

A Win-Win Situation

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Glassen Essay Contest

The United Nations report *Asylum Levels and Trends in Industrialized Countries* reveals that Canada is at the bottom of a top-15 list of industrialized refugee receiving countries. Since the Syrian civil war started in 2011, more than 4 million people have fled the country and more than half of the country's population have been displaced by violence, danger, conflict and persecution. While the number of Syrians exposed to these appalling circumstances continues to increase, Canada must decide whether or not to take action. As a member of the United Nations Canada is ethically and legally responsible to welcome refugees, so they can survive, recover and build a better future. Canadians should further integrate Syrian refugees into society, allowing them to contribute to Canada's economy and culture, and help stabilize the war situation in Syria.

Canada's history of refugees reveals that refugee populations can have a positive social and economic impact on their host country. When Canada accepted 60,000 refugees from Southeast Asia between 1979 and 1981, "within a decade, 86% of those former refugees were working, healthy and spoke English [...] and [...] they were less likely to use social services [...] than the average Canadian" (Cowan, 2015). The government's refugee protection program is helping "refugees [to] bring their experiences and skills as well as their hopes and dreams to Canada which [...] contribute[s] to an even richer and more prosperous society for [everyone]" (Citizenship and Immigration Canada [CIC], 2015a). While Canada is facing the demographic issue of a rapidly aging and shrinking population, welcoming refugees is an opportunity "to fill the working age population, [...] stabilize the state pension system" (Nie, 2015) and sustain the country's economy and standard of living. Canada has enough resources and space to resettle

more than the 25,000 Syrian refugees planned by Justin Trudeau, but how positively they will impact the country in terms of economic growth and social contribution depends on how well Canada is going to integrate them. When facilitating the integration of asylum seekers into Canada's society and economy, accepting them will be both a humanitarian gesture and wise economic policy.

Beside the economic and social benefits of accepting refugees, Canada is also obligated to follow international agreements and laws regarding its refugee policy. By Article 14 of the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* that was proclaimed by the United Nations General Assembly in 1948, “everyone has the right to seek and enjoy in other countries asylum from persecution” (United Nations, 1948). Having participated in the 1951 Refugee Convention and having signed on to the 1967 protocol, Canada is liable to welcome Syrians that fall under the document's definition of a refugee, an individual seeking refuge from persecution. Chapter Four Article 20 to 24 specifically define a country's responsibility to care for the wellbeing of refugees. According to the United Nations Refugee Agency, “refugees deserve, as a minimum, the same standards of treatment enjoyed by other foreign nationals in a given country and, in many cases, the same treatment as nationals” (Yan, 2015). By being a member of the United Nations and having signed international and Canadian treaties that concern refugees, Canada has a legal duty to accept Syrians fleeing persecution.

The assassinations and terror attacks, that took place in Europe since the start of the Syrian refugee crisis, reinforce the necessity to continue screening asylum seekers to protect the safety, security and health of Canadians. Since the discovery of a fake Syrian passport near the

body of one of the suicide bombers of the November 2015 Paris attacks, many Canadians are concerned about their safety when accepting refugees into their country. But in contrast to the often questioned screening process of European countries, Syrian refugees must “undergo a robust, multi-layered screening [...] including the collection of biometrics” (CIC, 2015b) before being allowed to enter Canada. The Government of Canada also focuses on “identifying vulnerable refugees who are a lower security risk” (CIC, 2015b). Thereby families, women and unaccompanied minors are prioritized since they pose the least risk of radicalization. The Canadian refugee screening process that consists of refugee identification, immigration and security interviews, identity and document verifications and health screenings is important to allow the country to welcome refugees while putting itself at a minimum security risk and protecting the physical, moral and political security and wellbeing of Canada.

The ongoing conflicts in Syria have triggered the worst humanitarian crisis in the world presently. The Canadian government needs to help secure the situation addressing the long-term development challenges facing Syria. On February 8, 2016 the Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau announced Canada’s new policy to “address the ongoing crises in Iraq and Syria [...] mak[ing] a meaningful contribution to the Global Coalition’s fight against the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL), while strengthening the ability of regional governments and local authorities to defend themselves, and rebuild over the long-term” (Global Affairs Canada, 2016). Since neither Canada nor any other country can accept an ever-increasing number of refugees, this is an important step towards finding a solution that stabilizes the Syrian war zones with the long-term consequence of reducing the number of refugees worldwide.

Canada's Liberal majority government is currently taking humanitarian leadership over the global refugee crisis making resettling Syrian refugees one of their priorities and planning on resolving the conflicts in Syria. Canada should continue to hold this position in the Syrian refugee crisis, welcoming screened Syrians and helping them to start a new life. Being morally and legally liable to accept refugees, we, as Stanley Knowles stated in 1943, “should do our best to provide as much sanctuary as we can for those people who can get away. [...] [W]e should do that because these people are human and deserve that consideration, and because we are human and ought to act in that way” (as cited in Active History, 2015). Worldwide Canada is known as a modern and progressive nation with open-minded citizens that are proud of their multicultural society and ethnic diversity. Especially in times of the current refugee crisis Canada should live up to its name, welcoming and integrating Syrian refugees.

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