

## Myths and Facts About Immigrants and Refugees

This factsheet was compiled from a variety of sources. Please see footnotes below

### **MYTH: Canada's refugee system is broken and refugees are to blame**

**FACT:** The high number of vacancies at the Immigrant and Refugee Board had a significant impact on its capacity to process cases in a timely manner. The inventory of unresolved cases reached an exceptionally high level – the IRB vacancy rate in March 2008 was 35%. (Office of the Auditor General of Canada, <http://bit.ly/xkAnmg>, 2009). Under-resourcing the system has created backlogs.

### **MYTH: Harsh policies will stop smugglers and asylum seekers arriving by boat.**

**FACT:** It is unfair and immoral to punish refugees to deter smugglers - and it won't work. Refugees fleeing desperate situations do what is needed to save their lives and their families. They rarely know the policies at their destination. Australia tried "Temporary Protection Visas" to stop unauthorized arrivals, requiring refugees to reapply for protection years later, limiting services, and barring family reunification. In 2008, they were abolished. "TPVs did not have any deterrent effect. Indeed, there was an increase in the number of women and children making dangerous journeys to Australia." (Government of Australia, Department of Immigration and Citizenship, <http://bit.ly/yqjWYS>, August 2008.)

### **MYTH: Refugee claimants pose threats to Canada's security**

**FACT:** Refugee claimants are not threats to security – they are seeking security and protection from threats to their own lives. Refugee claimants all go through a front-end security screening, in place since November 2001. Through this process, the Canadian Security Intelligence Service (CSIS) checks all refugee claimants on arrival in Canada. Since the screening was put in place, the number of claimants found to represent any kind of security concern has been statistically insignificant.

(For the years 2003-2006, only 7 out of a total of 99,980 claims were found ineligible on grounds of security. Calculated by the Canadian Council for Refugees from statistics provided by Citizenship and Immigration Canada)

### **MYTH: Refugees don't travel on false documents**

**FACT:** On the contrary, international law recognizes that refugees often have no choice but to enter a country of asylum illegally. The Refugee Convention therefore prohibits governments from penalizing refugees who enter or remain illegally in their territory. (*Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees*, Article 31. This is reflected in Canada's *Immigration and Refugee Protection Act* (s. 133) which exempts refugees from prosecution for using false documents.)

For many refugees fleeing persecution, a false travel document is the only means of escape. Repressive governments often refuse to issue passports to known political dissidents – or imprison them if they apply. Sometimes refugees are stripped of their identification as they flee from conflict or have no time to collect their documents before fleeing for safety. Many Jews fleeing Nazi persecution in the first half of the twentieth century used false documents to reach safety and were later recognized as refugees.

### **MYTH: Real refugees are those who wait in refugee camps overseas. Those who make a claim in Canada jump the line and are not as deserving.**

**FACT:** Refugees are people who have been forced from their homes by human rights abuses. All refugees have a right to protection, wherever they are. Canada also has legal obligations towards refugees in Canada under the Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees and the Convention against Torture. The Supreme Court of Canada has also confirmed that the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms guarantees the rights of asylum-seekers to fundamental justice.

### **MYTH: Government-assisted refugees receive more money for food than Canadians on welfare.**

#### **FACTS:**

- **Refugee claimants** and refugees recognized by the Immigration and Refugee Board receive no special income assistance. They may, depending on provincial regulations, be entitled, like other residents, to social assistance.

- **Privately sponsored refugees** are not entitled to any government income assistance (federal or the provincial government) during the period of their sponsorship (usually for one year after arrival). Their income support must be provided by their sponsors.
- **Government assisted refugees** have access to financial assistance from the federal government through the Resettlement Assistance Program (RAP). This financial assistance is generally for one year maximum and is received only if they do not have their own financial resources or income. The exact rate depends on the size of the family and is tied to social assistance rates.

In Ontario in July 2013, for example, a single person receives \$781 per month. In addition, government-assisted refugees are entitled to a one-time set up allowance, to cover such things as clothes, basic household effects and staples, and telephone installation. For a single person there is a maximum one-time allowance of \$905, plus a \$564 loan for house rental and telephone line deposits.

