# Canada sees rise in LGBTQ+ asylum requests from the US due to 'existential threat' to community



Canada has witnessed a striking rise in asylum requests from LGBTQ+ Americans, clearly due to escalating fears of persecution under President Donald Trump’s return to power. The NGO Rainbow Railroad, which aids sexual and gender minorities at risk globally, has reported a surge in requests, receiving 8,500 appeals for help since early 2025. The group highlights a tenfold increase in assistance requests from the U.S. in June alone, compared to the previous year, underscoring the worsening climate for LGBTQ+ rights south of the border.

This pattern is particularly pronounced among transgender Americans, many of whom cite intensified anti-trans policies as the impetus for seeking refuge. Since Trump’s re-election, measures such as executive orders criminalising trans identities, restrictions on gender marker changes in official documents, and rollbacks on civil rights and gender-affirming healthcare have fostered an environment of hostility. Lawyers and activists in Canada have described being inundated with calls from transgender individuals desperate to find safety, describing the situation as an 'existential assault' on the community. Some parents have also reached out, worried about the treatment of their children amid rhetoric labelling gender-affirming care as 'child sexual mutilation'.

The Canadian government, which maintains a liberal stance on LGBTQ+ immigration, has special programs aimed at protecting those persecuted for their sexual orientation or gender identity. However, obtaining asylum from the U.S. remains complex. Canada’s Immigration and Refugee Board emphasises that applicants must prove that no region within the U.S. can offer them protection, a high bar given the longstanding bilateral “Safe Third Country Agreement” that requires asylum seekers to request protection in the first safe country they enter. Rainbow Railroad and other advocacy groups have called for suspending this agreement, arguing it hinders the safety and rights of queer and trans refugees, who may face acute dangers if detained by U.S. immigration enforcement.

Data from Canada’s Immigration and Refugee Board supports the observed surge; in the first half of 2025, more Americans applied for refugee status in Canada than in the entire previous year, marking the highest figures since 2019. While American claims remain a small fraction of total refugee applications, the increase is significant and believed to be driven largely by transgender individuals responding to political and legal setbacks including U.S. Supreme Court rulings restricting gender-affirming care, military service, and participation in sports.

Figures from Rainbow Railroad reveal that on Election Day in November 2024, the NGO received 1,200 requests from Americans alone, their highest single-day total from any country. This demand coincides with broader international trends noted by the organisation, which cite growing xenophobia, anti-refugee sentiment, and queerphobia worldwide.

Despite the welcoming nature of Canadian society towards LGBTQ+ people, the asylum process remains daunting. Applicants must navigate stringent criteria, demonstrating real and sustained persecution and governmental failure to protect them. Lawyers like Yameena Ansari argue that the requirement to conform to a binary gender identity on official documents amounts to a form of violence against transgender individuals, highlighting the deep systemic challenges faced even in countries considered safe havens.

For many transgender Americans like Hannah Kreager, who fled Arizona to seek refuge in Calgary, Canada represents not just a physical safe space but a chance to rebuild lives away from fear and hostility. Their experiences illuminate a stark reality: in a country historically viewed as a beacon of LGBT rights, shifting political tides and legal reversals in the United States are prompting an unprecedented movement of people seeking asylum north of the border. Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## Bibliography

