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Marlene Epp

Conrad Grebel University College at the University of Waterloo

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# REFUGEES IN CANADA

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A BRIEF HISTORY

Editor: Marlene Epp,  
Conrad Grebel University College  
University of Waterloo

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Marlene Epp is professor of History and Peace & Conflict Studies  
at Conrad Grebel University College at the University of Waterloo.

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Newly-arrived refugees from Southeast Asia at the reception centre  
at Griesbach Department of National Defence base in Edmonton,  
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# **REFUGEES IN CANADA**

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## Introduction

The movement of migrants, and especially that of refugees, is often described with words like ‘tide’, ‘influx’, ‘waves’, or even ‘floods’. This is true of both the past and the present. Indeed, contemporary voices, whether from politicians or the media, often portray the arrival of people fleeing danger in their homelands as an ‘influx’, which is ironic given the actual small numbers of refugees accepted into Canada each year – on average less than ten percent of the total number of immigrants. The language used to refer to refugees can both reflect and influence attitudes towards newcomers.

The state of the world’s refugees in 2015 is an important place to start for this survey. In that year, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) reported that approximately 51 million men, women and children were displaced from their homes because of ‘unthinkable crises’ around the world. Throughout the previous year, Canadians heard about, and saw on various media, the plight of millions of civilians who had fled their homes in Syria because of a complex, protracted war that targeted civilians with violence. In late April, they learned of one of the biggest migrant tragedies in human history – when close to 1,000 refugee migrants drowned when a fishing boat carrying them from North Africa to southern Europe capsized in the Mediterranean Sea. In the following months, more images and more stories pointed to a growing global refugee crisis, the largest since the Second World War.

Canada’s response was mixed. While the majority of Canadians polled in early fall 2015 felt that Canada should increase its intake of refugees from Syria, the Conservative federal government’s response was regarded by critics as slow and ineffectual. For instance, while countries such as Germany and Sweden had together resettled nearly 100,000 by the end of 2014, Canada announced that it would take in 10,000 over three years, a number that seemed negligible in respect of the need. In fact, by the end of 2014 only about 1,300 Syrian refugees had been resettled in Canada, of whom just 200 were government sponsored. In light of world events and pressure for an international response, Canada’s attitudes and policies towards refugees became an important issue in the October 2015 federal election. Advocates for a more generous approach often looked to the country’s history and

drew on instances of humanitarianism in response to previous global crises. Cautionary voices, including those of anti-immigration lobbyists, frequently warned against an overwhelming tide of newcomers who could not be accommodated. Anti-Muslim views permeated concerns about cultural differences that would inhibit integration into a vaguely-defined Canadian norm. A newly elected Liberal government offered a more ambitious promise – to bring in 25,000 Syrian refugees by the end of the year, a deadline that was extended into the winter of 2016. In sum, the year 2015 was a microcosm of the ebbs and flows, and the ups and downs that characterize the history of refugees in Canada.

It was also in 2015 that Canadians acknowledged the 100th anniversary of the Armenian genocide that brought approximately 1,250 refugees, including about 100 orphans, into the country between 1919 and 1930. Canada's intake paled in comparison to the 23,000 admitted into the United States and the 80,000 admitted into France. Many of the immigrants of Armenian descent who came to Canada in the 1960s and later had been living in the post-genocide diaspora, especially in countries of the Middle East. Should we call these Armenians, who arrived decades after the genocide, refugees? The question of definitions is complicated, and it brings us to a number of issues that should be addressed before proceeding further.

The first dilemma that confronts the historian reviewing the history of refugees in Canada is defining who exactly is, or was, a 'refugee.' The term has been utilized in Canadian immigration history – and in public practice – rather broadly. Indeed, if used expansively, 'refugee' could be applied to anyone leaving an environment where his or her human security is threatened, whether by war and violence, persecution and discrimination, economic depression and limited employment, natural disaster, or climate change. Moreover, just about every migrant who has made Canada their home (whether by explicit choice or not) did so to better the lives of themselves and their families. However, the term 'refugee' developed a legal and policy-oriented meaning only after 1951, the year that the United Nations passed the "Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees" (hereafter, the Convention). This internationally accepted legal instrument defined a refugee as follows: "A person who owing to a 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.” The Convention is still the reference point for official definitions today.

An increasingly important related issue is the differentiation among refugees, particularly between those ‘sponsored’ by government or privately, and normally processed overseas, and those ‘claimants’ who seek asylum by arriving at Canadian borders. In politically charged circles, the former are often portrayed as ‘good’ or ‘patient’ refugees, while the latter are depicted as ‘illegitimate’ or as ‘queue-jumpers’. These broad categorizations emerged in legislation introduced in the 1970s and will be discussed in detail later. Other case-specific terminology that is used broadly is ‘forced’ or ‘involuntary’ migrants, ‘displaced persons’, and ‘asylum-seekers’. I will use these terms somewhat interchangeably. In the global context, the category of ‘internally displaced persons’ (IDPs) referring to people forced to flee their homes but remaining within their nation’s borders is increasingly commonplace as their numbers grow.

Another point that should be stressed is that Canadian policy, practice, and attitudes towards the admission of refugees has been shaped by factors influencing the nation’s general approach to migration. Economic self-interest, racial prejudice, and political biases existing in a given era were prime motivators in deciding which refugees should be allowed to reside permanently within the nation. Compassion, humanitarian concern, human rights, global affairs, and citizen lobbying have also been influential, but in varying degrees over time. As Armenian historian Isabel Kaprielian-Churchill states it, Canada’s attitude has historically combined “pity with anxiety and compassion with suspicion.”

Resettling refugees within its national borders is a voluntary action on the part of the Canadian state; there is no legal obligation to do so, even though some would argue there is a moral one. While Canada often prides itself on its generosity and its welcome to refugees, shining moments of humanitarianism must be contextualized within an overall approach marked by explicit and implicit exclusionary measures and primarily motivated by national economic and security interests. What the history of refugees in Canada has demonstrated clearly is the important, sometimes life-saving, role of civil society –

individuals, collectivities, and organized groups outside business or government – who have taken private and public action to include refugees in the nation’s social fabric.

## **Refugees before the UN Convention of 1951**

When I think about who was a refugee prior to the 1950s, my own family history comes to mind. There is a kind of myth in the popular historiography surrounding the refugee identity of both my sets of grandparents who immigrated to Canada from the Soviet Union (present-day Ukraine) in 1924. They were among some 21,000 Mennonites who decided to leave their homes in response to massive changes taking place in the newly created communist state. Their identities as a German-speaking, property-owning, Christian minority group meant that Mennonites were targets for repressive measures that expanded when Joseph Stalin came to power after Lenin’s death in 1924. While persecution of Mennonites and millions of others increased immeasurably over the next two decades – when my parents-in-law left Ukraine in 1943, they were literally fleeing for their lives – my grandparents made a premeditated decision to leave their country of birth. They obtained visas and permission from the Canadian government to immigrate. They had time to put their affairs in order, made decisions about what to take with them and what to leave behind, and bade farewell to relatives and friends at the train station. I consider them to be immigrants seeking new opportunities for themselves and their children, while leaving behind a national environment that was increasingly inhospitable. Yet they, and the historiography surrounding their migration, often categorize them as ‘refugees’ from a repressive communist state.

