

Canada and Refugee Resettlement: Sorry, More Needs to Be Done

Nathalie Margarita Alaves

Political Science 1020 - 009

Alyssa Fini

Professor Dan Bousfield and Professor Nig Narain

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Should Canada be accepting more refugees? This essay argues that Canada must increase its quota for settling refugees within its borders. Canada should accept more refugees because people's human rights, as outlined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), are at stake. Since the UDHR has been ratified, in whole or in part, by most states, it carries the weight of "customary international law," by entities such as the European Union.¹ Furthermore, Canadians, like Prime Minister Justin Trudeau, have espoused the idea of "cosmopolitanism," so refugee host countries expect Canada to follow through with meaningful actions.² The challenge of resettling refugees is illustrated by the statistics gathered by the United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR): from 2010 to 2019, 3.9 million registered refugees returned to their country of origin, 322,400 were naturalized in the asylum country and 1.1 million refugees were resettled to a safer country.³ However, as of 2019, there are 26 million refugees under UNHCR's mandate and 2.6 million of them live at refugee camps.⁴ Since there is a pressing need for long-term solutions, Canada should accept more refugees.⁵

¹ Ionel Zamfir, "The Universal Declaration of Human Rights and its relevance for the European Union," *European Parliamentary Research Service* (2018): 1, [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/ATAG/2018/628295/EPRS_ATA\(2018\)628295_EN.pdf](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/ATAG/2018/628295/EPRS_ATA(2018)628295_EN.pdf).

² Audrey Macklin et al. "A Preliminary Investigation into Private Refugee Sponsors," *Canadian Ethnic Studies* 50, no. 2 (2018): 40, doi:10.1353/ces.2018.0014.

³ "Global Trends: Forced Displacement in 2019," *United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees*, June 18, 2020, <https://www.unhcr.org/5ee200e37.pdf>, 4.

⁴ *Figures at a Glance: 79.5 Million forcibly displaced people worldwide at the end of 2019*, June 18, 2020. <https://www.unhcr.org/figures-at-a-glance.html>. and *Refugee Camps*, 2021. <https://www.unrefugees.org/refugee-facts/camps/>.

⁵ Megan Bradley and Cate Duin. "A Port in the Storm: Resettlement and Private Sponsorship in the Broader Context of the Refugee Regime," in *Strangers to Neighbours: Refugee Sponsorship in Context*, ed. Dr. Shauna Labman and Geoffrey Cameron (Montréal, Québec: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2020), 76.

Before presenting the arguments in favour of Canada accepting more refugees, the evolving definition of “refugee” is examined. The official criteria for being labelled a refugee began with the 1951 Refugee Convention and its 1967 Protocol: a refugee is someone who flees their country because they are in legitimate danger due to their political opinion, race, religion, nationality, or membership of a social group.⁶ Since then, the criteria for being designated a “refugee” have been expanding. For example, in 1969, the Organization of African Unity Refugee Convention added the idea that refugees include those who are forced to leave their country due to any serious “aggression” or disturbance that is not part of a declared war.⁷ Later, the UN added an extra category of refugees: people who suffer “severe socio-economic” deprivation, such as the millions of Venezuelans who have been leaving their country since 2016.⁸ Even if inept leaders were replaced and war-torn countries were rebuilt, there would still be a need to redistribute displaced people. For instance, people are “climate refugees” when it becomes impossible for them remain in their homeland due to extreme environmental threats.⁹ Presently, there are not many climate refugees, but “there is a need and a desire...to open up a legal framework to allow them to move elsewhere,

⁶ “Convention relating to the Status of Refugees,” in *United Nations Human Rights Office of the High Commissioner*, July 28, 1951, <https://www.ohchr.org/en/professionalinterest/pages/statusofrefugees.aspx>.

⁷ Rebecca Hamlin, *Let Me Be a Refugee: Administrative Justice and the Politics of Asylum in the United State, Canada, and Australia* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2014), 162.

