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# History and Legacy of Refugee Resettlement In Ottawa A PRIMER

Authored by  
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*Cover photo:  
A portrait of a Somali refugee  
in Dollo Ado, Ethiopia.  
25 August 2011  
Photo # 483099*

## List of Abbreviations

<b>BVOR</b>	–	Blended Visa Office Referred Program
<b>CCI</b>	–	Catholic Centre for Immigrants
<b>COR</b>	–	Coalition for Refugees in Ottawa
<b>CSIS</b>	–	Canadian Security Intelligence Service
<b>GAR</b>	–	Government Assisted Refugee
<b>IRCC</b>	–	Immigration, Refugees, and Citizenship Canada
<b>OCISO</b>	–	Ottawa Community Immigrant Services Organization
<b>RCMP</b>	–	Royal Canadian Mounted Police
<b>RLC</b>	–	Refugees Landed in Canada
<b>SAH</b>	–	Sponsorship Agreement Holder
<b>UNHCR</b>	–	Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
<b>UNRWA</b>	–	United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East

## Introduction

Canada has made significant contributions to refugee resettlement efforts over the years, especially since the end of World War Two. We have welcomed more than a million refugees who have adopted Canada as their home and made tremendous contributions to Canadian society. As the Honourable John McCallum, Minister for Immigration, Refugees, and Citizenship Canada, recently observed, two Governors General of Canada, Adrienne Clarkson and Michaëlle Jean, arrived in Canada as refugees, as did his colleagues, the Honourable Maryam Monsef, Minister of Democratic Institutions, and the Honourable Ahmed Hussein. These are illustrious examples, but they are joined by many others who have quietly built good lives for themselves and for their descendants in Canada.

Now more than ever, it is of the utmost importance that Canada continues to be a place of refuge. The world is in the midst of a refugee crisis of unprecedented proportions. According to the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), there are nearly 60 million forcibly displaced people fleeing war, persecution, and danger worldwide. Although most are displaced within their own countries, over 14.4 million fall under the UNHCR mandate as refugees.

This primer is intended to provide basic information on the history and legacy of refugee resettlement in Canada and to highlight Ottawa's role in these efforts. It contains basic facts about refugees and Canadian refugee policy, a brief timeline of refugee resettlement in Canada, highlights from Ottawa's history of refugee resettlement, and a myth buster intended to dispel some of the misconceptions about refugees and refugee resettlement history in Canada.



## The Basics

### **What are refugees?**

Refugees are people who are fleeing armed conflict or persecution. When they are forced to cross a national border to seek safety in neighbouring countries and it is too dangerous for them to return home, they become refugees as defined and protected in international law by the Refugee Convention and its 1967 Protocol, to which Canada is a signatory country.

### **What are asylum seeker and refugee claimants?**

Asylum seekers are those who have crossed an international border in order to seek protection under the Refugee Convention, but whose claims for refugee status have not yet been determined. When asylum seekers seek to be recognized as refugees

in Canada, they are referred to as 'refugee claimants'.

### **What are the basic rights of refugees?**

As laid down in the 1951 Refugee Convention and subsequent international law, three basic principles govern refugee rights: non-discrimination, non-penalization, and non-refoulement.

**Non-discrimination:** The convention holds that refugees are to be treated without discrimination based on their race, religion, country of origin, sex, age, disability, sexuality, or other internationally recognized prohibited grounds of discrimination.

**Non-penalization:** In recognition of the fact that the seeking of asylum can require refugees to breach immigration rules, the convention holds that refugees should not be penalized for their illegal entry or stay in a country. Under this provision, it is illegal to arbitrarily detain refugees, and to charge them with immigration or criminal offenses relating to the seeking of asylum.

**Non-refoulement:** The most fundamental principle of the Convention is that refugees shall not be returned against their will to a territory where their life and freedom would be under threat.

### **How do people gain refugee status in Canada?**

Under Canada's current refugee system, asylum seekers can gain refugee status in Canada in two ways:

1. Asylum seekers can come to Canada on their own. Those who do so must prove that they are a refugee to the Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada. If successful, they are recognized as refugees and given permanent residence in Canada. Once these refugee claimants are recognized as refugees in Canada, they are categorised in one of two ways:
  - i. Refugees Landed in Canada (RLCs); or
  - ii. As a dependent (family member) of an RLC.
2. Asylum seekers can also seek to gain a refugee status determination from UNHCR, or from the country to which they fled. Those who do so can be resettled in Canada one of three ways:
  - i. As a Government Assisted Refugee (GAR);
  - ii. As a Privately Sponsored Refugees (PSR);
  - iii. As a Blended Visa-Office Referred refugee(BVOR) in which case responsibility is shared equally between the government and private sponsors;

### **What kinds of support do refugees receive in Canada?**

The types of support that a refugee receives depends on whether a refugee arrived as an asylum seeker, as a GAR, as a privately sponsored refugee, or through the BVOR.

**GARs:** If they do not have resources of their own, the Resettlement Assistance Program (RAP) provides assistance to GARs to help them with their initial settlement in Canada for up to one year after their arrival. This assistance includes a one-time household start-up allowance, and monthly income support.

**BVORs:** If they do not have resources of their own, BVORs receive up to six months of support from the federal government, and another six months of support from their sponsor(s).

**PSRs:** If they do not have resources of their own, PSRs receive support from their sponsor(s) for up to one year.

**RLCs:** If they do not have resources of their own, RCLs and their dependants may, depending on the regulation in the province in which they reside, be eligible for the same social assistance offered to other residents.

**Refugee claimants:** If they do not have resources of their own, refugee claimants may, depending on the regulation in the province in which they reside, be eligible for the same social assistance offered to other residents.

Refugees can also access a loan to cover the cost of their transportation to Canada, and the cost of the medical examination that they must undergo before coming to Canada. This initial loan can range in the thousands of dollars, interest is charged on the loans, and refugees are expected to repay it.





Vietnamese refugees at the Pulau Bidong refugee camp in Malaysia. 01 August 1979. Photo # 100695

## Refugees by the Numbers

### Number of Refugees Worldwide (Source UNHCR)

- 60 million displaced people
- 14.4 million refugees who fall under the UNHCR mandate
- 5.1 million Palestinian refugees who fall under the mandate of United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA)

### Top 10 Refugee Producing Countries (Source UNHCR)

- |                |                                 |
|----------------|---------------------------------|
| 1. Syria       | 6. Democratic Republic of Congo |
| 2. Afghanistan | 7. Myanmar                      |
| 3. Somalia     | 8. Central African Republic     |
| 4. Sudan       | 9. Iraq                         |
| 5. South Sudan | 10. Eritrea                     |

*Note: This list excludes the 5.1 million Palestinian refugees who do not fall under the UNHCR mandate.*

### Top 10 Refugee Host Countries (Source UNHCR)

- |             |           |
|-------------|-----------|
| 1. Turkey   | 6. Jordan |
| 2. Pakistan | 7. Kenya  |
| 3. Lebanon  | 8. Uganda |
| 4. Iran     | 9. Chad   |
| 5. Ethiopia | 10. Sudan |

### Top 10 Refugee Resettlement Countries (Source UNHCR)

- |                  |                   |
|------------------|-------------------|
| 1. United States | 6. Norway         |
| 2. Canada        | 7. New Zealand    |
| 3. Australia     | 8. Finland        |
| 4. Germany       | 9. United Kingdom |
| 5. Sweden        | 10. France        |

*Notes: Only includes countries with explicit refugee resettlement programs. Only applies to approximately 100,000 of the world's 14.4 million refugees. The ranking is somewhat misleading, as Germany also accepts many refugees through humanitarian*

*provisions which are not included in resettlement numbers.*

*Moreover, it is important to take into account that because of their geographic location, Australia, Canada, New Zealand, and the United States are much more likely to receive refugees through resettlement programs as within reach of the top 10 refugee producing countries, which are more likely to receive refugees as asylum seekers.*

### Average Number of Refugees welcomed to Canada per Year (Source IRCC)

- 27,600 per year (average from 1979 to present)
- 24,000 per year (average from 2010-2014)

### Syrian Refugees Welcomed to Canada Since the Beginning of the Crisis Before November 2015 (Source IRCC)

- 2,300 (estimate, exact number has been elusive)

### Syrian Refugees Welcomed to Canada from November 2015 to February 2016 (Source IRCC)

- 10,000 by the end of December 2015 (2,000 GARS and 8,000 PSRs)
- 25,000 by the end of February 2016 (Over 10,000 of these refugees were privately sponsored, and over 2,000 arrived as part of the BVOR program)

*Note: Expecting another 10,000 GARS by the end of December 2016*

### Syrian Refugee Welcomed to Ottawa from November 4, 2015 to February 2016 (Source IRCC)

- Over 1,500 Syrians who arrived as GARS
- Nearly 200 Syrians who arrived through the BVOR program
- Over 200 Syrians who arrived as privately sponsored refugees

## Myth Buster

Perceptions based on inaccurate statistics and flawed understandings of Canadian policy run rampant in the media. Such misinformation is particularly visible in social media post, as well as in the comments sections of mainstream news articles. The following is intended to help dispel some of these myths.