The flexibility of the term ‘refugee’ as applied to pre-Second World War Canada is not only reflected in my family history; it can also be integrated into an analysis of migration in earlier eras. If we take a very expansive approach to thinking about refugees, then we can start with Canada’s early history. Individuals fleeing economic hardship, war, famine, and persecution have been among the newcomers to this country for centuries. While we should avoid categorizing all immigrants this way, we can nevertheless identify examples of groups that

fit these criteria most closely. During and after the American Revolution, Loyalists to the British monarchy who feared persecution in the new United States of America arrived by the tens of thousands over just a few decades near the end of the 18th century. In her widely used text, Valerie Knowles describes the Loyalists as “Canada’s first large influx of refugees,” numbering close to 50,000 and settling mainly in the Atlantic provinces, Quebec, and what would become Ontario. Janice Potter-MacKinnon also applies the term in her 1993 gendered study of Loyalist refugee women. While these newcomers were leaving America because of their political beliefs, social ideals, or simple disenchantment with the new order, they hardly had to make a case for acceptance in British North America. White, non-French, English-speaking settlers were considered highly desirable to offset Quebec’s influence as well as to displace and replace indigenous peoples. Of course, in Upper Canada a good number of the refugee Loyalists were British-aligned members of the Six Nations Confederacy. The Anglo-origin Loyalists, Pennsylvania German pacifists, and land-seekers who followed the official Loyalist movement were welcomed and indeed enticed to move north.

Receiving a more mixed welcome were Blacks, both freed and escaped slaves, who first arrived as Loyalists in Nova Scotia. The initial group of 3,000 was followed by about 30,000 who fled to Canada via ‘the underground railroad’ before emancipation. Today, we easily incorporate the 19th-century Black newcomers into our historical listing of refugees, and have created a mythology around the welcome they received by Canadians sympathetic to abolition. While there may have been an initial groundswell of sympathy towards those escaping slavery, the reception of Blacks who formed permanent rural settlements in parts of Ontario and Atlantic Canada was mixed, and often racist. Many returned to the United States.

The 100,000 Irish who migrated to Canada in 1847 – 1/5 of whom died en route or shortly after arrival – are commonly described as ‘famine refugees,’ fleeing starvation and, some argue, political persecution in their homeland. Portrayals of this group include many of the descriptors used for refugees past and present – poor, diseased, tragic, desperate, and persecuted. The sheer numbers of famine refugees who arrived in just one year, indeed one summer, prompted strong reactions on the part of Canadians. Fear of the ‘influx’ of Irish – 40 sailing

ships in the summer of 1847 alone – was not unlike the reaction to contemporary boatloads of asylum-seekers arriving on both east and west coasts of Canada in recent decades. Reactions were a mix of sympathy and xenophobia, as some Canadians, often churches, provided housing and medical aid to the newcomers, while others posted signs in their business windows that said ‘No Irish wanted here.’ Recent historiography has pushed against the tendency to include all 19th-century Irish immigrants under the famine or refugee umbrella.

In the late 19th and early 20th centuries, Canada accepted religious sectarians who were targets of persecution and pogroms in Tsarist Russia, such as Jews and Doukhobors. In these cases, Canada was acting out of economic self-interest more than humanitarianism as it sought white agriculturalists to settle the prairie west. As well, about 2,000 Icelanders left their homes, eventually settling in Manitoba, after volcanic eruptions destroyed their farmland; today we might call them ‘climate refugees.’ Another group with a refugee-like experience were the 376 passengers on the ship *Komagata Maru* that attempted to dock in Vancouver in 1914. Predominantly Sikhs from the Punjab region of India, these migrant hopefuls were turned away after two months in the harbor because of anti-Asian attitudes on the part of both state and citizenry. Like the Irish, they seem to fit our contemporary understanding of the refugee experience because of their departure from homelands no longer hospitable to them – politically, economically, environmentally – and because of stances against their admission.

The First World War, the Russian Revolution, and other civil conflicts that erupted in the early years of the century produced thousands of displaced people in Europe, but Canada’s doors were open to only a small number. Despite participating in the newly formed League of Nations, created to facilitate postwar reconstruction and encourage international cooperation, Canada did not contribute to the League’s work on the permanent settlement of refugees. In an era when human rights language and principles were not yet entrenched in either international or domestic policy, admission to Canada was framed as a privilege, not a right. As well, politicians and others feared that impoverished refugees would become public charges of the state. During this period, the Canadian state’s approach to refugee reception differed little, if at all, from its general immigration policy, which was

based on a hierarchy of source country, race, occupation, and other characteristics. These factors were compounded by both postwar unemployment and the 'Red Scare' that followed the Russian Revolution of 1917. Both Canada and the United States remained suspicious of any groups that might bring socialist ideology to their shores.

Prior to and during the Second World War, Canada demonstrated reluctance and outright opposition to responding to the growing refugee crisis in Europe. Despite internal pressure from civil society groups and some parliamentarians, the Canadian government turned its back on Jews targeted for elimination by Nazism before and during the war. In 1937, the Department of Mines and Resources, which was responsible for immigration, reported that "There is at present a great pressure at our doors for the admission of many thousands of distressed peoples of Europe." Six years after Hitler took power in 1933, more than 300,000 Jews had fled Germany, and its increasingly anti-Semitic laws, for neighbouring states. When an urgent international conference was convened at Évian-les-Bains, France in 1938 to develop a collective response to the plight of Jews fleeing Nazism, Canada participated grudgingly and, on the instruction of Prime Minister Mackenzie King, offered no ongoing commitment to quotas on refugee intake. As in other eras, officials used concern for the economy as an excuse for not relaxing immigration restrictions, even though the country was recovering from the Depression and beginning to experience a labour shortage. Not only did the government take a passive response to the crisis, it raised the capital requirement for Jewish immigrants (who were in essence 'refugees' at this time) from \$5,000 to \$20,000, and denied admission for other reasons to those with sufficient funds.

Though Canadian officials were somewhat more open to admitting non-Jewish refugees, they dragged their feet in responding to pressure from Britain and the League of Nations to admit German-speaking Sudetens displaced when part of Czechoslovakia was given up to Hitler in 1938. Unwilling to live under a fascist government, and subject to hostility elsewhere in the country, up to 20,000 Sudeten Germans hoped to migrate to the west. Canada reluctantly agreed to accept 1,200 families – as Christians with farming backgrounds, they fit the preferred categories – but in the end cautionary and bureaucratic delays meant that only 303 families and 72 single men were admitted un-

der this arrangement. The manner in which immigration regulations ran counter to the realities of people in distress is revealed in Canada's stipulation that only complete family units would be admitted; as subsequent years clearly showed, almost all the refugees of this era were members of fragmented families.

Maintaining the government's restrictive stance, Canadian bureaucrats, including the anti-Semitic director of immigration F.C. Blair, said no to the S.S. *St. Louis*, a ship whose 930 Jewish passengers sought asylum in the west as they attempted to flee Nazism in 1939. The ship eventually returned to Europe, and more than a third of its passengers perished in concentration camps. Although Canada admitted close to 100,000 people during the war years, only 5,000 of these were Jewish refugees. Most were British or American, with a few small movements of refugees, such as Poles, who could supply specific labour skills. Overall, Canada's record of response to those in greatest need was among the worst in the world.

Thanks to the research and education of such scholars as Irving Abella and Harold Troper, the response of immigration officials to the possibility of admitting Jews to Canada – “none is too many” – has become well-known as the nadir of Canadian refugee history. That the desperate pleas of some individuals and groups to admit Jewish refugees – including orphaned children – were ignored or refuted by the government, and by Canadians generally, speaks to the widespread bigotry of a predominantly white Canada. The racism on which immigration policy and attitudes rested was also manifest in the lack of outrage towards the internment of Japanese-Canadians during the war. For these reasons, Ninette Kelly and Michael Trebilcock describe the years 1930 to 1945 as “the blackest cloud” in Canadian immigration history. But they also note that such negative excesses were countered by a change of stance, and perhaps even a change of heart, in some parts of the nation in the years that followed.