⁸ “Venezuelan Migration: the 4,500-Kilometer Gap Between Desperation and Opportunity,” in *The World Bank*, November 26, 2019, <https://www.worldbank.org/en/news/feature/2019/11/26/migracion-venezolana-4500-kilometros-entre-el-abandono-y-la-oportunidad>.

⁹ Catherine Baillie Abibi and Shiva Nourpanah, *Refugees and Forced Migration: A Canadian Perspective An A-Z Guide* (Halifax, NS: Nimbus Publishing, 2019), 47.

when the time comes”.¹⁰ No matter how states define “refugee,” forced migration is a pressing issue which Canada, and the world, must address in a concerted manner.

This essay explores two main arguments supporting the stance that Canada should accept more refugees. The first argument relates to “responsibility sharing” which, according to the 2018 Global Compact of Refugees, entails “...a demonstration of solidarity, allowing States to help share each other’s burdens and reduce the impact of large refugee situations on host countries”.¹¹ The second argument highlights the strong social infrastructure that Canada has in place to handle controlled influxes of refugees. After both arguments are presented, a valid objection to each of the arguments is provided which is followed by a substantiated reply. The concluding paragraph summarizes the arguments, objections, and rebuttals of this essay.

In terms of the refugee crisis, Canada’s commitment to responsibility-sharing pales in comparison to the assistance provided by the refugee camps, especially those located in the Global South. The main role of refugee camps is to provide a *temporary* safe haven for refugees until they are able to return to their home country or until they are offered a pathway for resettlement.¹² However, some camps, like the Dadaab Refugee Complex in Kenya, have served as a “home base” for thousands of refugees for *decades*.¹³ Refugees who have lived in camps for more than five years are referred to as Protracted Refugee Situations (PRS), so they need additional services that

¹⁰ Avidan Kent and Simon Behrman, *Facilitating the Resettlement and Rights of Climate Refugees: An Argument for Developing Existing Principles and Practices* (Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 2018), 5.

¹¹ “Global Compact on Refugees,” In *The United Nations*, 2018, <https://www.unhcr.org/5c658aed4.pdf>, 36.

¹² *Refugee Camps*, 2021. <https://www.unrefugees.org/refugee-facts/camps/>.

¹³ “Dadaab Refugee Complex,” in *United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees: Kenya*, 2020, <https://www.unhcr.org/ke/dadaab-refugee-complex>.

provide them with the means to become self-reliant, regardless of where they end up living as citizens.¹⁴ Thus, camps take on enough responsibility for the care of refugees.

Along with the camps, some countries, mainly in the Global South, are doing more than their fair share to shelter refugees. For example, Uganda, Sudan, Bangladesh, and Ethiopia combined host approximately four million refugees, (and those who resemble refugees).¹⁵ The considerable effort made by the Global South is summarized by Ibrahim Awad and Usha Natarajan, “Countries of the Global South host 84 percent of the world’s refugees....the least developed states or (LDCs) host 28 percent of all refugees...”.¹⁶ Regarding this imbalance of responsibility-sharing, some academics, like Serena Parekh, suggest that “...[it] ensure[s] that refugees are contained in countries largely in the global South...”.¹⁷ The suggestion that many developed countries are discouraging refugees from leaving the Global South is sobering. Although Canada plans to accept about 173,000 refugees between 2021 and 2023, this intake number would represent only 0.45 per cent of Canada’s population (38.1 million).¹⁸ In sum, both the humanitarian relief organizations and the countries

¹⁴ James Milner, and Gil Loescher, “Forced Migration Policy Briefing 6: Responding to protracted refugee situations – Lessons from a decade of discussion,” *Refugee Studies Centre* (January 2011): 3, <https://www.refworld.org/pdfid/4da83a682.pdf>.