**Myth: Refugees collect more than pensioners/people on welfare.**

**Fact:** This has been one of the most persistent myths over the past 5 years, and it is false. As outlined in the basic facts section of this report, most categories of refugees are not eligible for government assistance. Those who are, are only eligible for a period of 6 to 12 months, and only if they do not have funds of their own. These refugees receive roughly the same amount as Canadians on welfare and are based on the provincial or territorial welfare rates where the refugee resides. At the end of this section you will find one of the most popular social media posts on this topic; it was fact checked and edited by Dr. Silvia D'Addario and York University students. Please share it!

**Myth: Refugees could bring the chaos that afflicts their country to Canada.**

**Fact:** This is a recurring fear in Canada. Throughout the Cold War, people were afraid that refugees from Eastern Europe, from Southeast Asia, and from Chile would bring communism to Canada. The fear proved to be unfounded. These refugees had lost everything to escape communist regimes, and they tended to thoroughly reject communist ideology. Refugees arriving from Iraq and Syria today are escaping from the atrocities committed by extremists in their country of origin. They, more than anyone else, have cause to reject extremist ideologies and actions.

**Myth: Terrorists could seek to enter Canada as refugees.**

**Facts: (1)** It is far more complicated, time consuming, and difficult to enter Canada as a refugee than it is to enter as a visitor. Refugee claimants go through thorough screening by both Canadian Security Intelligence Service (CSIS) and the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP), including fingerprinting and interviews. Any claimant found to pose a security risk, to have engaged in serious criminality, to have participated in organized crime, or to have committed human rights violations is not admissible as a refugee, and risk being detained. It is unlikely that a terrorist would risk undergoing such a process.

**(2) A terrorist act has never been committed by a refugee in Canadian history.** Despite this fact, Canadians have often viewed refugees with fear and suspicion. Canada has made the mistake of believing entire groups of people guilty by association in the past, for example, when it placed Japanese and German people in internment camps during World War Two. This is a very dark and shameful chapter in Canadian history, and we must be careful not to repeat it.



Residents at a Syrian refugee camp in the Beqaa Valley of eastern Lebanon prepare to greet Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon during his visit there today. 25 March 2016  
Photo # 668845



Somali refugees at their camp in Malkadiida, Ethiopia.  
25 August 2011  
Malkadiida, Ethiopia  
Photo # 483000



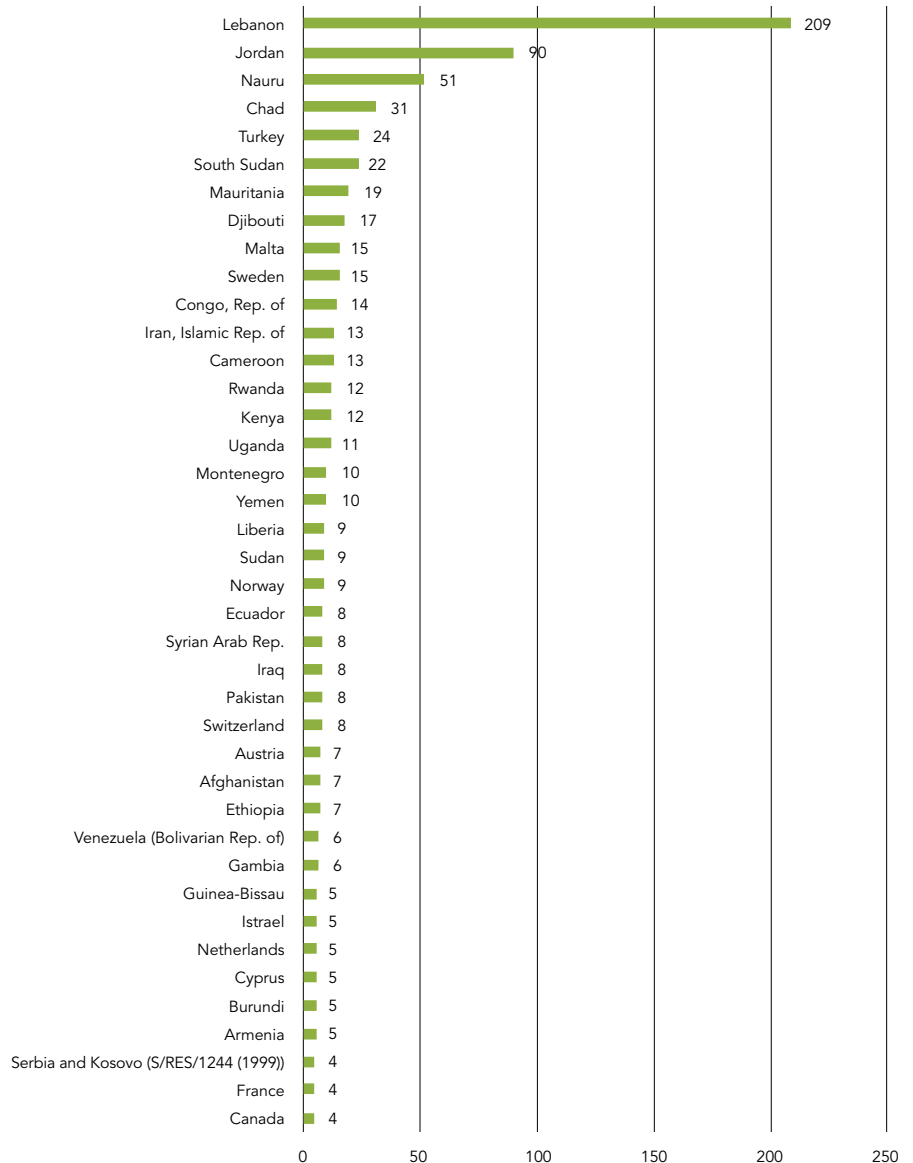
**Myth: Canada leads the world when it comes to refugees.**

**Fact:** When it comes to formal refugee resettlement, Canada ranks near the top; it ranks second in terms of total number of refugees resettled after the United States, and it ranks second in terms of refugees resettled per capita after Australia. This method of calculating the offer of refuge, however, only applies to a select number of countries that have formal refugee resettlement programs.

Many countries around the world host more refugees than Canada. In terms of total numbers of refugees hosted, Canada comes in 27th. Many countries host more refugees than Canada by virtue of their geography – they neighbour the top refugee producing countries. Even if we take these out of the equation, however, the United States, France, and Germany still take in more refugees than Canada. When it comes to refugees per capita, Canada ranks 41st in the world. Again, even if we take the countries that are close to the top refugee producing areas out of the equation, plenty of countries still take in more refugees per capita than Canada, including for example: Sweden, Malta, Norway, Ecuador, Switzerland, Austria, Venezuela, and France.

**Source:** UNHCR, *Mid-Year Trends 2015*.

Refugees per 1000 inhabitants





**Myth: Neighbouring 'Muslim Countries' are not pulling their weight to help resettle Iraqi and Syrian refugees.**

**Fact:** Most Iraqi and Syrian refugees are currently either resettled or sheltered in a refugee camp in a neighbouring Middle Eastern Muslim majority country. As for Saudi Arabia and other relatively wealthy countries in the Persian Gulf, refugees tend not to find their way there because they would have to cross hundreds of kilometres of desert lands. Nevertheless, according to UNHCR, Saudi Arabia and other Gulf states donate substantial sums of money to help with the refugee crisis, and take in thousands of refugees as temporary workers.

**Myth: Asylum seekers who arrive by boat are not legitimate refugees, they are migrants and should be incarcerated to deter others from coming.**

**Facts: (1)** Many refugees in Canada escaped their country of origin by boat, including most of the 'boat people' who were welcomed to Canada in the early 1980s as part of Operation Lifeline throughout Canada and of Project 4000 in Ottawa.

**(2)** People desperate to flee violence and persecution will escape by any means necessary, often by paying smugglers, and it would be immoral to punish them for doing so.

