

## **Why does Canada resettle refugees?**

In the past weeks, the new Liberal government's determined efforts towards fulfilling its election promise of admitting 25,000 Syrian refugees by the end of 2015 have dominated news reports in Canada and internationally. Most recently, this target had been modified to 10,000 Syrian refugees by end of 2015, an additional 15,000 by end of February 2016 and another 10,000 before the end of 2016. These quantities may sound generous but put in perspective, this is actually a very tiny portion of about 9 million Syrian refugees who have been displaced from their homes since the civil war started in their country in early 2011.

While the Canadian government and private sponsor initiatives to welcome Syrian refugees are truly commendable, many are still asking the basic question: why is Canada resettling refugees? To get the official answers, I have provided below some excerpts from the website of the government agency tasked to oversee this matter, namely, Citizenship and Immigration Canada (CIC) or the recently renamed Immigration Refugees and Citizenship Canada (IRCC).

First, CIC cites Canada's "tradition of humanitarian action" and explains that: "Canada resettles refugees to save lives and to provide stability to those fleeing persecution who have no hope of relief. Canada's resettlement programs are respected internationally because they provide permanent residence as a long term solution."

In response to frequent comparisons between refugees and immigrants, the CIC website states that: "A refugee is different from an immigrant, in that an immigrant is a person who chooses to settle permanently in another country. Refugees are forced to flee."

On this comparison, I do not fully agree, as there are also various levels and types of so-called economic immigrants, but I digress...

The official government position is that, "Refugees selected for resettlement to Canada have often fled their homes because of unimaginable hardships and have, in many cases, been forced to live in refugee camps for many years. When they arrive in Canada, they basically pick up the pieces of their lives and start over again."

"As a member of the international community, Canada helps find solutions to prolonged and emerging refugee situations and helps emerging democracies try to solve many of the problems that create refugee populations. To do this, Canada works closely with the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR)."

"Under our legislation, all resettlement cases must be carefully screened to ensure that there are no issues related to security, criminality or health. Citizenship and Immigration Canada (CIC) works with its security partners such as the Canada Border Services Agency to complete this work as quickly as possible"

CIC also noted that the Canadian refugee system has two main parts:

- the Refugee and Humanitarian Resettlement Program, for people seeking protection from outside Canada; and
- the In-Canada Asylum Program for people making refugee protection claims from within Canada.

The Syrian refugees who are the subject of existing government or private sponsorships are admitted under the Refugee and Humanitarian Resettlement Program. On the other hand, the refugee claimants whose cases are heard by the Refugee Protection Division of the Immigration and Refugee Board, fall under the In-Canada Asylum Program.

Another major bone of contention among skeptics involves the various forms of services and financial assistance provided to resettled refugees to help them integrate into Canadian society as quickly as possible.

On this, the CIC website explains that:

"Refugees - resettled from overseas or granted protection in Canada - often do not have the resources to easily establish themselves. As such, the Government of Canada, working with an extensive network of partners and stakeholders, supports the delivery a broad range of settlement services to support successful integration of all refugees."

These services and other forms of direct assistance which are provided by the government and/or private sponsors, may include immediate and essential services as well as income support to help with their initial settlement in Canada.

These supports are in addition to settlement services funded by CIC to help all newcomers, including refugees, settle and integrate into their new communities such as: language training, employment services, childcare, transportation assistance, translation and interpretation services, provisions for persons with a disability, as well as short-term/crisis counselling to deal with settlement issues.

On the whole, CIC assures Canadians that: "Canada's refugee protection programs have helped the world's most vulnerable, while ensuring the health and safety of Canadians. Through our refugee protection programs, refugees bring their experiences and skills as well as their hopes and dreams to Canada which, in turn, has contributed to an even richer and more prosperous society for us all."

With these in mind and especially during this season of giving, the best answer to the question posed above can only be: why not?

*A very Merry Christmas and a Blessed New Year to all!*

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