## **Postwar Humanitarianism**

As war came to an end in 1945, the world was faced with a massive refugee crisis, as tens of millions of people fled or were expelled from their homelands. Although initially hesitant to respond to the need,

Canada in the years 1946 to 1962 would bring in close to a quarter of a million refugees and displaced persons, part of a larger postwar immigration intake of nearly two million. A stronger public and official stance of humanitarianism was evident in small ways even before Canada entered the war, as concern about persecution and displacement in Europe grew. One group that spoke out was the Canadian National Committee on Refugees and Victims of Political Persecution (CNCR), active from 1938 to 1948. Led by two women (Senator Cairine Wilson and executive secretary Constance Hayward), the CNCR worked to liberalize Canadian immigration policies, especially with regard to individuals and families displaced from their homes during, and prior to, the war. Among its emphases was advocacy for child refugees and against anti-Semitic and pro-Nazi sentiments. In an effort to elicit public support and sympathy, the Committee produced a pamphlet titled "Should Canada Admit Refugees?" of which 9,000 were printed and distributed through such outlets as the YMCA.

The horror of the Holocaust, accompanied by the outward repudiation of theories of racial superiority, was perhaps the main prod for the international community, including Canada, gradually to welcome refugees. Furthermore, as the 'Iron Curtain' came down between east and west, many Canadians became desperate to rescue relatives who had fled nations and territories now under communist control. But here again, the national legacy is mixed. In spite of intense civil society lobbying, particularly by religious and ethnic organizations, Canada was slow to open its doors when the war ended. Fearing a postwar depression, immigration policy and practice did not really acknowledge the plight of millions of refugees until nearly two years after the Potsdam Agreement of August 1945. The European continent was devastated, with possibly as many as 40 million people having fled or been forcibly displaced during the conflict. Some could not, and others would not, return to their former homes. A complicating factor for the purpose of processing people was a distinction made by the International Refugee Organization (IRO) between 'refugees' – a broad term – and 'displaced persons' – a more specific category. The latter term came into usage in the immediate postwar era to describe individuals who refused repatriation to homelands from which they had been forcibly removed during the war, because those states were now under authoritarian and repressive regimes. These included, for

example, ethnic Germans from the Soviet Union and eastern Europeans who had been transported to Germany as forced labour.

A few small legislative steps were taken to address the refugee problem. However, significant discretion was given to the Prime Minister, the Cabinet, and bureaucrats responsible for immigration to make decisions about particular movements of people. Largely in response to lobbying, a 1946 Order-in-Council was passed allowing Canadian citizens to sponsor brothers and sisters, parents, and orphaned nephews and nieces under the age of 18. This provided immediate rescue for refugees in Europe with close family members in Canada. As the post-war need for labour became apparent, expressed in Mackenzie King's 1947 immigration agenda of 'absorptive capacity,' the posture of the state towards refugees and displaced persons altered. Indeed, its overall stance on immigration was rooted in an economy that remained mostly expansive into the 1970s. While most of the labour schemes implemented in the decade after the war were motivated by economic interests, they also served a humanitarian purpose – to provide homes to thousands of people. Refugees mainly from Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union arrived in Canada to work in domestic service, on farms, in mines and forests. In just four years (1947-51), 100,000 came in as labourers under industry-sponsored contracts.

It was thus a combination of domestic reasons, mainly economic and labour-related, and international pressure, that led to the launch of the Displaced Persons (DP) movement in April 1947 that brought 186,154 persons to Canada in the next six years. Among the first to arrive – although they were not exactly invited – were those in nine boats carrying close to 1,000 people, mainly Estonians, desperate to escape repatriation to the Soviet Union and having fled Sweden by sea. Another 1,000 were Jewish orphans. Otherwise, the official DP movement began as a trickle, as processing at camps in Europe was slow and staff were unsure what criteria to use, given the complicated stories that many refugees carried regarding their countries of origin and national identity. Furthermore, some refugees did not qualify for travel assistance from the IRO. In order to address this problem and to expedite refugee movement across the Atlantic Ocean and then within Canada, the two national railway companies, Canadian National and Canadian Pacific, in collaboration with religious and ethnic organizations established the Canadian Christian Council for Re-Settlement

of Refugees. Financing was provided by the community groups, while travel was coordinated by the railways. Religious groups – Christian and Jewish – were eager to be involved in bringing anxious refugees to Canada, though sometimes their priorities were at odds with the government's. In 1953 an 'Approved Church Program' was set up that gave four established groups the power to select and process immigrants. However, when it was discerned that the groups applying favoured the most desperate refugees instead of those best suited for Canada's labour market, its status was revoked by government only five years later.

My parents-in-law were part of the 'DP' movement. They were both German-speaking Mennonites who were born in the Soviet Union but had fled that country during the war, after nearly two decades of intensifying oppression under the communist regime. They found themselves, like many others refusing to return to homelands that came under Soviet control after the war, in a tenuous situation. Fearing repatriation, which meant labour camps in Siberia, and with no future prospects on the war-devastated continent, they sought out relatives in Canada who could sponsor them. My mother-in-law, Elizabeth Wall Born, was 17 years old when she arrived in Canada with her mother, three sisters and two brothers. Their father was arrested in the Soviet Union in 1938 by Stalin's secret police and never heard from again. Elizabeth's family was sponsored by an uncle in Manitoba, and they were employed under Canada's 'sugar beet worker' labour scheme.

My father-in-law, Peter Born, was 20 when he was sponsored by an uncle who promised that Peter 'would not become a public charge.' Peter was separated from all his family before and during the war. Like many other postwar refugees – and like many refugees today – Elizabeth and Peter's families were fragmented, with parents and siblings left in Europe or behind the Iron Curtain in unknown circumstances. They arrived in Canada, filled with relief over their personal safety and with hope for a better future, but nevertheless consumed with worry, uncertainty, and sadness over outcomes for family members they would never see again.

Despite postwar openness towards immigration generally and refugees specifically, at least relative to the previous decade and a half, the Canadian government nevertheless maintained rigid restrictions re-

lating to health, fitness, and morality that proved insurmountable for some potential refugees. Standards that may now seem ludicrous and prejudicial (although the criteria today are just different) were considered necessary in an era with strong biases against persons viewed as imperfect and potentially limited in their ability to contribute to the economy, or considered likely to become a burden on society. Physical illness such as tuberculosis, trachoma, or varicose veins, or a physical disability, as well as mental illness – not uncommon among individuals who had survived repressive regimes and war – were screens to filter out numerous individuals hoping to find homes in Canada. One government official reportedly likened the selection process to choosing “good beef cattle.”

Moral judgements were also pronounced on potential refugees. Immigration officials preferred ‘whole’ families, that is, a complete nuclear family with both parents present. Unmarried women with children, widows, and other fragmented family units were thought to become a liability. Such a preference – still true today – is misplaced, given that refugee families are very often not whole.