**(3)** Punishing people would be unlikely to serve as a deterrent because refugees often have no idea where they are going, and would likely choose to come even if they knew that they would be incarcerated, because the alternative could mean death or torture.

**(4)** Punishing refugees for illegally entering or remaining on a territory is against international law.

**Myth: Refugee claimants who enter Canada using false documents are bogus refugees and should be deported.**

**Fact:** Repressive governments often refuse to issue passports and documents to those that they are persecuting, or imprison people when they try to leave. International law has long recognized that such people may have to use false papers to escape their country; many Jewish Germans were forced to do so when they escaped Germany in the mid-20th century.

**Myth: Refugee claimants are immigration queue-jumpers.**

**Fact:** International law recognises the right of people who are fleeing violence and persecution to seek asylum in another country. It simply does not make sense to ask people who are running for their lives to wait in line. The Supreme Court of Canada has also confirmed that the Charter of Rights and Freedoms guarantees the rights of asylum seekers.

**Myth: Asylum seekers from 'safe countries' are bogus refugees.**

**Fact:** Many countries around the world may be relatively safe for most of their citizens, but not for others. For example, the Roma face enduring persecution in many European countries, which are considered to be safe by the Canadian government. LGBTQ people also face persecution in otherwise relatively safe countries around the world.

**Myth: Failed refugee claimants are bogus refugees who are trying to cheat the system to immigrate to Canada.**

**Fact:** Refugee claimants can be denied refugee status in Canada for many reasons, many of which are related to challenges associated with our refugee assessment process. For example, in the past refugees from countries where there is no authority to produce or renew passports were often not able to prove their identity. A current example relates to the process in place for refugee claimants from countries which have been designated as unlikely to produce refugees by the Canadian government, such as Hungary, and Mexico. These claimants are allotted much less time to build and present their application to the Immigration and Refugee Board, which makes it very challenging to meet all of the criteria set by the Board.

**Myth: Refugees are a drain on the Canadian economy.**

**Fact:** Refugees are an incredible source of human capital. After their initial settlement period, refugees become employed and pay taxes. They thereby contribute to the Canadian economy by adding to its workforce and tax base. Moreover, refugees are often highly educated people, and Canada benefits from their knowledge, talents, and skills. Finally, a fair portion of refugees tend to be children who will spend a lifetime contributing their skills to the economy and adding to the tax base.

**Myth: Refugees are going to take our jobs at a time when many Canadians are unemployed and underemployed.**

**Fact:** Refugees contribute positively to the Canadian economy. Many of them possess an entrepreneurial spirit, the kind of spirit that would be required to fling yourself and your family halfway across the world in search of safety; they start businesses that provide jobs for themselves and for other Canadians.

**Myth: Refugees arrive with complex health and mental health problems.**

**Fact:** While it is true that some refugees arrive with serious health and mental health problems as a result of the traumatic events that they have survived, those who work with refugees in settlement agencies and in community health centres emphasize that the great majority of those who arrive in Canada do not. Many are very stressed upon arrival, but their stress quite often relates to immediate questions, such as where they will find food and lodging, and then jobs, schools, and social connections – friends. When these needs are met in a timely manner, the risk of serious health and mental health complications is reduced considerably.

**Myth: The children of refugees are more likely to engage in criminal activity, such as taking drugs or being involved in gangs.**

**Fact:** The children of refugees and immigrants are LESS likely to be involved in criminal activities, to consume drugs and alcohol, and to be exposed to drugs and alcohol than Canadian born children whose parents were not immigrants or refugees (Ottawa Public Health, 2014).

**Myth: The children of refugees fail to thrive in Canada, and become a drain on the Canadian economy.**

**Fact:** In a 2016 report entitled, *Educational and Labour market outcomes of Childhood Immigrants by Admission Class*, Statistics Canada revealed that refugee children as a group had achieved better graduation outcomes than their Canadian-born peers. Thirty percent of refugees attended university compared to 24 percent of their Canadian born peers. The study also found that the earnings of people who arrived in Canada as refugee children were similar to those of their peers with Canadian born parents, and to those with parent who immigrated to Canada via the business and skilled working class streams.



# Only in Canada

\* It is interesting to know that the federal Government of Canada allows :

A monthly pension of : \$1,890.00 to a simple refugee *claimant*.  
plus : 580.00 in social aid

*NO*  
*Not true*  
They may be eligible for *\$0*

A grand total of : ~~\$2,470.00~~ monthly

X 12 months

=====

~~\$28,020.00~~ annual income of *\$6,960/yr*

A refugee receives  
*\$11,461* below the  
poverty line a year.

· By comparison, the Old Age Pension of a senior citizen who has contributed to the development of Our Beautiful Big Country during 40 or 50 years, CANNOT receive more than :

Amount/month

Supplement

X 12 months

=====

\$12,144.00 a

~~A difference~~

**IRRELEVANT**

Refugee claimants do not receive any money upon arrival! There is **NO** special refugee 'pension'.

and Guaranteed Income

That does not cover the cost of:

- Rent
- Food
- Clothing
- Transportation

\* Perhaps our senior citizens should ask for the Status of applying for Old Age Pension.

\* Let us send this message to as many Canadians as possible, and maybe the allowance of refugee ~~could then be reduced to \$1,012.00, and that of our Canadian pensioners raised to \$2,470.00 per month. (who actually deserve it) the money that they have been paying in income taxes for 40 or 50 years.~~

AN INCREDIBLE NONSENSE !!!

~~OUR CANADIAN SENIORS CITIZENS~~, DESERVE BETTER

*ALL PEOPLE*

*should be above the poverty line.*

Please circulate this text to see the reaction of your contacts !

*...and please check your facts before you spread lies about a vulnerable group.*



## Brief Timeline of Refugee Policy and Resettlement in Canada

### **Loyalists, African Americans, and Iroquois (1775-1783)**

Canada's history of refugee resettlement began at the time of the American Revolution. Nearly 100 years before the 1867 Constitution Act which officially proclaimed the Canadian confederation, 40,000 to 50,000 people sought refuge and settled along the southern edges of Upper and Lower Canada. Though most were people of British extraction, this first wave of refugees also included nearly 3000 African Americans, freemen and slaves, and nearly 2000 indigenous allies, mostly Six Nation Iroquois.

### **African Americans (from 1793)**

In 1793, Upper Canada abolished slavery; it was the first province in the British Empire to do so. Over the next 100 years, it is estimated that approximately 30,000 African American slaves escaped from the United States and sought refuge in Upper and Lower Canada with the aid of the Underground Railroad.

### **Scots (1770-1815)**

Troubles relating to the Highland Clearances that accompanied the forced modernization of Scotland led approximately 15,000 Highland Scots to seek refuge in Canada between 1770 and 1815. Most of these settled in Prince Edward Island, Nova Scotia, and Upper Canada. At that time, Gaelic became the third most common non-indigenous language in Canada.

### **The Irish (Late 1840s)**

It is estimated that between 1.5 to 2 million people fled Ireland because of the Great Famine, also known as the Potato Famine. Tens of thousands found refuge in Canada.

### **Poles (1830 and 1858)**

Many Polish people who took part in uprising and insurrections against the Russian and Prussian occupiers in Poland sought refuge in Canada. The first arrived following the 1830 Uprising against Russian occupation, and a second larger wave arrived after the insurrection against Prussian occupiers in 1858.

### **Italians (1880-1914)**

First fleeing the ravages of Italian Unification, and then forced off their land as Italy began to implement wide ranging reforms, thousands of Italians came to Canada.

### **Jews (1880-1914, 1950s-1970s, 1970s-1990s)**

Between 1880 and 1914, thousands of Jewish people fled from pogroms in Eastern Europe and sought refuge in Canada. They joined already substantial Jewish communities in Montreal, Toronto and other Canadian cities. Many more Jewish people fleeing difficult circumstances in Europe the Middle East and North Africa arrived in Canada throughout the 1950s, 60s, and 70s. In the 1970s, 80s, and 90s, 20,000 Soviet Jews who had been deprived of basic political and religious freedoms in the USSR were welcomed in Canada.

### **Ukrainians (1891, 1920-1939, 1945-1952)**

The first wave of Ukrainians seeking refuge in Canada in 1891 consisted of 170,000 people fleeing oppression under Austro-Hungarian rule. The second (1920-1939) and third (1945-1952) waves consisted of people fleeing from civil war, Soviet occupation, and communist rule.