1. <https://www.france24.com/en/tv-shows/focus/20250828-in-canada-ngo-rainbow-railroad-sees-rise-in-lgbt-asylum-requests-from-us> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.reuters.com/world/us/more-americans-applying-refugee-status-canada-data-shows-2025-08-21/> - In the first half of 2025, more Americans applied for refugee status in Canada than during the entire year of 2024, marking the highest number since 2019. Although the 245 claims represent a small share of the approximately 55,000 total refugee claims, the data from Canada’s Immigration and Refugee Board highlights a notable increase. Historically, Canada’s acceptance rate for U.S. refugee claims has been low, and under a bilateral agreement, many asylum-seekers arriving from the U.S. are turned back, as the U.S. is deemed a 'safe' country for asylum. The surge in American claims appears to be driven in part by transgender individuals seeking protection, as reflected in anecdotal evidence from lawyers and asylum-seekers. The increase follows rollbacks of transgender rights in the U.S., during President Donald Trump's term and decisions by the U.S. Supreme Court, including restrictions on gender-affirming care, military service, bathroom usage, and participation in sports. To win asylum in Canada, applicants must demonstrate that no part of the U.S. is safe for them. Canada’s Immigration and Refugee Board has started including information from organizations like Human Rights Watch about the treatment of LGBTQ people in the U.S. to inform its decisions.
3. <https://elpais.com/sociedad/2025-07-20/sexilio-en-estados-unidos-cientos-de-personas-trans-estadounidenses-buscan-refugio-de-trump-en-canada.html> - Since Donald Trump's re-election in 2025, there has been a notable increase in asylum requests from American transgender individuals fearing for their rights and safety. The organization Rainbow Railroad reported receiving 1,177 requests in just 24 hours, with 51% from transgender people. Many, like Hannah Kreager, who moved from Arizona to Calgary, Canada, cite intensified anti-trans policies, such as the criminalization of trans identities, restrictions on gender changes in official documents, and setbacks in civil rights, as reasons for their escape. Trump has signed twelve executive orders against trans individuals, fostering an environment of hostility and legitimizing discriminatory actions. This situation has led to a 994% increase in assistance requests to Rainbow Railroad compared to the previous year. Although Canada is historically receptive to the LGBTQ+ community, obtaining asylum from the U.S. is complex, as applicants must prove real persecution and the state's ineffectiveness in providing protection. However, lawyers like Yameena Ansari believe the severity of the current context justifies these demands. Individuals like Kreager seek to rebuild their lives in Canada, fleeing the 'darkness and fear' they feel in their homeland.
4. <https://www.breitbart.com/national-security/2025/04/16/report-canadas-immigration-lawyers-overwhelmed-with-transgender-asylum-requests-from-u-s/> - Canadian media reported this week that immigration attorneys and LGBTQQIAAP2S+ activists have noticed a significant spike in the number of requests for information from Americans identifying as transgender seeking to move to Canada, claiming persecution under the administration of President Donald Trump. The Globe and Mail quoted multiple Canadian lawyers on Tuesday who said they were 'overwhelmed' by the number of calls from alarmed transgender Americans seeking a way to claim political asylum in Canada. Some calls are also from parents whose children are being subjected to medical procedures in response to alleged gender dysmorphia, which the Trump administration has referred to as 'child sexual mutilation' and vowed to eradicate. One transgender activist accused President Trump of launching an 'existential assault' on transgender individuals and condemned the leftist government of unelected Canadian Prime Minister Mark Carney for not updating travel advisories to warn transgender Canadians to stay out of America. The report follows weeks of similar interviews with transgender individuals who oppose Trump’s policies protecting young girls in school sports from being forced to compete against men and his directives to mandate American passports and other legal documents recognize only 'male' and 'female' as existing genders, excluding non-binary, 'two-spirit,' and other LGBTQQIAAP2S+ identities. In Canada, these individuals are allowed to identify their gender on government documents as 'X;' according to the Globe and Mail, 3,600 people have chosen to use 'X' on their passports. 'We are receiving numerous inquiries from U.S. nationals, including many trans individuals, who are no longer feeling safe at home,' immigration lawyer Warda Shazadi Meighen told the Globe and Mail. 'International refugee protection is a last-resort option, granted only when a person’s home country is no longer safe.' The attorney noted that Canadian law 'certainly includes trans identity' as a potential reason for persecution that could trigger refugee protection. 