While a certain liberal humanitarianism and postwar guilt about the Holocaust shaped attitudes in Canada, the emergence of new international organizations, and agreements seeking global consensus about how to respond to global conflict and resultant human displacement, also provided impetus to postwar policy towards refugees and displaced persons. The creation of the United Nations in 1945 was one of the drivers. The UN’s 1948 *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* created new language and principles that were henceforth applied to the ‘rights’ of people forced from their homes and homelands: specifically, it included the statement, “Everyone has the right to seek and to enjoy in other countries asylum from persecution.” This was followed by the 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees, mentioned earlier, that elaborated on the definition of, and criteria for, who was considered a refugee. Importantly, the Convention also made it illegal to deport or return refugees to their country of origin if they might be subject to persecution on the basis of religion, nationality, race, or political belief. This was called the principle of ‘non-refoulement.’ While the Convention was initially aimed only at refugees in Europe prior to 1951, it was broadened with a Protocol in 1967 to apply across the globe and to refugee-generating events after 1951.

## **After the 1951 Convention**

Although the 1951 Refugee Convention marked a watershed in refugee history globally, Canada refused to sign the Convention and Protocol until 1969. Politicians cited security reasons, particularly that certain provisions would hinder deportation of suspected communists. Despite its foot-dragging response, Canada did participate in some international initiatives in the years after the introduction of the Convention. For instance, during the UN-mandated World Refugee Year in 1959-60, Canada admitted 325 refugees who tested positive for tuberculosis and 500 members of their families; this was the first time that the nation had waived its health requirements for refugees. The Year's intent was in part to close down postwar refugee camps that often housed the people in greatest despair, those not having qualified for admission earlier for various reasons, including health. During the Year, Canada admitted about 7,000 refugees from Europe, most of whom were from Soviet-bloc countries. Awareness of global refugee movements continued to grow in subsequent decades and, while the number of refugees as a percentage of overall migration went up and down, the idea and reality of refugees as a separate category of immigrants did take hold.

An array of factors contributed to the greater number of refugees in the last three decades of the 20th century: pressure from international organizations and other nation-states following the passage of the Convention; a mostly healthy economy – with some dips – that decreased unemployment and increased labour needs; recognition that Canada's population would not grow sufficiently without increased immigration; changes to immigration policy and process that did not discriminate, at least not explicitly, on the basis of race, ethnicity or source country; an era of decolonization in Africa, Asia, and Latin America that saw independence struggles, dictatorial repression, and civil war prompt the flight of many from their homelands; an increase in the global refugee population generally, or at least a more concerted effort to identify and assist such people; and the growing advocacy and activism of civil society organizations wanting to see a more humanitarian response towards either refugees generally or specific group movements. In the 1950s and beyond, the role of civil society gained importance in broadening the parameters of government pol-

icy. Individuals, families, religious groups, and ethnic organizations lobbied officials to allow in 'their people' – and others – who were in desperate circumstances elsewhere in the world.

All these factors carried the weight of sometimes disparate political agendas. In particular, the ideological forces of the Cold War meant that capitalist nations like Canada were more kindly disposed towards refugees from left-wing regimes than from right-wing. Cold War ideology and rhetoric underlay Canada's welcome of close to 40,000 people who arrived from Hungary in 1956 as well as 12,000 from Czechoslovakia in 1968-9. Both of these movements consisted of activists and others who opposed Soviet rule in their respective countries. And, while new immigration rules implemented in 1962 removed race and nationality as explicit determinants affecting the selection of potential immigrants, discrimination continued to fester in parameters for family sponsorship that were narrower for non-European (mainly Asian) Canadians than others. Nevertheless, perhaps the first special program for non-European refugees was the one that admitted 100 families from Hong Kong who were part of a mass exodus from the People's Republic of China. Here again, ideology played a role in choices about which refugees were preferred.

One early movement that reflected all the factors was the admission, in 1972 to 1973, of about 7,000 ethnic South Asian refugees from Uganda, from where they were expelled by dictator Idi Amin. Many of the newcomers arrived by chartered Canadian government planes and were assisted by military personnel whose chefs reportedly learned to prepare curry in order to make them feel more welcome. The welcome was reinforced when the newcomers arrived to cheers and shouts of glee over Canada's triumph over Russia in the famous world hockey championship of 1972 (some thought the cheering was for them!). Resident Canadians viewed this small number of new arrivals as non-threatening and even exotic; some of the refugees were the first South Asian residents in the cities where they settled.

Senator Mobina Jaffer was one of the Ugandan refugees who came to Canada via Britain in 1975. In 2001 she became Canada's first Muslim senator, first African-born senator, and first senator of South Asian descent. Jaffer has commented that "Canada is a dreamcatcher of the people of the world." Her remark reflected her own personal experience, but it should not be read to suggest that Canada's doors opened

easily and quickly in response to need. After the initial postwar levels, the number of refugees was proportionately quite low through the 1960s and into the mid-1970s; fewer than one in forty immigrants was a refugee. One government official's comment in response to a growing refugee crisis in Asia and Africa in the 1960s likely reflected a widely shared view: Canada shouldn't respond until "the necessity of such efforts is apparent," and when other countries also become concerned.

Nevertheless, the South Asians were soon followed by close to 7,000 Chilean refugees from the Augusto Pinochet dictatorship. In the case of the latter group, some of whom were leftist political activists, Canadian church groups were vocal in calling for their admission, although they criticized the process for being initially slow, reluctant, and ideologically driven. Accusations were leveled, both inside and outside the country, that Canada had the worst record among western nations. The contrast between decisions surrounding this movement and the refugees from socialist-bloc countries was not lost on many critics of the politics surrounding immigration. These two relatively small groups of refugee arrivals in the early 1970s marked a pivotal point in that they revealed a nation ready and willing to expand its notion of a permanent 'Canadian' to include 'visible minorities' – meaning not white – from non-traditional source continents of Africa and Latin America. Less publicized was the resettlement of more than 10,000 Lebanese people between 1975 and 1978 who fled strife within their homeland.

Despite the notable range of new source countries, perhaps the largest 'refugee' movement of the 1960s and 1970s came from just south of the border. Despite its general alignment with the anti-communist rhetoric of the United States, Canada opened its borders to as many as 40,000 American draft resisters in the late 1960s and early 1970s. While not treated as refugees by immigration officials, they were nevertheless fleeing political persecution. Given Canada's non-alignment with the United States on the war, and that most of these newcomers were white and educated, the immigration process was relatively easy.

While the limited historiography of this migration suggests that Canadians were strongly welcoming, there were voices and attitudes of opposition towards what seemed at times like an influx. Some 'resistance' to the resisters arose out of alarm about the hippie culture

with which many so-called draft-dodgers were associated; some Canadian nationalists feared the intrusion of an American political agenda, while other sectors worried about the impact on unemployment. Regardless, the draft resisters hardly faced the day-to-day struggles experienced by refugees from other parts of the world in regard to language and culture adjustment, long-term un- or under-employment, and permanent separation from family (more than 6,000 draft refugees returned to the U.S. after an amnesty was announced in 1974). The situation of the Vietnam war-era resisters would be echoed several decades later, when several hundred American men and women deserted their military assignments during the U.S. war in Iraq in the early 2000s. However, unlike the earlier resisters, this later group did apply to remain in Canada through the refugee determination process in place at the time. Although opinion polls demonstrated that most Canadians supported their claims for asylum, only a few resisters were accepted on 'humanitarian and compassionate' grounds – a category of admission for exceptional cases not normally approved for permanent residency.