Arrival of Hungarians at Union Station, Ottawa, December 24, 1956. City of Ottawa Archives/ MG393/CA025079/Newton

## Policies of Exclusion

In the first half of the 20th century, xenophobia, anti-Semitism, and racism had taken hold in Canada, and there was significant opposition to the admission of refugees. These attitudes did not change until the end of World War Two.

### 1800s to 1947:

Various Immigration policies, including a prohibitive tax on would-be Chinese immigrants and then outright exclusion of people of Asian origin, are put in place to stop people from coming to Canada.

### 1910:

Section 38 of the Immigration Act allows the government to prohibit landing of immigrants “belonging to any race deemed unsuited to the climate or the requirements of Canada.” In practice, this policy served to exclude people of non-European origins or heritage from immigrating to Canada.

### Sikhs (1914)

Canada turned away 376 refugees, most of whom were Sikhs, who had crossed the Pacific Ocean on the Komagata Maru. Forced to sail back across the Pacific, and many were massacred when they returned to India. On May 18, 2016, Prime Minister Justin Trudeau gave a formal apology for the incident in the House of Commons.

### German Jews (1939)

Canada turned away hundreds of Jewish German refugees on board the SS St. Louis, who were forced to return to Germany where they faced death. Canada eventually accepted approximately 4000 European Jews, but this paled in comparison to the efforts deployed in other countries. The refusal to provide refuge to Jewish people fleeing Nazi persecution in Europe came to be recognized as a national shame.

### Post World War Two Displaced People (1947-1956)

Despite some resistance, the Canadian Government acknowledged Canada’s moral obligation to assist people who had been displaced by World War Two and who did not wish to return to Communist dominated countries, and offered refuge to 163,000 people by the end of 1951, and to 29,000 Eastern Europeans between 1951 and 1956.

### Palestinians (1956)

Many Arab Palestinians were driven from their homes during the Israeli-Arab war of 1948. By 1955, it was estimated that approximately 900,000 Arab Palestinian refugees lived in Gaza and in the neighbouring countries of Syria, Lebanon, and Jordan. In 1956, Canada welcomed 39 Arab Palestinian families.

### Hungarians (1956)

In 1956, Hungarians rebelled against Soviet occupation. By the time the attempted revolution was suppressed, nearly a quarter of a million Hungarians had escaped the country. The Canadian government was very slow to react at first, but the media covered the events of the uprising extensively, and the Canadian public came to perceive the Hungarian refugees as freedom fighters. Public opinion turned in favour of the refugees and Canadian media was filled with calls on the government to do something. Responding to strong domestic pressure, the Canadian government eventually jumped into action, and resettled 37,000 Hungarian refugees.



*Tibetan girls perform a traditional Tibetan dance in Patan, Nepal. 01 July 1962  
Photo # 75204*



*Palestinian Refugees in Refugee Camps  
Children at the Damascus Reception  
Centre. [1948?] 01 January 1948.  
Damascus, Syria. Photo # 328299*

#### **Chinese People (1960s)**

Throughout the 1960s, hundreds of thousands of people sought to flee from ravages and instability associated with large-scale economic and social reform projects in China. Thousands applied to seek refuge in Canada. 109 families were selected to be resettled in Canada in the early 1960s, but most were turned away.

#### **Czechoslovakians (1968-1969)**

11,000 Czechoslovakians were granted refuge in Canada following the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia. Many individual Canadians, Canadian universities, provincial and municipal agencies, and other organizations rallied in an effort to facilitate the resettlement process.

#### **Tibetans (1970-1972)**

Canada welcomed 228 Tibetan refugees; according to the Canadian Council for refugees, these were among the very first non-European refugees to be resettled in Canada.

#### **Bengali Muslims (1971)**

Thousands of Bengali Muslims seek refuge in Canada following the outbreak of the Bangladesh Liberation War.

#### **Ugandans (1972-1973)**

Following the expulsion of Ugandan Asians from Uganda on the orders of then president, Idi Amin, Canada moved quickly to resettle more than 7,000 Ugandan Asian refugees.

#### **Chileans (1970s)**

The 1973 coup d'état that led to the overthrow of Chilean President Salvador Allende's government in 1973 led many Chileans to seek refuge in other countries. The Canadian government was initially reluctant to admit Chilean refugees; there were concerns that those who fled might have left leaning tendencies, and that accepting them as refugees could trouble Canada's relationship with the United States government. As had happened with the Hungarians, the media provided constant coverage of the events, and civil society, particularly churches, organized to pressure the government into action. As a result, 7,000 Chileans and other Latin Americans, including political prisoners and their families, were welcomed to Canada.

#### **Americans (1970s)**

Tens of thousands of American war resisters fled from the United States to Canada in order to avoid being drafted to fight in the Vietnam War.

#### **Iranians (1979 onward)**

Following the overthrow of the Shah in 1979 and the consolidation of the Islamic Revolution, many Iranians fled and continue to flee the country. Since that time, thousands of Iranians, including members of the persecuted Baha'i community, continue to come to Canada each year, many of whom have been admitted as refugees.



Vietnamese refugees at the Pulau Bidong refugee camp in Malaysia. This camp has about 36,000 Vietnamese refugees. 01 August 1979 Malaysia. Photo # 101363



**1951:**  
**United Nations  
Convention Relating to  
the Status of Refugees**

Although a Canadian, Leslie Chance, had chaired the United Nations committee which drafted the Refugee Convention, the Canadian government decided not to sign the agreement when it was finalized in 1951. Many of the Cabinet ministers of the time were concerned that the Convention would limit their ability to deport people that they considered to be security risks, particularly communists.

**1962:**  
The Canadian government officially abolishes racial discrimination in the selection of immigrants.

**1967:**  
Family sponsorship rules are made equal for all, and the point system enable economic immigrants to be selected according the same criteria universally.

**Vietnamese 'Boat People',  
Cambodians, and Laotians  
(1979-1980)**

**OTTAWA'S PROJECT 4000**

Saigon fell to communist North Vietnam in April 1975. As the North Vietnamese took over the city, many of those who had supported the U.S. backed South Vietnamese regime fled the country by any means available to them, but most did not make it out. Many were killed, and millions were imprisoned and sent to re-education camps.

Conflict continued to spread throughout the region. In Laos, members of the Hmong ethno-cultural minority who had fought alongside American troupes fled their country in December 1975 after Soviet backed forces defeated the royalist government. When the Vietnamese invaded Cambodia three years later, thousands of Cambodians fled to Thailand. The Vietnamese proceeded to topple Pol Pot's Khmer Rouge regime, to which the Chinese retaliated by invading northern Vietnam in support of their Khmer Rouge allies. At this point, Vietnam's ethnic Chinese population, who had already been experiencing repression in Vietnam, were targeted for persecution and imprisonment, and were forced to flee. By this time, the region was dealing with a massive

refugee crisis, with nearly 1.5 million people trying to flee.

Most fled overland to neighbouring countries, but approximately 300,000 people paid human traffickers exorbitant fees to secure a spot for themselves and their families on crowded, barely seaworthy boats. Nearly a third of these 'boat people' died at sea desperately trying to make their way across the South China Sea to reach the shores of neighbouring countries that were already overwhelmed by hundreds of thousands of refugees trying to survive in inadequate camps.

Every month saw 50,000 new refugees arriving in Thailand, Singapore, Indonesia, Malaysia, and the Philippines. Soon enough, these countries began turning away the boat arriving at their shores, and in June 1979, these countries declared that they would no longer be accepting any new refugees. The UN called on the world to respond to the crisis, and soon thereafter cities across Canada began organizing.

In Toronto, Professor Howard Adelman called a meeting to encourage the federal government to welcome more refugees. The meeting led to the launch of Operation Lifeline, which worked to inform Canadians about the new private sponsorship provision that had come into effect in 1978, and then

## Boat people capture hearts of Ottawans

*The Citizen, June 30, 1979*

## Overwhelming show of support: Dewar, planners, ecstatic as 2,500 Ottawans turn out to back refugee project

*Ottawa Citizen, July 13, 1979*

## Canada sets plan: 50,000 goal on refugees

*Ottawa Citizen, July 18, 1979*

to facilitate the sponsorship process for would-be sponsors.

One of the most spectacular efforts emerged from Ottawa. Much like other Canadians, Mayor Marion Dewar watched in horror as the tragedy was reported on televisions across the country. It was the first time that such events were shown in real-time on television. Moved to action, she organized a meeting on June 27, 1979 with Ottawa's community, church, and business leaders to establish what the city could do to help resettle some of the refugees. Though most were very supportive, a federal immigration official who had been invited to the meeting suggested that Canada had already done a lot having already reached half of the 8,000 people quota that had been set for the 'boat people' refugees. To this, Marion Dewar is said to have responded: "Fine. We'll take the other 4000." Thus was born Project 4000!

