

Waterloo Region Refugee Increase 2015

Background

According to the United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR), 59.5 million individuals were forcibly displaced worldwide at the end of 2014. Among these, 19.5 million were refugees recognised under the mandate of UNHCR and 1.8 million were asylum seekers. Currently, displacements are affecting many countries in the Middle East, Africa, Asia and Europe. The number of forcibly displaced persons continues to rise as the unresolved crises in Syria, Afghanistan and Somalia are now compounded by new crises that have broken out, or reignited, in the Central African Republic, South Sudan, Ukraine and Iraq, among other places.¹ According to UNHCR, there are approximately 4 million Syrians who have been forced to leave their country² and approximately 3 million individuals of concern in Iraq.³

Canada's new Federal Government has committed to resettling 25,000 Syrian refugees in Canada through direct government sponsorship by the end of 2015 and possibly more through private sponsorship. The Ontario government is expected to resettle an additional 10,000 refugees mainly through private sponsorship efforts; up to 2,500 in 2015 and the rest in 2016.⁴ These refugees are expected to begin arriving in Canada from the beginning of December. There are also significant efforts across Canada and in Waterloo Region to organize for the private sponsorship of more refugees.

It is the policy of the Federal Government to accept those refugees with the highest needs for resettlement to Canada. In Ontario, there are only six resettlement sites for Government Assisted Refugees (GARs): Ottawa, Toronto, Hamilton, Windsor, London and Kitchener.

The Federal Government has pledged to invest an additional \$100 million over this fiscal year for refugee processing, sponsorship and settlement services across Canada.⁵ The Ontario Government has pledged \$10.5 million to the Syrian refugee crisis with \$2 million of that to be directed overseas for immediate humanitarian aid.⁶ To date, there is no clear information about what proportion of or how those dollars will be allocated to communities for services in refugee-receiving communities.

Local Implications

Data from Citizenship and Immigration Canada (CIC) shows that from 2011 to 2014, refugee serving organizations in Waterloo Region supported between 200-250 new Government Assisted Refugees per year and between 75-140 Privately Sponsored Refugees (PSRs).⁷

¹ UNHCR *Global Trends*, 2015. p.2. Retrieved from: <http://unhcr.org/556725e69.html>.

² Amnesty International. *Syria's refugee crisis in numbers*. 2015. Retrieved from: <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2015/09/syrias-refugee-crisis-in-numbers/>.

³ UNCHR. *Global Appeal Update. Iraq*. 2015. p.2. Retrieved from: <http://www.unhcr.org/5461e60613.html>.

⁴ Newsroom, Office of the Premier. *Province Will Help Bring Up To 10,000 Refugees to Ontario by End of 2016*. 2015. Retrieved from: <http://www.premier.gov.on.ca/en/news/34192>.

⁵ Liberal Government Website. *Syrian Refugees. 2015*. Retrieved from: <http://www.liberal.ca/realchange/syrian-refugees/>.

⁶ Newsroom, Office of the Premier (2015).

⁷ Citizenship & Immigration Canada, RDM. October, 2014.

According to CIC projections for 2013-2015, Kitchener has been the destination for approximately 3.7% of all GARs in Canada and around 12% of GARs in Ontario.

Given the projection for the number of GARs and PSRs to be resettled by the Federal and Provincial governments in 2015, Waterloo Region could anticipate receiving upwards of 1,150 refugees (including 850 GARs plus 300 PSRs based on Ontario projections) in the next two months. This exceeds Kitchener's yearly intake of refugees, both publicly and privately sponsored, by over 250%. There could also be several hundred more refugees arriving in the community in coming months through local sponsorship efforts.

According to data gathered on new GARs supported in Kitchener in 2014-2015:

- Around 50% were singles while families of between 2-6 members accounted for 47% of arrivals.
- Around 50% were children and youth aged 0-24 and the other half were adults over the age of 25.
- Resettlement case workers held an average of 13 meetings per client per year (not counting interactions at other services).
- Access to health services was considered their top need (17%), followed by learning English (15%), community services (13%), housing (12%), food and clothing (10%), education & training (10%), information session (7%), library resources (6%), employment (5%), life skills (5%).
- Top client referrals were to health and mental health services (59%), social services (11%), housing (9%), language training (6%) and education (5%).⁸

The imminent influx of refugees to Waterloo Region in coming months will significantly impact service provision in the refugee settlement sector and many others. The demand for documents processing, temporary and long-term affordable housing, health and mental health services, education, language assessment and training, employment support, subsidised transit and child care, etc. will increase considerably in coming months.

Immigration Partnership will work with resettlement and settlement service agencies and refugee sponsorship groups to:

1. Engage government and funders in discussion to ensure that resources are being channeled where needed most urgently and utilized most effectively to meet refugees' needs.
2. Build on Immigration Partnership's existing frameworks for service alignment and coordination to facilitate targeted service planning and coordination with services in the areas of most immediate need.
3. Identify gaps and update the inventory of refugee support services in Waterloo Region and other agencies required to meet refugee needs.
4. Disseminate information to faith groups, ethnic communities, municipalities and other service groups so that they can prepare to support the welcoming and integration of refugees.

⁸ Reception House internal ETO database.