## **New Systems of Sponsorship and Refugee Determination**

The passage of a new Immigration Act in 1976 allowed for a significant revision of previous legislation. For the first time in Canadian law, refugees were a distinct category of immigrants with legal recognition and status according to the Convention as overseen by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). And if a refugee met the criteria of the UN Convention – and was thus a 'Convention refugee' – he or she could be sponsored by either the government or private individuals and organizations. The Act also allowed for admission of those who did not fit the Convention definition but were in 'designated' groups that experienced refugee-type hardships. This latter category would become more predominant in the midst of global upheavals in the 1980s and later. Now the question of refugee selection became significant: in particular, what should be the criteria for admission? With refugees a distinct category within immigration policy, the government began to set quotas for the numbers it would

accept as part of overall immigration intake. Although Canada, as a signatory to the refugee Convention, was legally required to consider claims for asylum at its borders, it had no such obligation towards the many refugees overseas seeking new homes. Quotas for the number admitted were entirely up to government discretion.

As well, the 1976 Immigration Act put into place a refugee determination system that created a legal process to assess the validity of claims for asylum made at Canada's border, or inland in the case of individuals already in the country. Decisions were made by a newly-formed Refugee Status Advisory Committee, with options for appeal going before the Immigration Appeal Board. (Today the process is overseen by the Immigration and Refugee Board.) Immigration legislation and practice were now responding to these overarching categories of refugees – those resettled in Canada from outside the country, and those making a claim inside the country, including at the border.

The Private Sponsorship of Refugees Program (PSRP) began in 1979, after its incorporation into the 1976 Immigration Act. This program allowed non-governmental groups to bring individuals and families in need of homes to Canada, with a requirement that resettlement support be provided for at least one year. The program led the way to possibly the most successful refugee movement of the 20th century. Following the formal end to the Vietnam War in 1975, more than a million people fled the new communist regimes in Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia. While en route to refugee camps in Thailand and Malaysia, they faced many horrific experiences on land and at sea. With television viewing now widespread, Canadians could nightly watch news stories of desperate men, women, and children abandoning or being thrown off rickety fishing boats, either to drown, be captured and killed by pirates, or be rescued. Because of their dangerous journeys by sea, this group were called 'the boat people,' a phrase later criticized as yet another example of racialized, simplistic language used to describe refugees.

The Ha family's story, as told in a *Globe and Mail* story of 2004, is a dramatic example of such an experience. Tam Ha, mother to two small children, ages 5 and 7, left Saigon with her husband in 1978. Mr. Ha had served in the South Vietnamese army. Thus when the Communists took over in 1975, he was sent to prison for 're-education.'

Fearing that he wouldn't survive if sent to prison again, the family fled their home. They burned letters and family photos, took only clothes and medication for seasickness, and joined about 250 others aboard a dilapidated fishing trawler. They did this knowing their odds of surviving the journey were much the same as the odds of staying alive in Vietnam. When the weighted-down boat began taking on water, they had to throw all their belongings overboard. Eventually they reached the coast of northern Malaysia, where they waded ashore and joined more than 2,000 others in a refugee camp. The Ha family opted to immigrate to Canada, as the wait for resettlement was only six months. They were sponsored by a group of households in Saskatoon with whom they maintained a friendship, and three decades later the Ha family in turn was able to support their aging sponsors (*The Globe and Mail*, 1 July 2004).

Like the families who collectively sponsored the Has, and responding to media reports, thousands of Canadians came forward, giving a dramatic launch to the new private sponsorship program. In the span of just over two years (1978-1981), 77,000 refugees from southeast Asia (60,000 of whom came in 1979-80) were resettled in Canada. During these years, refugees comprised 25 percent of all immigrants to the nation – an unprecedented level never equaled since. While Canada was viewed as a leader in this movement, the government was also following through on commitments made at an international conference convened in 1978 to deal with the humanitarian crisis in southeast Asia.

The high number of arrivals in such a short time – well over 100,000 arrived over the longer period of a decade – was due mainly to the sponsorship program. In 1979 the federal government announced that beyond its quota of 8,000 southeast Asian refugees, it would match private sponsorships 1 to 1: if Canadians privately sponsored 21,000 individuals, the government would do the same, raising the potential number to 50,000. The response was unexpectedly high, and private sponsorships surpassed 21,000, but the match formula was not extended. Although most of the sponsorships were by religious organizations such as Christian churches and Jewish synagogues, other groups came forward, including bowling clubs and neighbourhood associations. One could argue that this example of refugee resettlement was a high point of civic engagement in Canada. Yet while many

Canadians were sympathetic and opened their homes, wallets, and arms to these newcomers, there was criticism and xenophobia as well. Immigration Minister Ron Atkey received threats, and some media outlets published vitriolic comments from the public. The unprecedented number of arrivals in a short period led to the inevitable backlash from sectors that feared the changing makeup of the Canadian population.

The expansive precedent set with the southeast Asia arrivals continued, despite an economic recession, into the 1980s as civil wars intensified in Central America. Beginning in the mid-1970s millions of people were displaced from their homes as brutal dictatorships were overthrown, radical political movements spawned guerrilla armies, and counterinsurgency militias suppressed anti-regime militants and civilians alike. From 1982 to 1993, about 22,000 refugees arrived from El Salvador alone, the main source country from the region. It may have been indicative of a gradual easing of Cold War politics that Canada was less resistant than in the past to people fleeing a U.S.-backed right-wing dictatorship. As well, increased diplomatic relations and agreements between Canada and Latin America during the 1970s and '80s helped to distinguish Canada from the United States, including with regard to immigration policies. Individuals fleeing north from El Salvador, Nicaragua, and Guatemala – countries that experienced the most upheaval and violence – were faced with very different policies in Mexico, United States, and Canada. For instance, while the U.S. granted asylum to fewer than 3 percent of Salvadorans and Guatemalans, Canada accepted up to 80 percent of applications from those groups.

Refugee advocates combined forces, often overlapping with individuals and groups protesting horrible human rights abuses and other regime policies in Central America. This era also saw the beginning of a concerted 'sanctuary movement' whereby religious groups, especially, provided safe sites for newcomers whose status in Canada was in jeopardy. For instance, church buildings became places where refugees were allowed to live for weeks and months on end, because immigration authorities and police were unlikely to apprehend people protected in what were considered sacred places. While Canada's acceptance rate was high, numerous applications for asylum were tenuous, because many individuals did not clearly fit the Convention definition of refugee. Although all those who fled did so to escape

the widespread danger they had experienced or feared, many could not prove they had a 'well-founded' fear of persecution should they return.

The role of non-governmental organizations as stakeholders in refugee immigration soared during this era, partly in response to the optimism generated as a result of the movement from southeast Asia. This trend was exemplified by the emergence of the Standing Conference of Canadian Organizations Concerned for Refugees, which in 1986 became the Canadian Council for Refugees (CCR). In the same year, Canada was awarded the Fridtjof Nansen Medal by the UNHCR – the first time a nation was the recipient – in “recognition of [its] major and sustained contribution to the cause of refugees.” This was largely in response to the significant number of refugees from southeast Asia admitted in the previous decade. This award has often been held up as a symbol of Canada’s stance towards refugees outside its borders. However, the CCR reflected the cynicism of many when it observed that Canada was considered ‘the best’ only because international standards were ‘so low.’

Refugee movements from Central America also received impetus from legislative and legal developments in the 1980s. An important moment occurred in 1985 with the landmark ‘Singh’ decision, so-called because six of the seven appellants in this Supreme Court case had the surname Singh. In this case, the Court declared that the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms (1982), section 7, which states that, “Everyone has the right to life, liberty and security of the person and the right not to be deprived thereof except in accordance with the principles of fundamental justice,” applied to refugee claimants as well as Canadian citizens. The fact that these seven refugee claimants were not allowed to make their case for asylum orally before the Immigration Appeal Board was deemed a violation of their rights under the Charter. The call for in-person hearings led to the creation of the Immigration and Refugee Board (IRB) in 1989 – replacing the Immigration Appeal Board – the body which today adjudicates refugee claims. The number of individuals, or ‘judges’, who hear a claim, has varied.