¹⁵ Andrea Burgess, et al., *Pocket World in Figures: 2021 Edition* (London, England: Profile Books Ltd., 2020), 23.

¹⁶ Ibrahim Awad and Usha Natarajan, “Migration Myths and the Global South,” In *The Cairo Review of Global Affairs*, 2018, <https://www.thecairoreview.com/essays/migration-myths-and-the-global-south/>.

¹⁷ Serena Parekh, “Reframing the Refugee Crisis: From Rescue to Interconnection,” *Ethics & Global Politics: The Ethics of Refugee Prioritization: Reframing the Debate*, vol. 13, no. 1 (2020): 29, doi:10.1080/16544951.2020.1735013.

¹⁸ Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship of Canada, *2020 Annual Report to Parliament on Immigration*, by Marco E.L. Mendicino (Her Majesty the Queen in Right of Canada, represented by the Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship, 2020), <https://www.canada.ca/content/dam/ircc/migration/ircc/english/pdf/pub/annual-report-2020-en.pdf>, 24.

hosting large refugee settlements in the Global South need Canada to find more pathways for refugee resettlement.

Canada should not accept more refugees until the states that have resettled far less displaced people improve their record of responsibility-sharing. In the Global Compact on Refugees, the UN expresses its concern for the lack of countries offering resettlement opportunities and points out that the need for more responsibility-sharing “cannot be overstated”.¹⁹ Japan, for example, accepted a total of 3,356 refugees in 2018 and 2019, whereas Canada resettled 58,163.²⁰ Other developed countries, such as Portugal, South Korea and Saudi Arabia, also have comparatively low refugee intake numbers, although they are signatories to both the 1951 UN Refugee Convention and the 2018 UN Refugee Compact.²¹ These countries, as well as several others, are not doing their fair share of accepting refugees, so Canada should wait until more countries catch up with their responsibilities.

Apart from the principle of the matter, the failure of some states to share the responsibility of accepting refugees can have a negative impact on the countries that have been doing their part. Andy Lamey, author of *Frontier Justice: The Global Refugee Crisis and What to Do About It*, explains how it is problematic when certain states close their borders to refugees. He uses Germany’s experience after Chancellor Angela Merkel welcomed refugees in 2015:

Part of Germany’s problem was that none of its neighbours had equally strong asylum clauses....This arrangement punished Germany’s commitment to asylum

¹⁹ “Global Compact on Refugees,” In *The United Nations*, 2018, <https://www.unhcr.org/5c658aed4.pdf>, 36.

²⁰ *Refugee Data Finder*. 2020. <https://www.unhcr.org/refugee-statistics/download/?url=q5cpnW>.

²¹ Christophersen, Eirik, “A few countries take responsibility for most of the world’s refugees,” In *Norwegian Refugee Council: Global Figures*, 2020, <https://www.nrc.no/shorthand/fr/a-few-countries-take-responsibility-for-most-of-the-worlds-refugees/index.html>.

and rewarded nearby states with more punitive systems by seeing Germany's inflow of claims dramatically increase as those of its neighbours held steady. This was one of the factors that made the constitutional amendment possible, in that there emerged a widespread view among Germans that it was unfair to have to process so many more claims than other EU states.²²

After Merkel invited an influx of refugees to the country, German citizens started wondering why the leaders of neighbouring countries were not equally as welcoming. Then, the situation escalated and ended with the government bowing to the public pressure to amend their constitution. The lesson for Canada from this experience is that more countries should be pressured to participate in responsibility-sharing, otherwise more problems may arise than anticipated.