News of her reply spread across the country, and Mayor Dewar called on the federal government to do more in response to the crisis, and encouraged other Canadian cities to join in the effort. She found resounding support for her initiative, as Ottawa's city council gave her unanimous support, and approximately 2,500 people attended a meeting at Lansdowne Park to learn about the crisis and about what they could do to help.

The City of Ottawa contributed \$25,000 to launch Project 4000, which would assist Ottawa residents who wanted to sponsor refugees through the federal government's innovative, new Private Sponsorship of Refugees Program. The community response was astounding; thousands of Ottawa residents organized sponsorship groups. The Ottawa Citizen enthusiastically contributed to the effort, helping to connect would-be sponsors, committing to sponsor a family,



and encouraging other businesses to follow suit. Thousands more Ottawans made donations big and small. Notably, a property development company donated downtown space to house the project and its staff.

At the time there was no infrastructure to support the arrival of so many newcomers, so the Project 4000 coordinator and his 3 staff members had their work cut out for them: finding suitable housing, enrolling children in school, organizing language training, finding adequate winter clothing for everyone, preparing for the inevitable culture shock, etc. To this end, Project staff organized six volunteer committees to deal with different areas of challenge: housing, employment, education, health, fundraising, and media relations.

Ottawa became an example for the nation. More than 7000 private sponsorship groups formed across the country, and in the end, the quota was raised from 8000 people to 60,000. Later, the Honourable Flora McDonald, Minister for External Affairs would reveal that Project 4000 had been instrumental in convincing Cabinet to approve the increase. By 1983, when the Project was coming to an end, approximately 2,000 people were privately sponsored, and another 1,600 were sponsored by the federal



Vietnamese refugees living at the Songkhla refugee camp in Thailand. 01 July 1979 Thailand. Photo # 100465



**1968:**

Immigration rules are changed to allow military deserters to receive landed immigrant status in Canada.

**1969:**

Canada accedes to the United Nations Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees and the 1967 Protocol, and agrees not to return people to their country of origin if they have grounds to fear persecution.

**1970:**

A ‘Guideline for the Determination of Eligibility for Refugee Status’ to be used by immigration officers selecting refugees is issued. Canada also introduces a policy for oppressed minorities so people facing oppression but unable to flee across borders can be admitted to Canada as refugees.

government, bringing the total number of refugees resettled in Ottawa to 3,600. Across the country, 60,049 Vietnamese, Cambodian, and Laotian refugees found refuge in Canada, of which 32,281 were privately sponsored, 1,790 were sponsored by family members, and 25,978 were GARs.

*\* To learn more about the arrival and settlement of the ‘boat people’ in Ottawa, we encourage you to consult James Powell’s excellent summary of the effort, Today in Ottawa’s History: Project 4000, and for a more detailed account, Brian Buckley’s book, Gift of Freedom: How Ottawa welcomed the Vietnamese, Cambodian, and Laotian refugees.*

**Project 4000  
brought out  
best in  
community**

*Ottawa Citizen,  
October 8, 1989*

**Don Smith** is the chair of the Refugee Working Group of the Anglican Archdiocese of Ottawa and a member of the Coalition in Ottawa for Refugees (COR). He and his family sponsored a family from Southeast Asia in 1979. At an event organized by COR, he described his experience as follows: “It was a life changing experience for us. It put a personal face on a suffering people but in the years to come it also blessed us with friendships, as we are invited as honoured guests to celebrate births, graduations and weddings. We continue to share joys and sorrows, laughter and tears with these same people who we helped many years ago.”

**Source:** *Gruending, Dennis. “Canadians Must Respond to the Syrian Crisis: UN Ask Us to Accept 10,000 Refugees.” Rabble.ca, June 20, 2014.*

**The Honourable Paul Dewar** reminisced about Project 4000: “It was a magical thing. People in Ottawa decided to sponsor and support other people who needed help. We now call the people who arrived then our neighbours and friends. There is no reason that we can’t do that again.”

**Source:** *Gruending, Dennis. “Canadians Must Respond to the Syrian Crisis: UN Ask Us to Accept 10,000 Refugees.” Rabble.ca, June 20, 2014.*



A Somali refugee and his child  
in Malkadiida, Ethiopia.  
25 August 2011  
Photo # 483087



\* The following is small sample of the origins of the people who have been resettled since the 1990s.

### *Somalis (mid-1980s onward)*

#### **RESETTLING SOMALI REFUGEES IN OTTAWA**

People began to flee from Somalia by the tens of thousands in the mid-1980s. Initially, they were fleeing the human rights abuses perpetrated by the regime of Mohamed Siad Barre, and then from the civil war that led to the fall of the regime in 1991. It is estimated that approximately a fifth of the population had left Somalia by 1990. The flow of refugees did not stop with the overthrow of the regime because Somalia was completely destabilized by the civil war, and remains unstable to this day. The Somali diaspora has established itself all around the world, and Canada has received 55,000 to 70,000 Somali refugees.

Somalis arrived in Ottawa (and other Canadian cities) under very different circumstances than the Indochinese 'boat people' had in the early 1980s. They did not benefit from the same kind of political leadership and broad societal goodwill and welcome that had given rise to Project 4000. Most arrived in Ottawa as refugee claimants or through the family reunification class, rather than as GARs or PSRs, meaning that they did not receive resettlement assistance from the government or from sponsors. Moreover, the lack of broad public support meant that church groups, businesses, and thousands of Ottawa residents

were not organizing to smooth over their settlement process. Further complicating matters, the media tended to reinforce stereotypes, prejudices, and fears about Somalis and their faith.

Initially the media portrayed Somalis as queue-jumpers who were coming to Canada to take advantage of our health and social services, when the reality was that many of them wished nothing more than to be able to go back to their old lives. Many of the Somali people who came to Canada were middle-class urban professionals who had been forced to abandon a good life. Although life in Somalia had been far from idyllic, they had come from a beautiful, warm country with long white beaches on the ocean, and were a little shocked to arrive in a country that spent months frozen in the grips of winter each year. Initially, the focus of many Somali refugees was on bringing an end to the war in Somalia and on planning their return. As the crisis in Somalia dragged on, it became obvious to Somali leaders, especially to Somali mothers, that they would have to focus on the future of their children and on building a new life for themselves here in Canada.

The Somali Canadian community rallied. In the absence of the welcome and supports offered to government assisted and privately sponsored refugees, they relied on the traditional Somali Kinship model that requires

each member of the community to support those in need without any reservation to support each other in their resettlement and integration process. They also built strong relationships with progressive organizations and with minority communities. These two factors (mutual aid and alliances) were essential to the ability of Somali refugees to help their family find refuge in Canada, to navigate through the resettlement process, and to survive while their refugee claims were being processed.

One of the most challenging barriers faced by Somali refugee claimants was Bill C-86, an amendment made to the Immigration Act in 1993, which required all applicants, including refugee claimants, to have valid passports or other recognized forms of identification in order to become a permanent resident. The stated purpose of the amendment was to combat immigration fraud, but it had a terrible impact on refugees, because many are unable to produce valid identification. There are many valid reasons for this; for example, many are unable to secure travel documents before they flee over international borders, and others may be forced to use false documents to escape persecution by their governments. In the case of the Somali refugees, those who fled after the collapse of the Somali state could not obtain valid passports, because there was no longer a central authority to issue and update passports and other official identification documents. As a result of the new amendment, Somali refugees arriving in Canada



*Somali refugees sell goods at their camp in Dollo Ado, Ethiopia. 25 August 2011  
Photo # 483001*

#### 1976:

With the passage of the 1976 Immigration Act, the Refugee Convention definition of a refugee is entrenched in Canada, and for the first time refugees are recognized as a special class of immigrants in Canada. Before then, refugees were admitted through orders in council, which relaxed screening criteria and suspended immigration regulations for the designated group of refugees.

The Act also enables Canadians to privately sponsor refugees, a provision that remains unique in the world. Since then, 275,000 refugees have been resettled in Canada through private sponsorship.

#### 1978:

The Act came into effect in April 1978.

were stuck in a state of legal limbo. They could not reunite with their families, they could not attend university unless they were able to pay international student fees, they were ineligible for certain types of employment, they could not re-enter Canada if they left. The situation improved somewhat in 1997, when Canada introduced the Undocumented Convention Refugees in Canada Class as a way to accommodate refugee claimants who could not produce valid documents, but it still left refugees waiting for an average of seven years without permanent status. The issue was finally resolved in 2000 after a group of Somali refugees launched a successful Charter challenge. It was a great victory for the Somali refugees who were involved and for all the undocumented refugees who have arrived since then.