The Singh decision and its consequences had momentous implications. No longer could the state fully control the size and timing of refugee arrivals. The 1982 Charter set new precedents for individual and communal rights in Canada broadly; after the Singh decision, nu-

merous people who fled their homelands and arrived of their own volition to seek asylum in Canada also had rights recognized under law. For Mexicans, Central Americans and Latin Americans, who could travel northward between continents more easily and with less cost than refugees crossing oceans, the ruling allowed them to knock on Canada's door, as it were, and cross the border to make their claim from within the safety of their destination country.

The possibility of making a claim – and a determination process that created options for those not considered 'Convention' refugees – on Canadian soil, along with greater ease of transportation, resulted in a notable increase in asylum-seekers. During the 1980s the number of people making claims for refugee protection at Canadian borders and also 'inland' rose dramatically. By the middle of the decade, about 4,000 individuals per year were making a claim from inside the borders, an increase from just several hundred in the previous decade, but much less than the nearly 40,000 in the early 1990s (today averaging about 20,000 per year).

Nevertheless, greater recognition of refugee issues and systems implemented to respond to them was often accompanied by efforts to limit the admissibility of refugee claimants. Economic recession in the 1980s contributed to a tightening of refugee policy through Bill C-55 and C-84 (in effect as of 1989), which restructured the refugee determination process dramatically. Another measure to decrease numbers was contained within Bill C-86, passed in 1992, which introduced the 'safe third country' provision. While not actually implemented until 2004, this highly controversial piece of legislation stipulated that refugees fleeing their homeland could be denied entry if they had previously lived in or travelled through a nation deemed 'safe'. This had a great impact on individuals from Mexico, Central and South America, many of whom came to Canada via the United States. While the number of refugee claims increased, so did the number of deportations of people whose application failed. Alongside specific laws passed in Parliament was the always discretionary power of the Minister of Immigration (the name of the department changed frequently in the latter 20th century) and the Minister's office to make decisions about specific refugee movements.

The 'safe third country' provision was contentious also because it seemed to repeat a sorry episode in Canadian history, namely the Con-

tinuous Journey regulation of 1908, which effectively barred entry of any potential immigrant who didn't arrive by direct sea passage from their homeland. This racially-based law thus prevented immigrants from Asia from travelling to Canada. Similarly, the introduction in 1995 of a 'Right of Landing Fee' of \$975 per adult refugee echoed the wretched 'Head Tax' applied to Chinese immigrants from 1885 to 1947. The fee was eliminated for refugees in 2000.

Even if some officials were actively putting checks on refugee acceptance, and some sectors of the population were opposed to refugee admissions, world events did not exempt Canada. A steady stream of refugees from Afghanistan began as a trickle in 1986 but increased to thousands per year after the Soviet occupying army withdrew in 1989, followed by civil war, Taliban rule, and a NATO military campaign in 2003. However, despite the massive number of refugees created by this multi-stage conflict, Canada did not create a special program to facilitate the admission of Afghans, even though the numbers remained high in the second decade of the new century. This was true also of refugees from Iraq from the early 2000s to today.

Other refugee movements of the late 20th and early 21st centuries received a more organized response. For instance, after the Tiananmen Square massacre in June 1989, Canada relaxed its immigration requirements and admitted 8,000 Chinese students and migrants as refugees. During the protracted civil war in their country, 20,000 Somalis were admitted in 1990 to 1997, although this followed more than a decade of minimal response to a considerable problem of displaced persons throughout Africa. This reluctance was evident in the lack of organized response to refugees from Sudan, the Democratic Republic of Congo, and Eritrea, for example – all conflict-ridden regions producing significant numbers of refugees right up to the present. Although Canada claimed to have a colour-blind immigration policy during this era, the restrictive stance towards African refugees suffers in comparison to the more generous approach to displaced white Europeans. Approximately 20,000 Bosnians settled in Canada in the 1990s, followed by 5,000 Kosovars in 1999 – all fleeing the ethnic and territorial conflict in the Balkan region. Even so, in the first decade of the new century, Canada was one of the few nations that welcomed small movements of persecuted ethnic minorities from Burma/Myanmar – Karen and Rohingya peoples in particular.

What do all the above movements show us? They reveal that the global refugee phenomenon was increasing and Canada had a role to play in responding to crises of human displacement. While Canada, with its northern location bordered on three sides by ocean, was difficult to get to, advanced travel and communication networks, as well as the country's identity as a 'nation of immigrants' with strong social programs made it a desirable destination. Even while government agencies sorted out special programs to respond to acute needs overseas, and annual quotas were set for admission of refugees from a variety of settings, thousands annually made claims for asylum from within Canada. The large number of claims, together with a refugee determination process that often succumbed to bureaucratic delays, meant that it could take many years before a decision was made, and for permanent residency to be conferred or for deportation to be ordered. Critics of the system came from across the ideological spectrum. Those who believed that many claimants were 'illegitimate' argued for a process that would quickly identify and eliminate individuals not deemed to need protection and not likely to experience persecution if returned to their homeland. Others argued for a more transparent process, with adequate opportunity for claimants to make their case for asylum, and for multiple levels of appeal available should a claim be denied.

## **Refugees in a Post-9/11 Era**

In the summer of 2010, a shipload of 492 mostly Tamil people from Sri Lanka arrived in Victoria Harbour on Canada's west coast, seeking asylum. This was one of several highly-publicized arrivals of refugees by sea, and elicited responses of both sympathy and alarm from public and politicians alike. Most of those on board the M.V. Sun Sea, including some children, were held in detention centres for close to a year. In response to public and political outcry over what was described as 'human smuggling', 'queue-jumping', and 'bogus refugees', the Conservative government introduced a number of bills aimed at quashing arrivals such as the Tamils. The new rules punished smugglers who transported them, but also called for mandatory detention for asylum-seekers considered to be 'irregular arrivals,' which vaguely meant

those who arrived by sea in large groups. The contentious debates surrounding this legislation reflected highly polarized attitudes, especially towards people who made a refugee claim after arriving in Canada. Contrary to the assumptions underlying the outrage expressed over the M.V. Sun Sea in 2010, five years later about two-thirds of the passengers had received positive decisions on their refugee claims, while others remained in process.

The post 9/11 era, the first decade-and-a-half of the 21st century, witnessed new and challenging issues for refugees seeking permanent homes in Canada. The initial one was an aura of suspicion, based on (mis)perceptions of terrorism, that surrounded refugees from specific parts of the world, whether sponsored or claimants. Such accusations were made against the passengers on the M.V. Sun Sea. In the aftermath of the attacks in the United States on September 11, 2001 that resulted in more than 3,000 deaths, the Canadian state was increasingly motivated by security measures aimed at preventing terrorist acts. This led to immigration policies and practices that were mainly exclusionary, not open-door. To a certain extent, national security became a greater determinant of immigration – especially regarding refugees – than the state of the economy and labour market. As in the Cold War era, Canada's response to potential refugees was highly politicized and often motivated by anti-Muslim sentiments, given that many refugees were now coming from predominantly Muslim countries. Some critics of present-day practice suggest that while racism is less explicit in preference for and against certain groups, ideology is now more dominant as a factor.

