



# Mentoring Refugee, Immigrant & Newcomer Children and Youth

Refugees and Newcomer  
Population Profile



# Refugees and Newcomer Population Profile

Refugees and newcomers arrive from many countries. In 2016, Canada admitted 46,700 refugees, the most since 1980. According to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, the top five countries of origin were:

- Syria (33,266)
- Eritrea (3,934)
- Iraq (1,650)
- Congo (1,644)
- Afghanistan (1,354)

Overall, Canada admitted more than 320,000 newcomers from July 2015 to July 2016, also a high for recent years.

Alberta was the destination for more than 57,000, its most ever and the second most of any province.

Newcomers to Canada, and Alberta, are diverse in country of origin, background, income, and education. Some have strong language skills and a support network, and others face a greater linguistic and cultural adjustment. It is important to understand the population you are working with, especially the refugee population.

## Syrian Refugees

In 2011, conflict and a civil war erupted in Syria. This has created a significant outflow of refugees from the country, numbering in the millions. Many spent several years in refugee camps before finding settlement elsewhere.

Privately sponsored refugees have been coming to Canada for several years. In November 2015, the Government of Canada announced a plan to resettle 25,000 government sponsored Syrian refugees in the next year. As of January

29, 2017, Canada has welcomed more than 40,000.

As of January 2017, Alberta was home to more than 3,000 government-sponsored refugees, and had settled around 1700 additional privately-sponsored refugees since November 2015.

Syria has been home to many different religious groups, including the Sunni, Shia, and Alawis branches of Islam, Yazidis, Ismailis, and Christians. There is similar diversity amongst the population of refugees who have arrived in Canada.

Many working with Syrian refugees noted the importance of finding mentors who share a language if not also a common culture. Grassroots organizations, particularly faith organizations, are important groups to work with when developing and offering programs.

## Eritrean Refugees

In 2016, more refugees from Eritrea arrived in Canada than any other country besides Syria. Counting refugees and newcomers, there are an estimated 7,000 Eritreans-Calgarians alone. In 2015, the United Nations estimated that 5,000 refugees flee Eritrea each month, where human rights violations have been documented, and many are imprisoned or forced into labour camps.

## South Sudanese Refugees

Since 2013, a civil war has displaced 2.7 million people in South Sudan, with almost 1.5 million fleeing for other countries.

With more than 15,000 South Sudanese, Alberta is home to the largest community in Canada. To date, much of the work to support refugees locally has happened through private sponsorship and assistance.





The continuing civil war and displacement contributes to stress and trauma, as many newcomers still have family in the country.

## Somali Refugees

Somali refugees have been arriving in Canada since the 1980s, fleeing human rights abuses and civil war. In addition to the trauma experienced back home, and the long waits in refugee camps, Somali refugees have often faced language barriers – speaking neither English nor French, which has affected employment opportunities for young adults.

There are now large Somali communities in many cities, and established Somali-led organizations that help with the arrival and settlement process.

## LGBTQ Refugees

LGBTQ refugees and asylum claimants often face additional barriers. They may be fleeing persecution back home, and also not be accepted by their cultural community in Canada. This means they may not be comfortable accessing services and supports from a cultural organization. They may instead seek out an agency that serves the LGBTQ community.

The alienation and isolation they have, and often continue,

to experience, leads to a higher incidence of mental health challenges. While accessing services in a safe space, they may also face challenges of not being able to come out or be open if interacting with members of their cultural community.

It is important to ensure that a safe, welcoming space is created to serve LGBTQ refugees and newcomers.

### Learn More:

Refugee Alberta: How to Partner and Collaborate for Success - <http://refugeealberta.ca/refugee-organizations/how-to-collaborate/>



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