Despite these challenges, Somali refugees and their descendants have shown themselves to be incredibly resilient, and as the example above demonstrates, their efforts to build a life for themselves in Canada has been marked by real triumphs. In overcoming the barriers to their own

settlement and equitable integration, the Somali Canadian community has paved the way for other refugees, and has made Canada a more inclusive and welcoming country. Today, the Somali community is thriving, which is visible by the number of Somali students present on University campuses throughout the country. Exemplifying the progress made by the Somali community, and hinting at progressive change occurring in Canada as a whole, the Honourable Ahmed Hussein, a former Somali refugee, became the first Somali Canadian elected to the House of Commons on October 19th, 2015.

*\* To learn more about the arrival and settlement of the Somali refugees, we encourage you to consult, Somali Refugee Resettlement in Canada, a paper presented to the 18th National Metropolis Conference, by the Ontario Council of Agencies Serving Immigrants.*

**Aurelia Achor** arrived in Canada as a refugee from South Sudan in 1990. Since then she has sponsored 29 refugees from many different countries on her own. At an event organized by COR she called on others to become private sponsors: "I have eight children of my own, so if I can sponsor refugees, then all of you can do it. Go home and think about it when you are eating your next meal. You can't sponsor all refugees but you can help who you can."

**Source:** Gruending, Dennis. "Canadians Must Respond to the Syrian Crisis: UN Ask Us to Accept 10,000 Refugees." Rabble.ca, June 20, 2014.

**In 1986, the United Nations awarded the Nansen Medal to the people of Canada for their outstanding tradition of settling refugees.**





*Kosovar refugees fleeing their homeland. 01 March 1999. Blace area, The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia  
Photo # 50810*

**Bosnian Muslims (1992)**

5,000 Bosnian Muslim refugees fleeing ethnic cleansing in the Yugoslav Civil War were welcomed to Canada.

**Kosovars (1999)**

**OPERATION PARASOL**

In April 1999, at the height of the war on Kosovo, Macedonia closed its border to the hundreds of thousands of people fleeing the massacres being committed by Slobodan Milosevic's military. Footage and photographs of cold, wet, mud-covered Kosovar refugees trapped at the Macedonian border were shown around the world. The Canadian government decided to airlift 5,000 Kosovar refugees, to bring them to refugee bases in Canada, and to automatically grant them refugee status, which would allow them to seek permanent residency in Canada. They also fast-tracked the Kosovo Family Reunification Program, which allowed another 2,200 Kosovar refugees to join their family members in Canada.

**Colombians (2005 onward)**

Colombia has been marked by internal conflict for decades, and civilians have often been the targets of the military, right-wing militias, and leftist guerrilla forces alike. Since 2005, Canada has resettled approximately 150,000 Columbian refugees.

**Karen (2006)**

Canada welcomed 3,900 Karen refugees who had been living in refugee camps in Thailand.

**Bhutanese (2008-2013)**

Canada welcomed and resettled 5,000 Bhutanese refugees.

**Iraqis (2003 onward)**

Many Iraqi refugees sought refuge in Canada as they fled the violence and chaos that followed the American-led Operation Iraqi Freedom, and more have sought refuge in Canada since the Iraqi insurgency and civil war began in 2011.

**Tamil Refugees (2009-2010)**

Hundreds of Sri Lankan Tamil asylum seekers arrived on the West coast on the MV Ocean Lady and MV Sun Sea in 2009 and 2010. Using the provisions of Bill C-31, many, including women and children, were sent to detention centres, where they did not have access to lawyers and psychosocial supports. Some were kept in detention centres for years. In the end, the great majority were accorded refugee status.

**Haitians (2010 onward)**

Canada welcomed thousands of Haitian refugees, including many orphaned children, after the devastating 2010 earthquake in Haiti.

*Haiti: Months after the Earthquake  
A girl washes a cooker outside her tent  
at the refugee camp of Mais Gate in Port au  
Prince. 04 November 2010.  
Port-au-Prince, Haiti  
Photo # 465284*





#### 1985:

The Supreme Court of Canada rendered the Singh decision, which recognized that refugee claimants are entitled to fundamental justice under the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms. As a result, all refugee claimants were entitled to an oral hearing, and Canada's responsibility to provide the necessities of life while they wait for a hearing was confirmed.

#### 1993:

Guidelines on Women Refugee Claimants Fearing Gender Related Persecution are issued by the Chairperson of the Immigration and Refugee Board. Canada was the first country in the world to issue such guidelines. An amendment to the Immigration Act was introduced which required that all applicants, including refugees, have passports or satisfactory ID in order to be granted landing. The stated purpose of the amendment was to combat immigration fraud, but it

*Jordan Camp Host to Thousands of Syrian Cross-Border Refugees. 07 December 2012. Mafraq, Jordan. Photo # 537294*

#### Syrians (2011-2015)

The Syrian refugee crisis began in 2011 with the onset of the armed conflicts which would lead to the Syrian Civil War. Over 4 million Syrian fled and sought refuge in the neighbouring countries of Iraq, Lebanon, Jordan, Turkey, and Egypt, and 2.8 million have been registered as refugees. Many Syrian Canadians, civil society, and religious groups applied to privately sponsor Syrians refugees, and thousands of Syrian refugees applied to come to Canada, but slow processing times, restrictive rules limiting which refugees could be sponsored, extremely complicated forms combined with a lack of local government officials to offer guidance made the process extremely difficult. The result was that compared to the efforts being made in European countries, Canada welcomed relatively few Syrian refugees during this period.

#### Syrians (2015-2016)

#### CALLS FOR A NEW PROJECT 4000 – OTTAWA AND THE SYRIAN RESETTLEMENT EFFORT

By the summer of 2015, the Syrian Civil War had forced 4 million Syrians to flee their country, and had internally displaced another 7 million. Widely recognized as one of the worst humanitarian crises of our time, the refugee crisis had been ongoing since 2011. Despite all of this, the Canadian response to the crisis had remained muted. Many Canadians were eagerly seeking to privately sponsor Syrian refugees, but their efforts were fraught with challenges, and bureaucratic delays.

As early as June 19th, 2014, the Coalition in Ottawa for Refugees (COR) was calling for Project 4000 to be re-ignited to welcome Syrian refugees, but the event barely secured a mention in the Ottawa Citizen, and failed to garner widespread support; the broader community was simply not engaged.

All of that changed on September 2, 2015 when the body of a three-year-old Syrian boy, Alan Kurdi, washed up on the shores of Turkey and was captured in a photograph that made headlines around the world. Like so many others, his family had attempted to cross the Mediterranean to reach the shores of Europe, only to drown at sea. The photo sparked international outrage.

Canadians soon learned that the family had hoped to join an aunt in Canada, but had been having difficulties meeting the stringent requirements set by the Canadian government. In particular, the family had been unable to obtain an official recognition of their refugee status from the Turkish government, a document which is near impossible to obtain in Turkey. The family had boarded a flimsy inflatable rubber boat in an attempt to reach the Greek Island of Kos in the hopes of obtaining the document needed to complete their application there.

The heart-breaking sight of the toddler and the knowledge that Canada could have saved the family shook many Canadians to their core, and almost overnight the question of Syrian refugee resettlement became a core electoral issue in the 2015 federal election campaign. The Liberal Party promised to resettle 10,000 refugees by the end of the year for which they garnered resounding support. After the elections, the newly elected Liberal government committed to resettling a total of 35,000 Syrian refugees by the end of 2016. The effort became a national project as cities across the country readied to welcome all the newcomers.

In Ottawa, Mayor Jim Watson publicly announced that Ottawa would do what it could to help, and following the federal elections, the city jumped into action. Ottawa was expecting to welcome over a thousand refugees over the course of just a few months.