Instead of waiting for reluctant countries to accept more refugees, Canada should steadily increase its refugee numbers while actively encourage other states to do their share. Lamey argues that the chances of resettling more refugees increases when states discuss with each other possible solutions to a crisis. Lamey interviews Harold Koh, an American lawyer involved in the Haitian refugee crisis, to get his opinion about how the Bush and Clinton administrations failed to help the refugees. Koh tells Lamey, "With enough jawboning, the United States could have persuaded other nations in the region –such as Canada, Venezuela, and Mexico –to take their share of refugees while the political crisis in Haiti was being negotiated".²³ Lamey supports Koh's assertion by providing other examples of when cooperation between states had been successful: in the 1950s, 180,000 Hungarians were resettled and in the 1960s to the 1970s,

²² Andy Lamey, *Frontier Justice: The Global Refugee Crisis and What to Do About it* (Toronto, ON: Doubleday Canada, 2011), 174.

²³ Lamey, *Frontier Justice*, 98.

thousands of Cubans were resettled.²⁴ Therefore, states can choose to act as advocates for refugees through negotiations.

Besides directly negotiating with reluctant states to accept more refugees, Canada should prove to others how settlement programs can be successful through its experiences. One way that Canada is currently leading by example is through its Private Sponsorship of Refugees (PSR) program. The PSR program started in the late 1970s to supplement the government-funded refugee programs.²⁵ In their article, “A Port in the Storm: Resettlement and Private Sponsorship in the Broader Context of the Refugee Regime,” Megan Bradley and Cate Duin outline the impact the PSR program has had over the past forty years:

...one of the most significant contributions PSR...may be in fostering more supportive sentiments toward refugees among the citizenries of states in the global North, inculcating the idea that assisting refugees is part of the national character, and positioning governments to take stronger leadership roles in the refugee regime – an all too pressing challenge given... the rise of ever-fiercer anti-refugee sentiment across much of the global North.²⁶

Bradley and Duin point to the impact of the PSR program: the commitment shown by proactive Canadians for resettling refugees has had a positive influence on people’s attitudes toward refugees. On an international stage, therefore, Canada can confidently prove that helping refugees can become “part of the national character,” which can counterbalance the “closed-door” policies of some Global North states. To summarize,

²⁴ Lamey, *Frontier Justice*, 98.

²⁵ Shauna Labman and Geoffrey, Cameron, “Introduction: Private Refugee Sponsorship: An Evolving Framework for Refugee Resettlement” in *Strangers to Neighbours: Refugee Sponsorship in Context*, ed. Dr. Shauna Labman and Geoffrey Cameron (Montréal, Québec: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2020), 4.

²⁶ Bradley, “A Port in the Storm,” 87.

since refugees deserve a relatively stable life, Canada should accept more refugees while actively pushing other states to follow suit.

Apart from the argument that Canada should welcome more refugees as a way of improving its record of responsibility-sharing, another argument is that it has strong “frontline” support from private sponsors and other volunteers. Private sponsors in Canada have been instrumental in facilitating the resettlement of approximately 327,000 refugees since 1979.²⁷ The most recent influx of refugees was between 2015 and 2016 when 39,636 Syrians came to Canada, 35 per cent of whom were a part of the PSR program.²⁸ The article “A Preliminary Investigation into Private Refugee Sponsors” presents the results of a survey that 530 Syrian refugee sponsors filled out at the end of their one-year commitment. The research revealed that most sponsors were born in Canada and that although eighty per cent of the sponsors were “first-timers,” half of them indicated that they would be willing to be a sponsor again.²⁹ Therefore, Canada can build on these positive results when planning for increased numbers of refugees.

Even if not all Canadians are willing or able to be refugee sponsors, enough residents provide support for refugee resettlement by volunteering in other ways. For example, the role of volunteers in refugee resettlement is noted by Aasa Marshall and

²⁷ Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship of Canada, *By the numbers – 40 years of Canada’s Private Sponsorship of Refugees Program* (Government of Canada, July 21, 2020) <https://www.canada.ca/en/immigration-refugees-citizenship/news/2019/04/by-the-numbers--40-years-of-canadas-private-sponsorship-of-refugees-program.html>.

