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## Matching Government-Assisted Refugee Newcomers

### How Does International Resettlement Work?

The International Refugee Regime (the institutions, laws, treaties, and norms around international displacement) stipulates three “durable solutions” to situations of international displacement: return to countries of origin, naturalization in host countries, and international resettlement. Until the end of the Cold War, the regime operated on what scholars call an “exilic bias” – the assumption that most refugees would be naturalized or resettled internationally. Changing conflict dynamics and political sentiment meant that by the end of the 1990s “return” had become the preferred durable solution.

After the Cold War, refugee source regions shifted to the Global South and refugee populations began to grow. Developing countries host 85% of the world’s refugees; half are in states with less than \$5000 GDP per capita; and the fifty least developed countries host a quarter of all refugees. The emphasis on return, coupled with longer civil wars, mean most refugees will not return home. Two thirds of refugees are in what the United Nations High Commission for Refugees calls “protracted situations,” waiting an average of 25 years for a durable solution. As of 2016 there were over 21 million refugees in the world. Yet every year only one percent is recommended by the UNHCR for international resettlement. Canada accepts from 20,000 to 25,000 refugees per year – 0.001 % of the global total.

### How Many Refugees come to Toronto?

Refugees make up about ten percent of Canada’s annual inflow of newcomers. Unlike than the majority of immigrants who are accepted on economic potential, labour designation, or existing networks, most refugees are accepted on the basis of vulnerability. They require more social support.

Toronto Resettlement	BVOR	GAR	PSR	Total
2011	NA	1,345	2,015	3,360
2012	NA	825	1,205	2,030
2013	30	920	1,715	2,665
2014	20	1,365	1,380	2,765
2015	95	1,300	2,870	4,265
Jan-Jul 2016	520	1,945	3,010	5,475



While media attention focuses on Canada’s private sponsorship model, most refugees in the world are resettled by governments. Canada chooses resettlement location on the basis of existing family ties, other social connections, or established communities. Many refugees settled in rural areas or smaller cities relocate to big cities in the first year. 7,700 Government-Assisted refugees have arrived in Toronto over the past five years at an average of around 1,300 per year.

## **Why Are Government-Assisted Refugees Unique?**

Government-Assisted Refugees are resettled based on criteria of vulnerability. They tend to have lower literacy rates, lower professional status, and less proficiency with Canada’s official languages than Privately-Sponsored Refugee (PSR) newcomers. In addition, whereas PSRs arrive to a dedicated sponsorship group, GARs rely almost exclusively on settlement case workers for support. In Toronto, the average case load per worker is around 70 families. GARs thus experience a dual barrier to integration.<sup>1</sup>

GAR families in Ontario often report social isolation, overcrowded or substandard living conditions, and more social ills around mental and physical health. GAR youth report significantly more negative experiences and racial bias, with negative effects on long-term integration potential.<sup>2</sup> In the first year of settlement GAR newcomers have access to specialized social assistance. However, they are under significant time constraints to access services, enroll in language classes, access extended health care, and find suitable housing. Limited contact with case workers and a lack of social networks means they often fail to access services in the crucial first months – a delay with potentially long-term impacts.<sup>3</sup>

Welcome Groups can help bridge integration gaps by helping GAR newcomers navigate what might seem like simple errands or bureaucratic tasks. Sharing knowledge and access to social networks can have deep and lasting positive impacts for new members of our community. The friendships that form offer meaningful life experiences for everyone involved.

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<sup>1</sup> For example see Sweetman, Arthur, and Casey Warman. 2013. “Canada’s Immigration Selection System and Labour Market Outcomes.” *Canadian Public Policy* 39 (Supplement 1): S141–S60.

<sup>2</sup> Hyndman, Jennifer (with research assistance from Silvia D’Addario and Matt R. Stevens). 2014. “Refugee Research Synthesis 2009 - 2013.” A CERIS Report Submitted to Citizenship and Immigration Canada, Ottawa.

<sup>3</sup> OCASI. 2012. “Making Ontario Home: A Study of Settlement and Integration Services for Immigrants and Refugees.” [www.ocasi.org](http://www.ocasi.org)