**“This is an exciting moment where the whole community and all of its institutions have the shared intention of welcoming the new refugees. There is an unprecedented sentiment of solidarity with refugees. And what made the difference is government leadership, which really helped to set the tone, and the media which has helped to encourage public sympathy for the refugees.”**

*Hindia Mohamoud, Director, OLIP*

## Canadians ready to take in thousands more refugees

*Ottawa Citizen, September 8, 2015.*

## Political leadership needed in refugee crisis, UN official says

*Ottawa Citizen, September 4, 2015.*

## Let's show we care

*Ottawa Citizen, September 4, 2015.*

## Canada can lead world

*Ottawa Citizen, November 20, 2015.*

Ottawa's capacity to resettle, orient, and integrate newcomers has flourished since our first major refugee resettlement effort – Project 4000. At the time, Ottawa did not have well-developed settlement agencies, and local health, social, and community services had little experience in working with diverse newcomers. Today, Ottawa has a capable and experienced network of settlement services for immigrants and refugees, and the local health, social, and community services have made considerable progress in their capacity to effectively serve Ottawa's increasingly diverse populations in an inclusive and equitable manner. Moreover, since late 2009, OLIP and its partners have made tremendous strides in building settlement and integration capacity in Ottawa; it has multiplied and deepened the connections both within the settlement sector, and between the settlement sector and health, education, and economic development sectors, among others. OLIP has also raised awareness about the needs of newcomers in multiple sectors. Thanks to these

new capacities, the people who were brought together in support of the refugee resettlement effort already knew each other, and had developed a certain level of trust between each other. Nevertheless, there was a need for an entity and structure dedicated solely to the coordination of Ottawa's Syrian refugee resettlement effort.

Perceiving this need, several individuals, including Louisa Taylor jumped into action and, with help from the settlement, health, and education sectors, were able to create Refugee 613. Part of what distinguished this refugee resettlement effort from Project 4000 was that funding had not been made available for a coordinating body, which was a serious gap in the planning process. The settlement sector was able to secure a few months of initial funding through the Community Foundation of Ottawa thanks to an anonymous donor, and with guidance from MPP Yasir Naqvi, Refugee 613 was then able to secure one year of funding from the provincial government.





Syrian Refugee Settlement,  
Beqaa Valley, Lebanon.  
25 March 2016.  
Beqaa Valley, Lebanon  
Photo # 668850

placed an extreme burden on refugees who came from states where there was no authority to issue or renew passports.

**2012:**

The Canadian government passes Bill C-31, known as the Protecting Canada's Immigration System Act, which facilitates the exclusion of certain refugees, such as political prisoners and activists.

It also enacts mandatory detention of certain kinds of refugee claimants, such as those who used human smugglers to get to Canada; two policies which are in contravention of the Refugee Convention.

The Bill also creates a list of countries considered to be safe, which are determined unlikely to produce refugees. Refugee claimants from these countries are denied appeal procedures.

## UN urges Canada to welcome Syrians; Refugee crisis 'worst humanitarian problem' since Rwandan genocide

*Ottawa Citizen, May 27, 2014*

## UN slams treatment of refugees; Kept in prisons, detainees treated worse than criminals, lawyer says

*Ottawa Citizen, August 29, 2014.*

The initiative took on a hub and spoke model and leveraged the structures and relationships created by OLIP to bring together all the people that would need to work together. Refugee 613 also invited some of the people that had been involved in the organization and governance of Project 4000, such as Barbara Gamble, who had played a key role in getting the project off the ground and who has privately

sponsored several refugee families since then. Ms. Gamble brought with her the institutional knowledge from Project 4000, which helped to refine the model for Refugee 613. She also brought with her a vast well of experience and knowledge which was essential in foreseeing some of the services that the Syrian refugees would need upon arrival in Ottawa.

Once formed, Refugee 613 strived to inform, connect, and inspire people across the city. It worked to inform community leaders and citizens. It sought to connect the sectors working toward the Syrian refugee resettlement effort, to connect citizens who wished to sponsor Syrian refugees, and to connect citizens who wished to volunteer with volunteer opportunities. Finally, it rallied energy and goodwill to inspire the city to action. Within 10 days of launching their website, Refugee 613 had already received 5000 calls and emails from people wishing to get involved in the effort.

Pretty soon, Syrian refugees began arriving in Ottawa by the hundreds, and settlement agencies who are already stretched for resources under normal circumstances were making a super-human effort to care for all the newcomers. Other service agencies in the city were being stretched too as they scrambled to connect the newcomers with doctors, counsellors, schools for the children, language schools for the adults, etc.

One of the biggest and most pressing challenges was finding housing for all the refugees in a city where affordable housing is already very scarce. The Refugee Housing Taskforce had been preparing for the worst – going as far as making a list of people who had rooms available in their homes, and

of winterised cottages outside of the city. The number of people who were ready to share their space and welcome refugees into their homes revealed the breathtaking magnitude of the goodwill present in the city, but such an arrangement would have represented a severe logistical challenge from the perspective of service provision. In the end, Carl Nicholson, Executive Director of the Catholic Centre for Immigrants (CCI) and member of the Refugee Housing Taskforce collaborated with private sector landlords to devise an innovative solution to the problem. CCI and the landlords would enter into a partnership whereby private landlords would initially set aside units and provide housing for refugees at a reduced rate, and CCI would keep their vacancy rate near zero, and take charge of some of the tenant administration responsibilities associated with the Syrian refugees. Against all expectations, by April 21st, all of the 1,112 refugees that came to Ottawa had already found permanent housing!

The Syrian refugee resettlement effort is still in its early stages. The refugees have arrived and have settled into their new homes, but so much more remains to be done in order to ensure the success of the resettlement effort. Nevertheless, with all of the goodwill and generosity that Ottawans have expressed, there is good reason to hope that Ottawa will succeed in this collective project.

## How Ottawa is preparing for the influx

**“Officials are confident that with planning and the surge of goodwill among Ottawans eager to help, we’ll cope well.”**

*Ottawa Citizen, April 21, 2016*

## All 1,112 Syrian refugees find permanent housing

*Ottawa Citizen, April 21, 2016*

### **2012:**

The Canadian government makes reforms to the Interim Federal Health Program which provides health-care to refugees. These reforms severely limited the healthcare provided to certain classes of refugees, especially to refugee claimants.

### **2015:**

The lack of appeal procedure for refugee claimants from safe countries is deemed unconstitutional by the Federal Court.

Cuts to refugee health are successfully challenged in Federal Court.

### **2016:**

The Canadian government restores the Federal Health Program for refugees.

# “We were part of a generation that wanted to change the world.”

Carl Nicholson, E.D. CCI

## Legacy

### *Project 4000*

Those involved in Project 4000 and in the broader Canadian resettlement effort were part of a generation that wanted to change the world. Their participation changed them forever, sensitizing them to the plight of refugees. Those who had privately sponsored refugees in particular, forged lasting friendships that instilled a deep multigenerational awareness and inclination to help those in need.

Many of the people who had been involved in the effort continued to work in support of refugees long after Project 4000 wound down. Some went on to become public servants, lawyers, judges, mayors, Members of Parliament and Provincial Parliament – some would even argue Prime Ministers – where they helped to shape and refine Canada’s immigration and refugee policy. Others went on to work in the settlement sector to help newcomers with their settlement and integration, and to advocate on behalf of these vulnerable populations when it was necessary – the 1980s were a time when federal, provincial, and municipal Canadian governments wanted feedback from the population and not only welcomed advocacy, but actively encouraged it by funding advocacy groups. Others simply became lifelong allies creating a more receptive and welcoming environment in homes, places of worship, schools, and workplaces throughout the city, and country.

### *A More Welcoming, Inclusive, and Equitable Country and City*

One of the most valuable legacies of Project 4000 and of subsequent refugee resettlement efforts has been to help Canada and Ottawa to become the diverse, welcoming, inclusive, and equitable country and city that they are today. Integration is a two-way street – it requires that immigrants seek to settle and to make a home for themselves in Canada, and it requires that Canadians facilitate this process by refraining from erecting unnecessary barriers to integration, and by genuine welcoming and recognizing immigrants and refugees as new members of the community.

**Barbara Gamble had this to say about her experience of sponsoring refugees over the years:**

**“What I have found is that it dissipates people’s anxieties and fears about otherness, which is really positive and all comes from building connections and relationships.”**

This is not always an easy process. People are often suspicious and fearful of the unknown, and without contact and exposure to people who are different from ourselves by their appearance, their faith, and their culture, all we know of each other are the crude stereotypes that prevail at any given time. When the Vietnamese, Cambodian, and Laotian people arrived, there were many in Canada who were fearful. All that most Canadians knew about the refugees was that they were coming from areas where communist ideology ran strong. Although the refugees arriving in Canada tended to be vehemently anti-communist, because they had lost so much to the spread of communism, many Canadians believed that some of the refugees would be communists, and that it was simply too dangerous to allow them to come to Canada. This fear proved to be completely unfounded, and as Canadians came to know the newcomers, as they became friends, co-workers, and school mates, they became more open and welcoming.