The new millennium saw a major sweep of immigration-related changes in policy and practice. Greater differentiation between 'immigrants' and 'refugees' that was apparent in public and political discourse was entrenched in new federal legislation that took effect in 2002, the Immigration and Refugee Protection Act. Although the Act was introduced before 9/11, much of its intent was framed by concern for securing Canada's borders from terrorist activity. The numerous regulations that were implemented following passage of the Act were more restrictive towards refugees and gave substantial discretion to immigration officers with the Canadian Border Service Agency, created in 2003 and charged with enforcing immigration regulations at the nation's borders. Under the new Act, annual quotas for refugees went down to about 12 percent of overall immigration. As well, while the

new Act included an option to appeal a negative decision on a refugee claim, the body to hear such appeals was not instituted until about ten years later. Some observers described a 'growing culture of exclusion' in Canada. The language used with reference to refugee arrivals was also hotly debated, as some pro-refugee Canadians expressed outrage over politicians' usage of descriptors such as 'bogus' and 'illegal' to refer to a diverse and complicated group of people seeking asylum.

The process by which refugees were admitted to Canada has changed in important ways since the watershed years of the mid-1970s. Today (2016) there are essentially three paths that can be taken for individuals to be assigned refugee status in Canada. First is the path of government-assisted refugees (GARs), who are accepted and processed overseas, often in refugee camps operated by the UNHCR. The second path is that of private sponsorship on the part of individuals, groups, or private organizations that undertake to support refugees (PSRs) financially for at least one year. This is the category that has experienced the greatest rise and fall since its launch in the late 1970s, comprising most of the refugee arrivals in 1989 and then steadily declining to near disappearance in the early 2000s; an upward trend began in 2015 with the Syrian refugee movement. Within the categories of government-assisted or privately-sponsored resettlement were additional classes of persons who lived in varying circumstances of persecution, violence, and risk that warranted protection. The third path, now the predominant one, is through the decision-making power of the Immigration and Refugee Board, which adjudicates claims for refugee status using the criteria of the UN Convention or other risk factors. While this category constitutes the largest proportion of the annual intake (2016 perhaps being an exception given the high number of government and privately-sponsored refugees), the percentage of successful claims generally hovers below half.

Debate is ongoing over the total number of refugees in all three categories that should be admitted annually. While the overall annual target of immigrant intake has remained fairly consistent since the early 1990s – about 250,000 – the refugee portion of it has fluctuated dramatically. A Five-Year Immigration Plan introduced in 1990 proposed that refugees should comprise 21 percent of the quarter million, but the actual number has gone as low as 8 percent, and since 2005 has averaged at about 10 percent.

And while refugees had a long history of arriving on Canadian shores in large groups on boats or ships, a new fear of a 'deluge' or 'influx' of asylum-seekers expressed itself in opposition to individuals arriving by sea, as evidenced by the Sri Lankan refugees discussed earlier. Another issue was mainly bureaucratic. Concern on all sides of the immigration debate was expressed over the backlog in the refugee determination system. An increasingly complicated process for making a claim for refugee status, combined with varying levels of appeal options, meant that individuals and families faced long waits until their status as refugees and then permanent residents was confirmed. Months and years could pass while claimants waited in limbo for hearings to be scheduled, appeals to be heard, and new information to be gathered and accessed. In one case, an asylum seeker from Nicaragua waited 19 years until her claim was finally approved. While this is an extreme example, it is not unusual for claims to take up to ten years to be processed.

An effort to speed up the process was Bill C-31, "Protecting Canada's Immigration System Act," which was passed in the spring of 2012 but was widely criticized both for its stringent approaches to asylum-seekers and for violating the UN Convention as well as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. The new regulations were indicative, some said, of declining sympathy and openness to refugee newcomers. These regulations featured shortened timelines for refugees to compile and put forward their claim, and a lengthier list of 'designated' or so-called 'safe' countries of origin – places that Canada did not consider to be producers of refugees. The Conservative government in power argued that a speedier process was more efficient and would reduce the backlog. Critics pointed out that the shorter timelines implemented in December 2012 made it nearly impossible for newly arrived refugee claimants to compile an adequate case file. Two years after the implementation of these changes, the results were mixed, and success was measured differently by government and its critics. While the number of claimants declined by almost 10,000 in 2013, the number of claims approved increased from 38 percent in 2013 to 50 percent in 2014. The jury is still out on the impact of the new process. Although the number of cases awaiting adjudication is in decline – the so-called backlog – other problems persisted and new ones emerged.

One of these problems is the issue of family reunification. An immigration system mired in bureaucracy, suspicion, and political agenda resulted in families separated by long distances over long periods of time. In 2015, family reunification became a key campaign of the Canadian Council for Refugees (CCR), which outlined numerous cases in which children (often dependent ones) were separated from their parents for close to a decade. One such case was that of 'Ihssan' (not her real name), whose activism on behalf of women's rights in Afghanistan resulted in threats to her and her family, prompting her flight to Canada in 2008. She left behind four children (two additional adoptive children were disallowed from her application by Citizenship and Immigration Canada), but was reunited with a daughter studying in the U.S. and gave birth to a son within a year of arrival. Her early optimism over a reunion turned to despair when, in 2015, she was still navigating a sometimes unresponsive bureaucracy unmoved by the physical and emotional insecurity of the children left behind who moved through three different countries in search of safety. For this family, like too many others, the officially stated period for reunification – about 32 months – had long passed.

Another hot button issue is sanctuary for refugee claimants who have received negative decisions on their claims. Acting out of human rights concerns, Canadian civil society groups, mainly churches thus far, have decided to offer sanctuary to these individuals. Providing sanctuary has been described as a form of civil disobedience, since it purportedly defies the rule of law. An additional issue, highlighted by the crisis of 2015, relates to the definition of a refugee: increasingly, we are seeing large movements of refugees who might be called 'economic' in nature, people fleeing their homes because they lack the means for basic survival – water, food, arable land. While they wouldn't be considered refugees according to the 1951 Convention, in a world beset by climate change the number of people seeking asylum to better their lives will rise. Canada, as a rich country with a large land mass and relatively small population, will increasingly be under pressure – from both internal and external forces – to expand its refugee intake.

Canada's overall record on refugees is mixed, and assessments of it are largely based on one's political stripes. In some respects, Canada has historically been a leader in admitting refugees and has been recognized as such internationally, as the Nansen award mentioned

earlier attests. As well, in 1993 Canada became the first country to issue Guidelines on “Women Refugee Claimants fearing Gender-related Persecution,” which for the first time recognized gendered experiences of violence and harassment as a variable that should qualify an individual for protection as a Convention refugee. The Guidelines acknowledged that, while women and children worldwide outnumbered men as refugees, they had more difficulty reaching a country like Canada and also were subject to human rights abuses that are gender-specific, such as sexual violence and harmful cultural or religious practices. Following this precedent, Canada has also been a leader in recognizing sexual orientation and gender identity more broadly as grounds for a refugee claim.

Canada has often been portrayed as having one of the most generous policies towards refugees in the world. Indeed, there is much to be proud of, especially during the latter decades of the last century, when the nation’s rich multicultural identity was formed in large part because of the arrival of refugee populations from diverse regions, particularly from the global south. However, some would argue that this is a myth, and doesn’t acknowledge the racism and discrimination often experienced by refugees in Canada.

Yet, according to the CCR, the rhetoric surrounding refugee reception is increasingly about the fear that Canada’s generosity is being abused, rather than about the basic human right of persecuted people to seek asylum. A fundamental question about the nation’s attitude towards refugees is whether admission is a privilege or a right. Given the dire state and sheer volume of refugees and displaced persons in the world today, 80 percent of whom are hosted in global south countries with minimal resources, it behooves Canada to reconsider both its past and future commitment to people around the globe who are fleeing for their lives.

