

REFUGEE MYTH BUSTING CAMPAIGN

SURREY EDUCATION SECTOR TRAINING

REFUGEE BACKGROUNDER

GENEVA CONVENTION DEFINITION OF A REFUGEE, 1951

A refugee is a person who “owing to well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality and is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country”.

Source: “Convention and Protocol Relating to the Status of Refugees”, Office of UNHCR, August 2007.

WHO DO WE CALL “REFUGEES”?

In general, refugees are people who flee their homeland and seek asylum in another country for fear of persecution or life threats. Signatories to the 1951 Geneva Convention are obligated to protect refugees who are in their territory. UNHCR (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees) is also mandated to protect the rights and well-being of refugees worldwide.

People who cross an international border when fleeing persecution are considered asylum seekers as they seek the protection of another state. Those who do not leave their home country are called Internally Displaced Persons (IDP); they remain under the protection of their home state. Asylum seekers are people who claim protection but whose situation has not been assessed yet (by a state or UNHCR). Once their claim has been validated (by a state or UNHCR), refugee status is officially bestowed to them. UNHCR considers three durable solutions for refugees:

- Voluntary repatriation: when conditions in home country have improved in a lasting and meaningful way and refugees are able to return safely and with dignity.
- Local integration in country of asylum: when refugees are allowed to stay in their country of asylum with rights similar to those of citizens (they can for example work, attend school and freely move in the country).
- Resettlement in a third country: when refugees cannot return to their home country or integrate locally the third durable solution is for them to resettle in another country that will guarantee their protection and civil rights.

HOW DO REFUGEES ARRIVE IN CANADA?

Refugees arrive in Canada typically in one of two ways: either they are selected abroad to be resettled, or they come by their own means and present a refugee claim at the Canadian border or once in Canada.



1. In 2012, among the more than 10 million refugees in the world, UNHCR estimated that 800,000 were in need of resettlement. UNHCR refers cases for selection to various resettlement countries based on the refugee's need for protection and the targets and criteria set by each country. For Canada, a visa officer will establish whether the refugee is eligible for resettlement to Canada. Selected refugees have to undergo medical, criminal and security checks before being admitted to Canada (these costs are part of their transportation loan). They can be sponsored through the Government Assisted Refugee program (GAR) or through the Privately Sponsored Refugee program (PSR). In 2012, 9,624 persons arrived in Canada as sponsored refugees.
2. Some people manage to travel directly to Canadian borders and claim asylum there. Their claims are assessed by the Immigration Refugee Board (IRB). The IRB is an independent administrative tribunal responsible for hearing asylum seekers and making decision on whether they should be accepted as refugees. When accepted, refugees are usually referred to as a Refugee Landed in Canada. If their claim is rejected, asylum seekers may have the opportunity to appeal the decision (depending on whether their country has been considered as "safe" by Citizenship and Immigration Canada (CIC). Those who receive a final negative decision will usually be asked to return to their home country. In 2011, 7,700 refugees were landed in Canada along with 1,715 dependants.

Source: mainly adapted from *The Ministry of Welcoming the Stranger, a Guide to Refugee Sponsorship for Congregations*, Canadian Lutheran World Relief, 2011. And CIC facts and figures 2011, <http://www.cic.gc.ca/english/resources/statistics/facts2011/permanent/03.asp>

DEFINITION OF THE DIFFERENT CATEGORIES OF REFUGEES COMING TO CANADA

Government Assisted Refugees (GAR): Convention Refugees selected from abroad by the government of Canada for resettlement. GARs hold permanent resident (PR) status upon arrival and receive financial and other support from the government of Canada for up to one year.

Privately Sponsored Refugees (PSR): Convention Refugees selected from abroad by a private sponsor who agrees to provide financial and other support for one year. PSRs hold PR status upon arrival.

Refugee Claimants: Foreign nationals who apply for refugee protection from within Canada, or at a port of entry. Once their asylum claims are heard and approved by the Immigration and Refugee Board (IRB) they can apply for PR status.

Refugee Landed in Canada (RLC): Refugee claimants who have their asylum claim approved by the IRB.