This pattern has been repeated time and time again since the early 1980s, and Canada has become a better country with each repetition.

### ***Development of the Settlement Sector***

One of the major legacies of 'boat people' resettlement effort was the realisation that Canada would benefit tremendously from having professional settlement services. The system that emerged is unique in the world. Rather than having a one-size fits all approach funded and administered by the government, or a system that relies exclusively on charity and goodwill, the system that developed in Canada is one where non-government organizations, partly funded by the government and partly funded through charitable donations, operates at arms lengths from the government to offer professional, but targeted, settlement services.

In Ottawa, two local organizations agreed to specialize in different areas of settlement work, OCISO would take care of all the education and language training needs, and CCI would take care of other settlement needs, including help navigating various systems, preparing applications and filling out forms, accompanying newcomers to appointment, etc. In 1989, CCI also launched a reception house to house

refugees when they first arrive in Ottawa. Today, there are over 11 settlement agencies operating in Ottawa, some of which offer more community specific services, such as the Ottawa Chinese Community Services Centre, the Lebanese and Arab Social Services Agency, and the Somali Centre for Families and others, such as OCISO and CCI, that offer specialized services to all immigrant and refugee newcomers.

These organizations have tremendous experience working with newcomers, and have been able to learn from all the previous waves of newcomers. When the Somali refugees arrived, for example, the schools were not ready to deal with so many new students and parents with little official language competence. It took quite some time to develop a model that worked to support the new students, their families, and the school system through the integration process, but in the end OCISO and the Ottawa Carleton District School Board collaborated to develop the Multicultural Liaison Officer program, which has since been replicate in schools across the country. Like so many others since then, the Syrian refugee children and their families will benefit tremendously from the knowledge that has been accumulated over the years and from the programs that have been developed.



*Kosovo Refugees  
Boys carrying their families' bread rations.  
01 April 1999. Photo # 384472*

### **Potential Legacy of the Syrian Refugee Resettlement Effort**

While it is too early to identify what the legacy of the current Syrian refugee resettlement effort will be, those who have been involved in the process can already perceive a few possibilities.

### **A Renewal of Community Engagement and Support for Refugees**

Within 10 days of its launch, over 5000 people had registered their desire to volunteer in support of the Syrian resettlement effort on the Refugee 613 website. Settlement organizations were flooded by emails and phone calls from people who wished to help. It was beautiful and heartening, and also completely unexpected. Local organizations simply did not have the capacity to train and to channel so many volunteers, especially at a time when they were receiving hundreds of refugees each week. The experience revealed a world of possibilities for improving organizations' capacity to harness and to channel citizens' desire to be engaged and to help. The organizations involved note that dedicated funding would be needed to train, organize, and channel large numbers of volunteers, but that the benefits of doing so would be incredible. Settlement agencies have already begun to develop this capacity. The Catholic Centre for Immigrants, for example, has launched a program called Circle of Friends, which trains volunteers to form support networks for refugees as they settle in their new lives in Canada.

Another way in which public goodwill and energy was revealed was in the sheer number of people who wanted to privately sponsor refugees. There were more people willing to sponsor refugees than the total number of private sponsorship spots allocated by the government for the whole year! Many more people could be brought in, and many hope that the government will move to expand the private sponsorship program.

### **Bringing Attention to Other People in Need in Our Community**

The Syrian refugee crisis took the country by storm in the Fall of 2015, and once it was confirmed that thousands of refugees would be resettled in a short period of time, Canadians jumped into action, forming group to privately sponsor refugees, fundraising, volunteering, donating, finding innovative solutions to chronic problems, such as housing, for example. It did not take long for people to start asking why we do not exert the same effort to help other vulnerable populations, such as the homeless, for example. It is an excellent question. Given all that we are willing to do for refugees, it became obvious that we do not do enough to help vulnerable populations at home. With this fresh realization, there is hope that some of those who were moved to help in the refugee resettlement effort, will decide to help tackle domestic challenges as well.

### **Increased Collaboration among Faith Communities**

There is a long history of multifaith collaboration in the refugee resettlement sector in Ottawa. Since the early days of Project 4000, COR, a non-profit coalition of groups that facilitate the private sponsorship process, has facilitated collaboration between many faith communities, including the Anglicans, Baptists, Lutherans, Mennonites, Presbyterians, Roman Catholics, Unitarians, and United Church. Although the Coalition also counted among its member organizations such as the Ottawa Muslim Women's Organization, most of the interfaith collaboration taking place in support of refugees in Ottawa was among Christians. All of this has begun to change with the Syrian resettlement effort. More than ever before, Christian churches have been collaborating with local Mosques and people of Muslim faith. The project has also had a positive impact within the Muslim community itself, as it has led to a significant increase in collaboration between local Mosques and Muslims of different world regions. Part of this work has involved organizing and assisting people who wish to



Vietnamese refugees who live in boats anchored at Koh Paed Island in Thailand.  
01 January 1978  
Photo # 99591



sponsor refugees, and fundraising effort to help settle refugees when they arrive. These networks of collaboration have the potential to significantly increase the voluntary sector's capacity in Ottawa.

#### **Shedding Light on Existing Problems in our Community**

Our healthcare system, social safety net, and affordable housing are severely under-resourced. Those who work in community health and resource centres have been aware of these issues for many years. People struggle to find a doctor. People struggle to find affordable housing. What affordable housing exists is often neglected and ill-kept. People cannot survive on social assistance. People have to wait approximately three months to access counselling. Families cannot find affordable day-care services, which forces some parents out of the labour market. Transportation is a major challenge for many. Our services, and the people who offer them, are running at capacity. Many people know this, but they do not necessarily grasp the magnitude of the problem.

Many of those who privately sponsored refugees are relatively well-off and do not usually have to grapple with these issues. In preparing for the arrival of the refugees that they have sponsored, private sponsors must find them affordable housing, must identify the kinds of services that refugees might need, and maybe try to find them a family doctor. In completing these preparations, sponsors have become intimately aware of the sad state of our services. All have bemoaned how difficult it is to find housing. Most have been surprised at how little money refugees are expected to survive on, and at the thought that this is the same amount being received by those who receive social assistance. With these issues brought to the surface, there is hope that they may be addressed and that decision makers might see the need to invest in these essential services.

#### **Innovative Solutions that have Broader Applicability**

When a crisis strikes and people are forced to network with new people to find solutions to pressing challenges, there are often many opportunities for synergy between sectors. One of the ways that this has already manifested itself in Ottawa is in the housing sector. The crisis brought people working in the settlement sector into contact with people working on issues of homelessness and inadequate access to affordable housing, landlords, and others. The settlement sector which has been working with private sector landlords for years, was able to devise an innovative solution to the refugee housing challenge, whereby CCI promised to keep the vacancy rate close to zero, and to deal with any issues arising with the refugees, while the landlords agreed to provide a few months of housing rent free. This is a new model that could be used to tackle the homelessness problem, and the access to affordable housing problem.





*Hungarian Refugees Arrive  
in Yugoslavia  
01 March 1957  
Photo # 358004*

## Final Thoughts

Canada has a long history of contradictory responses to refugee settlement. At times we have come together and strived to welcome as many refugees as possible, in as warm a manner as possible, giving in to our kindness, compassion, and generosity. These times were captured in our response to the Hungarians, the Vietnamese, Cambodian, and Laotian 'boat people', the Kosovars, and now, the Syrians. At other times we have resisted responding to refugee crises, giving in to our fears. These times we remember in our response to the Sikhs on Komagata Maru in 1914, to the German Jews in 1939, to the Somalis in the early 1990s, to the Tamils in 2010, to the Iraqi and Syrian refugees from 2012 to 2015, among others.

Our political leaders and the media have had and continue to have much power to sway public sentiment in one direction or the other. They lead the way calling on our better selves, or giving voice to our fears. At a time when anti-immigrant and anti-Muslim sentiments are being stoked in the United States, it may be wise to remember an old parable:

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We extend our heartfelt thanks to the leaders who govern from a place of compassion, to the media organizations and journalist who have helped to inform us on the plight of refugees, and to the thousands of Ottawans who enthusiastically responded with goodwill and generosity.

**A grandfather tells his grandchild about a terrible fight going on inside of him “It is a terrible fight between two wolves. One is angry, envious, greedy, arrogant, resentful, proud, and egotistical. The other is peaceful, kind, loving, empathetic, hopeful, generous, and compassionate. This fight is going on inside you, and inside of every other person.”**

**The grandchild asks:  
“Which wolf will win?”**

**To which the grandfather replies:  
“The one you feed.”**

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