²⁸ Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship of Canada, *Syrian Outcomes Report* (Her Majesty the Queen in Right of Canada, represented by the Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship, June 2019) <https://www.canada.ca/en/immigration-refugees-citizenship/corporate/reports-statistics/evaluations/syrian-outcomes-report-2019.html#s3>.

²⁹ Audrey Macklin et al. “A Preliminary,” 47.

Daniel Beland in their 2019 research paper based on Saskatoon's experience with the influx of Syrians:

...without the support of volunteers and the donations of goods and services, the process would have been much more difficult. Though coordinating volunteers was a challenge, it provided invaluable support for organizations on the ground. One participant said it would have been impossible for four counsellors to greet 10 or more families at the airport at one time without the help of community volunteers.... Volunteers also signed up to lead conversation circles with newcomers, watch children while their parents were in language assessment sessions, and oversee the distribution of goods at donation centres.³⁰

The above description indicates the effort that is needed to help newcomers get settled into a community: counselling, shuttling, teaching, child-minding, etc. As a result, people in Canada are not only being "nice," but work well enough together so that refugee resettlement goals can be reached. To conclude, Canada is capable of accepting more refugees because it has agencies and communities that are willing to assist in the resettlement process with their time, resources and skills.

Canada can rely on its residents to resettle more refugees, but it should do more capacity building before any increase in refugee numbers is considered. For example, the education sector has a major role in the resettling process, but it lacks teachers who are well informed about the needs that displaced people may have. In the book, *Immigrant and Refugee Students in Canada*, various researchers describe some of the specific challenges that teachers experience. One area in which teachers need more support is cited by Marta Young and K. Jacky Chan, "...over 25% of teachers surveyed stated that it was difficult for them to determine which problematic behaviors required

³⁰ Aasa Marshall and Daniel Béland, "Street-level Bureaucrats, Policy Learning, and Refugee Resettlement: The Case of Syrian Refugees in Saskatoon, Canada." *Canadian Public Administration*, vol. 62, no. 3 (2019): 406, doi:10.1111/capa.12339.

intervention, and they were often unfamiliar with available community resources”.³¹

Another area in which teachers need more capacity building is presented by Samuel

Tecele and Carl James in their article, “Refugee Students in Canadian Schools:

Educational Issues and Challenges”. Using Tecele’s personal educational experiences in

Toronto as a catalyst for their research, the authors conclude their paper by stating:

...teaching from a perspective of equity requires that teachers be at all times inclusive of the experiences, ideas, and contributions of *all* students in their classrooms and schools. Such inclusiveness means having class materials, curriculum, pedagogy, and references that represent and speak to the diversity, differences, and variations that exist among people....³²

Tecele and James call for more inclusiveness training and supports for teachers across

Canada. Therefore, if the government decides to increase refugee numbers, it must

also increase funding to the education sector, so that teachers and staff are adequately

equipped to address refugee needs. Besides the people working in the education

sector, the staff at employment agencies also requires more capacity building. The

article, “‘Can Someone Help Me?’ Refugee’ Women’s Experiences of Using Settlement

Agencies to Find Work in Canada” argues that staff at employment agencies should

rethink their approach, so that “the multitude of refugee settlement needs” are

adequately addressed.³³ More specifically, the authors state:

Our findings... highlight the need for specialized services for refugees and other vulnerable newcomers rather than homogenized programming that is inclusive of all immigrant categories. Given the rushed nature of their departure and lack of

³¹ Marta Young and K. Jacky Chan, “School-based interventions for refugee children and youth: Canadian and international perspectives,” *Immigrant and Refugee Students in Canada*, ed. Courtney Anne Brewer and Michael McCabe (Edmonton, Alberta: Brush Education Inc., 2014), 45.

³² Samuel Tecele and Carl E. James, “Refugee Students in Canadian Schools: Educational Issues and Challenges,” *Immigrant and Refugee Students in Canada*, ed. Courtney Anne Brewer and Michael McCabe (Edmonton, Alberta: Brush Education Inc., 2014), 158.

