

Study: Syrian refugees who resettled in Canada in 2015 and 2016

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In 2015, the Canadian government announced a plan to resettle 25,000 Syrian refugees in Canada by the end of February 2016, in the wake of the ongoing war in Syria since 2011 and the ensuing humanitarian crisis.

For refugees, the first few months or years in a new country can be difficult. They often have fewer education credentials, less language proficiency in English or French than other immigrants, and they may also have fewer social networks and connections, particularly when they do not benefit from a private sponsor. As a result, refugees often need time and support to establish themselves in the country, acquire skills and find employment.

Today, for the first time, Statistics Canada is releasing a detailed analysis of the socioeconomic conditions and demographic characteristics of those Syrian refugees who resettled in Canada from January 1, 2015, to May 10, 2016, a period during which many Syrian refugees were admitted to Canada.

"Resettled refugees" are refugees who were selected abroad while outside their home country or country where they normally lived and who were granted permanent resident status on the basis of a well-founded fear of returning to that country.

The study, titled "Syrian refugees who resettled in Canada in 2015 and 2016," mainly uses census data, which is the richest source of current information available for Syrian refugees. Data from the 2016 Longitudinal Immigration Database are also used to examine the income situation of refugees who were admitted in November and December of 2015.

As more data become available on the socio-economic situation of Syrian refugees in Canada, Statistics Canada will add to this analysis and provide a more comprehensive picture of their settlement and integration over time.

The vast majority of Syrian refugees are families with children

The demographic and family indicators of Syrian refugees reflect their selection process. Families with children were prioritized, while young adults without children were less likely to be selected.

Specifically, 85% of Syrian families consisted of a couple with children, and these families had 2.8 children on average. This compared with 63% of refugee families from other countries, who had 2.2 children on average.

As a result, the Syrian refugee population had more children than that of other refugees, and a smaller proportion of people aged 15 to 29. In 2016, 44% of Syrian refugees were under the age of 15, compared with 31% for refugees from other countries.

The characteristics of government-assisted refugees are different from those of privately-sponsored refugees

Among Syrian refugees who came to Canada in 2015 and 2016, more than half were assisted by the government. That proportion was comparable to that of refugees from other countries.

Because the government gave priority to young families with children and vulnerable refugees, the demographic characteristics of government-assisted refugees were quite different from those of privately-sponsored refugees.

In 2016, 94% of government-assisted Syrian refugee families were couples with children, and these families had 3.2 children on average. The median age of government-assisted Syrian refugees was 13 years old.

In comparison, 78% of privately-sponsored refugee families were couples with children, and these families had 2.2 children on average. The median age of privately-sponsored Syrian refugees was 26 years old.



Government-assisted Syrian refugees were also less likely to speak at least one official language (about 20%) than privately-sponsored Syrian refugees (67%). They were also far less likely to hold a university degree (2% versus 25%).

The profile of government-assisted refugees points to a more vulnerable population with greater labour market integration challenges than privately-sponsored refugees.

After accounting for sociodemographic characteristics, Syrian refugees are as likely to work as other refugees

Syrian refugees had a lower employment rate than other refugees, largely because they had been in the country for a shorter period of time. At the time of the 2016 Census, on which these data are based, Syrian refugees had been in the country for an average of four months, while other refugees had been here for an average of eight months.

Among Syrian refugees aged 20 to 59 who arrived in 2015 and 2016, 24% of males and 8% of females were employed on Census Day (May 10). This compared with 39% of male and 17% of female refugees from other countries.

Another factor was language proficiency. In 2016, 55% of Syrian refugees did not speak English or French, compared with 28% of refugees from other countries.

When these factors and other sociodemographic characteristics were accounted for, the gap in employment rates between Syrian refugees and other refugees narrowed significantly among men and became virtually non-existent among women.

The labour market participation of refugees can change rapidly in the first few years after admission as they gradually improve their language proficiency and professional skills.

The average income of Syrian refugees was similar to that of other refugees

Annual income levels can be examined for refugees aged 20 to 59 who were admitted to Canada in November and December of 2015 and who, on December 31, 2016, had accumulated between 12 and 14 months of residence in Canada.

The average income of Syrian refugees was comparable to that of other refugees who spent the same length of time in Canada, with annual income levels varying from \$15,000 to \$20,000.

After 2016, Canada continued to welcome Syrian refugees, mainly via private sponsorship. In total, almost 60,000 Syrian refugees have resettled in Canada since 2015.

Statistics Canada will continue to follow the progress of Syrian refugees as new data becomes available, including more recent data from the Longitudinal Immigration Database.

Note to readers

The data in this analysis are from the 2016 Census of Population and from the 2016 Longitudinal Immigration Database. **Resettled refugees** are defined as immigrants who were selected abroad while outside their home country or country where they normally lived and who were granted permanent resident status on the basis of a well-founded fear of returning to that country. **Government-assisted refugees** are refugees who received resettlement assistance from the federal government. **Privately-sponsored refugees** are refugees who were privately sponsored by organizations, groups of Canadian citizens and/or permanent residents, or who had the funds to support themselves and any dependents after they arrived in Canada.

This study uses Census data to examine the sociodemographic and employment situation of refugees who resettled in Canada from January 1, 2015, to May 10, 2016. During that period, a large number of Syrian refugees were admitted to Canada over a very short period of time, particularly from December 2015 to the end of February 2016. The study also examines the 2016 annual income figures of Syrian refugees who came to Canada in November or December of 2015. In the near future, new data from the Longitudinal Immigration Database will be made available with 2017 annual income figures, which will allow for the analysis of the income in 2017 of Syrian refugees who were admitted in 2016.

Definitions, data sources and methods: survey numbers [3901](#) and [5057](#).

The article "[Results from the 2016 Census: Syrian refugees who resettled in Canada in 2015 and 2016](#)" is now available in *Insights on Canadian Society* ([75-006-X](#)).

For more information, or to enquire about the concepts, methods or data quality of this release, contact us (toll-free 1-800-263-1136; 514-283-8300; STATCAN.infostats-infostats.STATCAN@canada.ca) or Media Relations (613-951-4636; STATCAN.mediahotline-ligneinfomedias.STATCAN@canada.ca).

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