

THE ASYLUM CLAIM BACKLOG SURPASSES 80,000 CASES

The processing rate for asylum claims continues to drop, even as the number of new claims being reported remains high.

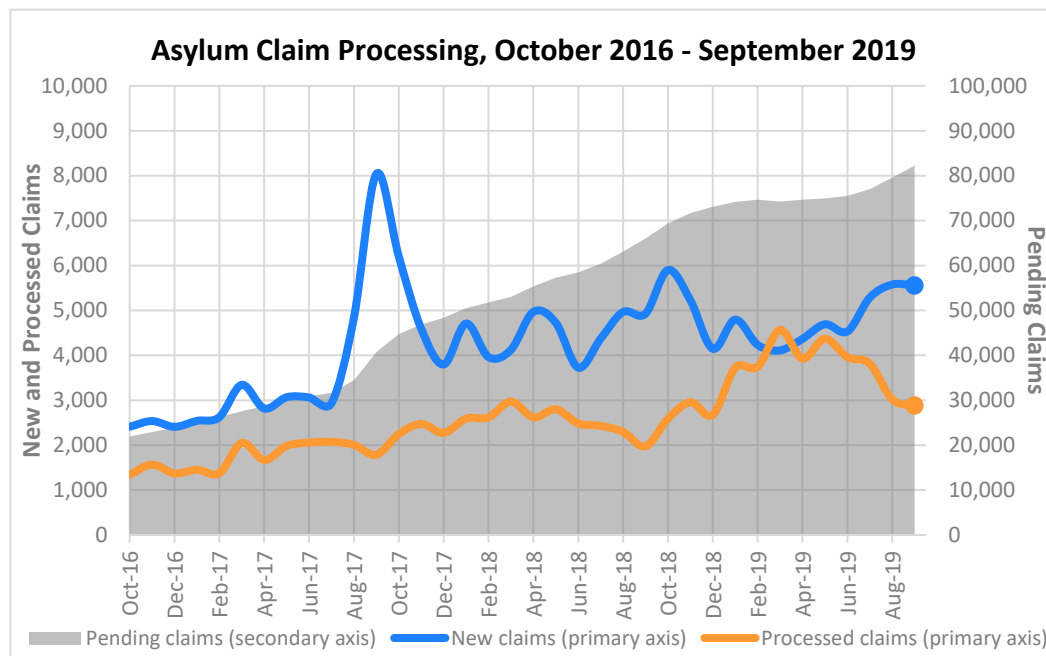
The figure in this paper presents data on the processing of asylum claims made in Canada. The blue line identifies the number of new asylum claims being filed each month. The orange line produces the number of claims processed each month. These values are shown on the vertical scale to the left. The height of the grey area measures the inventory of unprocessed claims. These values are shown on the vertical scale to the right. The Immigration and Refugee Board (IRB) [processes these claims](#) by determining whether claimants have well-founded fears of persecution or torture in their home countries.

5,560 new asylum claims were made in September 2019, while less than 2,880 were processed. This added almost 2,700 unprocessed asylum claims to an inventory of nearly 80,000 pre-existing cases, bringing the total to 82,240. This represents the largest number of unprocessed claims on record, and the first time ever that it has surpassed 80,000 pending cases.

The majority of new claims come from people who entered Canada through official border crossings. The growing inventory of unprocessed claims is an administrative issue, rather than an issue of border security.

The grey area, representing unprocessed asylum claims, grows when the blue line is above the orange line, meaning the IRB received more claims than it processed that month. This “mountain” of unprocessed claims shrinks when the blue line is below the orange line, representing a month where the IRB processed more claims than it received. With the exception of March 2019, the IRB has not been able to exceed the number of claims it has received, and so the inventory of unprocessed claims has grown.

The federal government has attempted to process larger volumes of claims by [streamlining cases](#) and integrating the [work](#) and [coordination](#) of the



Source: “Recent Trends,” IRB 2019.

agencies involved. Despite these attempts at procedural reform, the number of claims processed by the IRB has continued to drop since peaking in March 2019 with the result being the higher “mountain” of unprocessed claims shown by the grey area in the figure.

Respecting the right of people to seek asylum means that the inventory of claims can only be reduced by increasing its processing rate. This is an administrative decision, largely determined by the number of staff hired to process asylum claims. [Attracting and retaining staff members](#) at the IRB and other asylum-related agencies would increase the rate of processing and reduce the number of pending cases. Some initiatives may include shifting from fixed-term contracts to permanent job positions, as well as providing greater mental health support to staff members assessing large volumes of emotionally-intense cases.

Investing in a timely and robust asylum system would likely result in cost-savings to public funds, especially for the provinces, which provide income support and limited social services to asylum seekers waiting for a hearing. Processing larger volumes of claims may also bolster public trust in the asylum system, and give prompt protection to those in need.