³³ Sonja Senthanaar, et al, “‘Can Someone Help Me?’ Refugee Women’s Experiences of Using Settlement Agencies to Find Work in Canada,” *Journal of International Migration and Integration*, vol. 21, no. 1 (2019): 291. doi:10.1007/s12134-019-00729-1.

social ties, refugees face a difficult integration process that extends to employment.³⁴

The authors argue that “refugees face a difficult integration process” and that they deserve services that have staffed by people who are well-trained in refugee situations. Although some refugees may find it easy to find a meaningful job in Canada, others may face hurdles, such as learning a language they never thought they had to use or establishing their own business in communities with a multitude of by-laws. In sum, the people involved in refugee resettlement should have more capacity building to adequately address the needs of this class of newcomers: the quality of services is as important as the numbers of people served.

Although more capacity building is necessary, it should not prevent Canada from accepting more refugees because it is through concrete experiences that the resettlement process can be improved. Currently, Canada is learning from the resettlement process of the Syrian refugees. Marshall and Beland describe how the people working for the settlement agencies coped with the challenges brought on by the influx of Syrian refugees:

A story emerged from the data about the chaotic beginning of the process, followed by a rapid period of problem-solving, creativity, and coordination. These problem-solving processes resulted in a system that had identified and closed gaps, created new tools, and ultimately became stronger as a result of going through this period of stress and pressure.³⁵

This study describes how the people who work at the various agencies, or sectors, are learning to coordinate better with each other to overcome challenges that arise when larger groups of refugees move to Canada. The way that the process “became

³⁴ Senthana et. Al., “Can Someone Help Me?,” 291.

³⁵ Marshall and B eland, “Street-level Bureaucrats,” 399.

stronger,” as experienced by the “street-level bureaucrats,” supports the idea to accept more refugees.³⁶ The “learning through experience” model that Canada should continue to apply as it accepts more refugees is also apparent through the work done by academics studying migrant issues. For example, in their study of refugee-host relationships, Christopher Kyriakides et al. state:

...paternalism undermined the definition of “resettlement success” that interviewees held. We had to avoid reinforcing the view that refugees constitute a “a particular kind of person: a victim whose judgment and reason had been compromised by his or her experiences,” while allowing for their narratives of mortal-threat and self-rescue against the disconfirming forces of conflict.³⁷

Since the researchers felt that sponsors often expressed paternalistic attitudes toward the refugees, they realized they had to be careful with their line of inquiry: the view that refugees were incapable of making sound decisions for themselves was not acceptable. Just like the people who are working on the “frontlines” of refugee resettlement, academics are contributing in their way to improve the resettlement process. So, although Canada is still determining the best way to provide refugees with safer places to live, it must forge ahead with increasing the number of refugees it accepts.

To conclude, Canada should accept more refugees: it has both a responsibility to do its share as well as a network of dedicated people whose experiences help to strengthen the resettlement process. Some people argue that Canada should wait to increase its refugee numbers until states elsewhere co-operate with taking in more refugees. The reply to this viewpoint is that Canada should do everything in its power to persuade the uncooperative states to change their minds while it keeps giving the

³⁶ Marshall and Beland, “Street-level Bureaucrats,” 399.

³⁷ Christopher Kyriakides, et al., “Status Eligibilities: The Eligibility to Exist and Authority to Act in Refugee–Host Relations,” *Social Forces*, vol. 98, no. 1 (2019): 296, doi:10.1093/sf/soy109.

opportunity for more refugees to move here. Others argue that people who are involved, directly or indirectly, with the resettlement of refugees need to be sufficiently educated and equipped to handle larger intake numbers. The counterargument for this position is that Canada must nevertheless accept more refugees because it can make improvements along the way. After all, each additional refugee whose life is stabilized, even if imperfectly, is worth the effort.

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