## For Further Reading

An extensive body of social science research and literary output analyzes and reflects the experience of refugees in Canada, some of which is historical in its interpretation. Except for a few important exceptions, this bibliography will not attempt to summarize that literature.

Overviews of Canadian immigration history that contain sections on refugees include: Ninette Kelley and Michael J. Trebilcock, *The Making of the Mosaic: A History of Canadian Immigration Policy, second edition* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2010); Valerie Knowles, *Strangers at our Gates: Canadian Immigration and Immigration Policy, 1540-2006*, revised edition (Toronto: Dundurn Press, 2007); Reg Whitaker, *Canadian Immigration Policy Since Confederation* (Ottawa: Canadian Historical Association, 1991). Many of the Canadian Historical Association's booklets on Canada's Ethnic Groups include sections on refugee immigrants.

The following publications analyze attitudes and policy towards refugees, both historically and in a contemporary setting.

Howard Adelman, *Immigration and Refugee Policy: Australia and Canada* (Carlton: Melbourne University Press, 1994); and Adelman, *Refugee Policy: Canada and the United States* (Toronto: Centre for Refugee Studies, York University, 1991); Adelman and C. Michael Lanphier, *Refuge or Asylum? A Choice for Canada* (North York: York Lanes Press, 1990); Gerald E. Dirks, *Canada's Refugee Policy: Indifference or Opportunism?* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1977); Dirks, *World Refugees: The Canadian Response* (Toronto: Canadian Institute of International Affairs, 1988); David Matas, and Ilana Simon, *Closing the Doors: The Failure of Refugee Protection* (Toronto: Summerhill Press, 1989); Peter Showler, *Refugee Sandwich: Stories of Exile and Asylum* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2006).

Accounts of pre-Second World War movements that are characterized as refugee migrations include: Frank H. Epp, *Mennonite Exodus: The Rescue and Resettlement of the Russian Mennonites Since the Communist Revolution* (Altona, MB: D.W. Friesen, 1962); Janice Potter-MacKinnon, *While the Women Only Wept: Loyalist Refugee Women in Eastern Ontario* (Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1993); Isabel Kaprielian-Churchill, *Like Our Mountains: A History of Armenians in Canada* (Montreal & Kingston: Mc-

Gill-Queens University Press, 2005); Benjamin Drew, *The Refugee: Narratives of Fugitive Slaves in Canada* (Toronto: Dundurn Press, 2008); Karolyn Smardz Frost, *I've Got a Home in Glory Land: A Lost Tale of the Underground Railroad* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2007); Mark McGowan, *Death or Canada: The Irish Migration to Toronto, 1847* (Toronto: Novalis, 2009).

On the wartime and post-Second World War movements of refugees and displaced persons, see: Susan Armstrong-Reid and David Murray, *Armies of Peace: Canada and the UNRRA Years* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2008); Irving Abella and Harold Troper, *None is too Many: Canada and the Jews of Europe, 1933-1948* (Toronto: Lester & Orpen Dennys, 1982); Abella and Troper, "The Line must be drawn somewhere: Canada and Jewish Refugees, 1933-1939," *Canadian Historical Review* 60:2 (1979): 178-209; Karl Aun, *The Political Refugees: A History of the Estonians in Canada* (Toronto: McLelland and Stewart, 1985); Milda Danys, *DP: Lithuanian Immigration to Canada after the Second World War* (Toronto: Multicultural History Society of Ontario, 1986); Wsevolod Isajiw, Yury Boshyk, and Roman Senkus, eds., *The Refugee Experience: Ukrainian Displaced Persons after World War II* (Edmonton: Canadian Institute of Ukrainian Studies Press, 1992); Ben Lappin, *The Redeemed Children: The Story of the Rescue of War Orphans by the Jewish Community of Canada* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1963); Lubomyr Luciuk, *Searching for Place: Ukrainian Displaced Persons, Canada, and the Migration of Memory* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2000); Lynda Mannik, *Photography, Memory, and Refugee Identity: The Voyage of the SS Walnut, 1948* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2013); Marlene Epp, *Women without Men: Mennonite Refugees of the Second World War* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2000); Laura Madokoro, "Slotting' Chinese Families and Refugees, 1947-1967," *The Canadian Historical Review* 93, 1 (March 2012): 25-56; Lynne Taylor, *Polish Orphans of Tengeru: The Dramatic Story of their Long Journey to Canada, 1941-49* (Toronto: Dundurn, 2009).

On the Cold War era refugee movements, see: Robert H. Keyserlingk, ed., *Breaking Ground: The 1956 Hungarian Refugee Movement to Canada* (North York: York Lanes, 1993); Franca Iacovetta, "Freedom Lovers, Sex Deviates, and Damaged Women: Iron Curtain Refugee Discourses in Cold War Canada," in *Love, Hate, and Fear in Canada's*

*Cold War*, ed. Richard Cavell (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2004), 77-107; Franca Iacovetta, *Gatekeepers: Reshaping Immigrant Lives in Cold War Canada* (Toronto: Between the Lines, 2006); Laura Madokoro, *Elusive Refugee: Chinese Migrants in the Cold War* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2016).

Case studies of latter 20th-century refugee migrations include: John Hagan, *Northern Passage: American Vietnam War Resisters in Canada* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2001); Alan, Haig-Brown, *Hell No, We Won't Go: Vietnam Draft Resisters in Canada* (Vancouver: Raincoast Books, 1996); Francis Peddie, *Young, Well-Educated and Adaptable: Chilean Exiles in Ontario and Quebec, 1973-2010* (Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 2014); Morton Beiser, *Strangers at the Gate: The "Boat People's" First Ten Years in Canada* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1999); María Cristina García, *Seeking Refuge: Central American Migration to Mexico, the United States, and Canada* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006). Elizabeth McLuhan, ed., *Safe Haven: The Refugee Experience of Five Families* (Toronto: Multicultural Society of Ontario, 1995); Ivaylo Grouev, *Bullets on the Water: Canadian Refugee Stories* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2000); Janet McLellan, *Cambodian Refugees in Ontario: Resettlement, Religion, and Identity* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2009); Helene Moussa, *Storm and Sanctuary: The Journey of Ethiopian and Eritrean Women Refugees* (Dundas, ON: Artemis Enterprises, 1993); Ratna Omidvar and Dana Wagner, *Flight and Freedom: Stories of Escape to Canada* (Toronto: Between the Lines, 2015).

For contemporary analyses of refugee policy and practice, see the following websites: Canadian Council for Refugees ([www.ccrweb.ca](http://www.ccrweb.ca)); Amnesty International Canada ([www.amnesty.ca](http://www.amnesty.ca)); UNHCR [The UN Refugee Agency] Canada ([www.unhcr.ca](http://www.unhcr.ca)); Canadian Sanctuary Network ([www.sanctuarycanada.ca](http://www.sanctuarycanada.ca)).

## IMMIGRATION AND ETHNICITY IN CANADA

Immigration and Ethnicity in Canada Series (previously titled Canada's Ethnic Groups Series) is a series of booklets designed to provide secondary and undergraduate students, historians and general readers with concise histories of particular aspects of immigration and ethnicity in Canada.

Many of these readable accounts trace the origins, the development, and the contemporary situation of particular ethnocultural communities in Canada. The booklets include maps and tables suitable for overhead projection, as well as suggestions for further reading.

They are available in both French and English and additional booklets are in the planning stages. The series is published by the Canadian Historical Association in collaboration with the Department of Canadian Heritage, Government of Canada.

1. J.M. Bumsted, *The Scots in Canada* | *Les Écossais au Canada*
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