#### **MYTH: Immigrants take jobs away from Canadians**

**FACT:** New immigrants are three times more likely than Canadian-born workers to be found in low-skilled jobs.<sup>12</sup> Between 1993 and 2001, it was found that immigrants who had been in Canada for 10 years or less had a higher rate of over-qualification than their Canadian-born counterparts.<sup>13</sup> This may mean that immigrants are more likely to take jobs that individuals born in Canada with equivalent qualifications will not take.

**FACT:** Although many immigrants come to Canada as highly skilled professionals, their qualifications may not be recognized as equivalent to the qualifications of Canadian-born workers trained in the same fields. Such immigrants do not have the opportunity to compete for jobs with Canadians who have the same levels of qualification. (Statistics Canada.

(2006). The Dynamics of Over qualification: Canada's Underemployed University Graduates - Catalogue No: 11-621-MIE2006039)

#### **MYTH: Internationally trained professionals are not as qualified as Canadian professionals**

**FACT:** Foreign trained professionals such as doctors, accountants, engineers, teachers, social workers and others must have their credentials reviewed by accredited Canadian assessment bodies before they can practice in their field.

(Canadian Information Centre for International Credentials general guiding principles for good practice in the assessment of foreign credentials provides in-depth information on the assessment process. <http://www.cicic.ca/502/good-practice.canada>.) Foreign trained professionals can only practice in their area of expertise if the assessing bodies are convinced they are qualified and competent.

**FACT:** There are many foreign trained professionals who are successfully working in their field of expertise. It is estimated that more than 40% of immigrants to Canada are working in the profession for which they were trained.

(Grewal, San (2007, September 13) Engineers breaking new ground. Attitude shift helps professional body lead the pack in licensing foreign trained workers. <http://www.thestar.com/article/255475>)

**FACT:** According to the Canadian Medical Association (CMA), more than 26% of all physicians practicing in Ontario in 2011 were foreign trained. (Canadian Medical Association Statistics, Percent by Country of MD Graduation, Canada, 2011.

[http://www.cma.ca/multimedia/CMA/Content/Images/Inside\\_cma/Statistics/09GradCountry.pdf](http://www.cma.ca/multimedia/CMA/Content/Images/Inside_cma/Statistics/09GradCountry.pdf))

#### **MYTH: Immigrants do not want to integrate into "Canadian society"**

**FACT:** Immigrants are more likely to become Canadian citizens than eligible newcomers in other similar countries. A study published in 2005 found that 84 per cent of immigrants who had lived in Canada for at least three years were Canadian citizens in 2001. Meanwhile, in the U.K., only half of the immigrants who had lived in the country for five years were British citizens, and only 40 per cent of foreign-born residents had become citizens in the States. (The Hamilton Spectator <http://www.thespec.com/news-story/2222361-10-myths-about-immigration/> )

#### **MYTH: Immigrants bring crime to Canada.**

**FACT:** Actually, immigrants in Canada have lower overall crime rates than Canadian-born populations, and are less involved in criminal activity. (Statistics Canada. (2006). The dynamics of over qualification: Canada's underemployed university graduates. Catalogue No: 11-621-IE2006039

<http://canada.metropolis.net/EVENTS/ottawa/WORTLEY%20PAPER%201.htm> )

#### **SOURCES:**

Canadian Council for Refugees ([www.ccrweb.ca](http://www.ccrweb.ca))

Peel Newcomer Strategy Group ([www.peelnewcomer.org](http://www.peelnewcomer.org))

Grand Erie Immigration Partnership ([www.workforceplanningboard.org/immigration](http://www.workforceplanningboard.org/immigration))

The Hamilton Spectator ([www.thespec.com](http://www.thespec.com))

Kamloops Welcoming Communities Program's Fact Sheets (<http://immigrantservices.ca/wp-content/uploads/2014/04/1.pdf>)