'If that fear stems from U.S. state action or inaction, the state is considered the agent of persecution, and the claimant isn’t required to show they first sought protection from the authorities.' Another attorney, Yameena Ansari, told the newspaper that requiring individuals to identify by their sex on government documents was 'a form of violence.' Ansari reportedly described her law practice as 'overwhelmed' by Americans seeking information on how to move to Canada due to LGBTQQIAAP2S+ identity. 'Some immigration lawyers have been hosting online seminars for LGBTQ communities on navigating Canadian immigration to address the volume of inquiries,' the Globe and Mail noted. 'One last month, attended by 62 people, was dominated by questions about asylum claims from transgender Americans.' The Canadian government maintains a liberal policy regarding allowing foreigners identifying as LGBTQQIAAP2S+ to move to the country. 'Canada has a proud history of providing protection to and helping resettle those most in need. That includes those in the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, intersex, and additional sexually and gender diverse (LGBTQI+) community,' the Canadian government explains on its immigration website, noting Ottawa has special programs in place, in conjunction with LGBTQQIAAP2S+ advocacy groups, to identify those persecuted and help fast-track resettling in the country. Rainbow Railroad, one of those organizations, reported in February a dramatic increase in requests from Americans seeking to escape the Trump administration’s policies on the grounds that they amount to persecution. Speaking to the CBC, an official with the group said it had documented a 1100-percent increase in U.S.-based requests for resettling in 2025 so far. On Election Day in November, 1,200 Americans reportedly reached out to Rainbow Railroad, 'the most requests we’ve received in a single day from any country,' director of protection initiatives Swathi Sekhar said. Rainbow Railroad has been helping LGBTQQIAAP2S+ individuals from around the world escape countries that persecute them for nearly two decades, traditionally focusing on those attempting to escape countries where regimes punish suspected homosexuality by death. The group’s website features a map highlighting some of the most dangerous places in the world for LGBTQQIAAP2S+ people in the world, featuring much of the Middle East, Russia, Southeast Asia, and Africa. The United States is not highlighted on the map. In 2019, during his first term as president, Trump launched a global initiative to pressure such countries to decriminalize homosexuality, led by then-Ambassador to Germany and current Special Presidential Envoy for Special Missions of United States Richard Grenell. Rainbow Railroad is advocating for Canada to suspend a policy Canada and America have shared since 2004 known as the Safe Third Country Agreement. That policy mandates that asylum seekers must apply for asylum at the first country to which they arrive — meaning, if they reach America first, they cannot then request asylum in Canada. 'LGBTQIA+ people seeking asylum are being put under extreme scrutiny, and it’s hindering their right to safety and protection. Particularly, trans women seeking asylum will experience acute danger if they are detained by immigration enforcement,' Rainbow Road denounced in a joint letter with other advocacy groups in February. 'For many queer and trans refugees, resettlement to a third country is their only option to escape violence and persecution.' The suspension of the Safe Third Country Agreement would not affect Americans seeking to apply for asylum in Canada but, rather, individuals fleeing a third country who arrive in America first. It remains unclear if Canadian law would allow for political asylum claims from Americans, though some have already made the move. In an interview with the CBC published on Saturday, Juliana Antonimus, a transgender American, explained the decision to move to Halifax, Nova Scotia. Antonimus, originally from Arkansas, fled to Halifax from New York fearing persecution. 'If I was feeling that way in what was once my safe space because the rules had changed, I recognized that I need to find a new safe space,' Antonimus told the CBC. The CBC did not clarify if Antonimus was formally seeking political asylum in Canada. Sekhar of Rainbow Road told the CBC in February that, to have a claim, asylum seekers 'have to show that their government would be absolutely unwilling or unable to protect them in any part of the country. So, they would have to show that they’ve tried to potentially move from state to state, and were not able to find any safety by relocating internally first.' The influx of American requests for information on seeking asylum in Canada followed a dramatic change in immigration policy last year by the ruling Liberal Party. Former Prime Minister Justin Trudeau, who stepped down after a decade in power in January, had announced in October that his government would 'significantly reduce the number of immigrants coming to Canada for the next two years' after dramatically expanding immigration opportunities for most of his tenure. It remains unclear at press time if the policy would affect Americans or whether successor Mark Carney will choose to keep the new policy in place. Follow Frances Martel on Facebook and Twitter.