog is real. The solution is competent enforcement

"A credible immigration system must be fair at the front end and final at the back end."

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people across its removal inventories. But 464,910 of those cases were "not yet actionable," generally because an immigration or refugee proceeding remained unresolved, while another 32,619 were legally or practically impossible to remove at that time. The operational problem is still serious, but more precise: 40,827 people were being processed for removal, and 33,847 were in the "wanted" inventory after failing to appear for proceedings.

Accuracy matters because the wrong diagnosis produces the wrong remedy. Calling every person in the broader inventory a deportation fugitive ignores the distinction between a conditional removal order and one that is legally enforceable. Canadian law provides appeals, judicial review, and protection against return to persecution, torture, or other serious harm. Those safeguards are not bureaucratic loopholes; they are legal obligations. But once linked to designated terrorist organizations should be held in custody and removed as quickly as possible.

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The encouraging news is that removals have increased substantially. CBSA recorded 23,160 enforced removals in 2025, compared with 17,397 in 2024, and another 10,607 during the first six months of 2026. Yet the inventory continues to refill. CBSA officials told Parliament that the agency was

The composition is also important. Of the 40,827 cases in the removal-in-progress inventory on June 30, 2026, 36,622 involved non-compliance by refugee claimants. By comparison, 1,576 involved criminality, 92 security grounds, and 55 organized crimes. Serious cases must remain the highest priority, but the scale of lower-risk failed claimant cases means that simply directing every officer toward criminals will not restore overall finality to the system.

Why do cases stall? Some individuals fail to report or conceal their whereabouts. Others lack passports or travel documents, sometimes because their governments are slow or unwilling to issue them. Still others become eligible for a pre-removal risk assessment, obtain a court stay, face criminal proceedings or cannot be removed because conditions in the destination

There is also an administrative failure. The Auditor General previously found poor data quality, weak information-sharing and extended periods in which enforceable files received no meaningful action. Some improvements followed, including national triage, performance dashboards, and data-quality initiatives. Nevertheless, CBSA's latest evaluation found that removal case volumes rose much faster than removals staffing over the period reviewed, while warrant-review targets for serious inadmissibility cases were missed.

Ottawa therefore needs a practical, measurable plan.

First, dedicate a defined portion of the 1,000 new CBSA officers being recruited over three years to inland enforcement, warrant review, travel-

Second, assign every enforceable case a responsible officer, a next-action date, and an automatic escalation when a file becomes inactive. CBSA and Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada must also finish integrating their case-management information so that court decisions, risk assessments and changes in status move between agencies without delay. Better technology will not remove anyone by itself, but it can prevent thousands of files from disappearing into administrative limbo.

Detention might still be necessary for security cases. Other cases require close supervision. For cooperative, lower-risk cases, reporting requirements and alternatives to detention can preserve compliance without the expense and human cost of unnecessary detention.

Fourth, make voluntary departure the default for suitable low-risk cases. Most removals are already unescorted, and CBSA has a dedicated telephone line for people subject to removal orders. A carefully limited return-assistance program could free enforcement officers for fugitives and complex cases—but only if independently evaluated. Canada's earlier pilot achieved 3,950 removals against a projected 6,955 and became less cost-effective as participation declined. That record argues for disciplined experimentation, not another open-ended program.

clear timelines, senior-level escalation, and public reporting on persistent non-cooperation, while respecting Canada's international protection obligations.

Parliament has now required monthly reporting on removals, unenforced orders, and the reasons for delay. That transparency should be used to publish outcomes by risk category, inventory age, and impediment—not merely the largest possible removal total. Raw numbers can reward easy administrative closures while difficult public-safety cases remain unresolved.

A credible immigration system must be fair at the front end and final at the back end. Canada should never remove someone before the law permits it. But when every legitimate avenue has been exhausted, a removal order must

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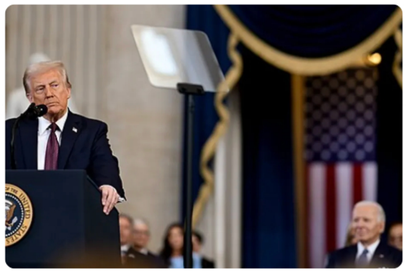

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