



# **WELCOME HOME!**

## **A RESOURCE KIT FOR UNIONS & LABOUR COUNCILS**

**Canada is now home to thousands of Syrian refugees.**

They need help to get settled as they build new lives for themselves and their families. Unions are already at work, making them feel welcome and helping them get started.

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[canadianlabour.ca](http://canadianlabour.ca)



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## WHO IS A REFUGEE?

Refugees are not immigrants. An immigrant is someone who chooses to settle permanently in another country. A refugee is someone forced to flee to another country and who, quite often, cannot return.

There are an estimated 60 million people in the world today who are displaced: those who have been uprooted and forced to move from their homes within their countries, and those forced to flee from their countries.

The refugees from Syria who are coming to Canada come from the latter group.

## THE SYRIAN REFUGEE CRISIS

Most of the world's displaced people are the result of conflict. In 2011, conflict erupted in Syria that, over the next few years escalated into a full-blown civil war that continues to this day. The United Nations (UN) estimates that more than half of Syria's pre-war population of 23 million are in need of urgent humanitarian assistance.

Today, there are 4.6 million known refugees who have taken refuge outside of Syria. About 95 per cent of these Syrians have taken refuge in neighbouring countries. According to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) there are 2.1 million Syrians registered in Egypt, Iraq, Jordan and Lebanon, 1.9 million Syrians registered by the Government of Turkey, as well as more than 26,700 Syrian refugees registered in North Africa.<sup>1</sup>

Europe has received the next largest numbers of refugees. Germany alone received 1.1 million refugees including 428,500 from Syria in 2015.<sup>2</sup> Canada has promised to receive 25,000 Syrians over the coming months, with 10,000 having arrived as of mid-January of this year.

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1 UNHCR <http://data.unhcr.org/syrianrefugees/regional.php>

2 <https://www.rt.com/news/328692-refugees-future-europe-germany/>

Refugees are people who have fled their countries because of a well-founded fear of persecution, and who are therefore unable to return home. Many refugees come from war-torn countries and have seen or experienced unthinkable horrors.

Citizenship & Immigration Canada (CIC)

## **CANADIAN UNIONS HAVE A HISTORY OF HELPING REFUGEES**

The Canadian Labour Congress (CLC) has a long history of supporting refugees and standing up for fairer and more equitable policies in Canada.

For example, in 2002, the CLC headed the Colombia Pilot Project, which brought Colombian union members and their families faced with persecution and assassination to Canada. This was a ground-breaking achievement for unions in Canada who, with the help of the CLC, became designated Refugee Sponsorship Agreement Holders (SAHs) with the responsibility of acting as private refugee sponsors.

Canadian unions have continued this work, developing policies and advocating for the rights and protection of refugees.

As the Syrian refugee crisis escalated, the CLC joined with many other organizations to call on our former federal government to do more to help. For example, the CLC and its affiliates wanted Canada to stop hindering the efforts of private citizens and organizations and remove barriers to the private refugee sponsorship.

Unions have also been strong advocates for the full restoration of coverage under the Interim Federal Health Program. They have also demanded less red tape around private sponsorships.

In October 2015, the CLC established a special fund, in partnership with the Canadian Council for Refugees (CCR), to help support the settlement of Syrian refugees in Canada. That fund has raised more than \$200,000 so far.

In December, the CLC joined with other national organizations representing business, faith and community groups to be part of the broader Canadian effort to welcome and support the resettlement of the thousands of Syrian refugees about to land in local communities.

This resource kit is part of that larger effort.

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## HOW YOU CAN HELP

There is a union presence in every one of the communities where refugees will be settling in the weeks and months ahead. Many of those communities also have a Labour Council.

Canadian unions need to do our part. We can activate our vast network of members and our local networks of community allies to bring refugees to Canada through private sponsorship, and support Syrian newcomers through donations, volunteerism, political action and fellowship.

## SPONSORING REFUGEES

There are a number of ways to privately sponsor refugees to come to Canada. First, they must qualify for entry under Canada's laws and must pass medical and security checks before they can enter the country.

Most sponsorships last for one year, with private sponsors providing financial and emotional support for the refugees over the duration of that period. This includes helping newcomers settle in and helping with housing, clothing and food, language training and finding employment.

To get more information about how to privately sponsor refugees, go to:  
[www.cic.gc.ca/ENGLISH/refugees/sponsor/index.asp](http://www.cic.gc.ca/ENGLISH/refugees/sponsor/index.asp)

**The Canadian Council for Refugees (CCR)** is a national non-profit organization committed to the rights and protection of refugees and other vulnerable migrants in Canada and around the world and to the settlement of refugees and immigrants in Canada. They have put together a very helpful resource kit: [Action Suggestions for Canadians Wanting to Sponsor or Assist Syrian Refugees](#).

Refugees are people who have a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, are outside the country of their nationality, and unable to avail themselves of the protection of that country.

United Nations Refugee Convention

## SUPPORTING REFUGEES IN CANADA

Today, **137 Canadian communities** have volunteered to receive Syrian refugees.

Once they arrive in your community, Syrian newcomers will need support getting settled. Think about it; they have fled their homes and their country, leaving their communities, their friends and families, and their way of life behind to make a new life in the safe refuge of Canada.

### They will need help with:

- **Affordable housing:** Finding temporary, and more importantly affordable, long term housing is a challenge.
- **Family support:** Finding child care, enrolling kids in school, finding the health care and other services.
- **Language training:** Finding language training opportunities for learning or improving English or French.
- **Adapting to the climate:** Finding the right clothing and footwear for the climate.
- **Transportation:** Learning how public transit works in your community, getting a drivers license, and finding a vehicle.
- **Community and cultural orientation:** Getting to know the community and culture.

Local unions and labour councils can actively and meaningfully be part of this national effort to help Syrian refugees make Canada their new home through donations and volunteerism.

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### **Unions and labour councils can:**

- Partner with service organizations, community groups, schools and places of worship that are helping or want to help with the settlement of newcomers.
- Help their members volunteer with service organizations, community groups and places of worship to assist newcomers.
- Donate directly to local and national funds set up to aid the settlement of Syrian refugees, including the joint CLC-CCR fund:  
[ccrweb.ca/en/syrian-refugees](http://ccrweb.ca/en/syrian-refugees).
- Stand up for fairness and social justice for Syrian newcomers, to ensure they enjoy the same rights and freedoms we all enjoy in Canada.

## **WORK WITH OUR ALLIES**

Unions and labour councils can also work with local groups—the local Chamber of Commerce, United Way, faith groups, community service groups, cultural organizations, etc. to raise funds and provide support for refugees as they arrive and settle in. More information on who in your community is already at work is available from [www.cic.gc.ca/english/refugees/welcome/volunteer.asp](http://www.cic.gc.ca/english/refugees/welcome/volunteer.asp)

## **STANDING UP FOR FAIRNESS**

Finally, one of the things that unions do best is stand up to unfairness, discrimination and oppression. This includes standing up for the rights of Syrian newcomers in our communities. Unions and labour councils are uniquely positioned to engage in political action and advocacy work with community partners and local government. Let's ensure that Canada's humanitarian commitment to refugees continues and lead by example by standing up to any racism and hatred directed towards Syrian newcomers and other racialized groups.

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# **STANDING UP FOR FAIRNESS**

Unions have a long history of standing up to discrimination and promoting equality.



**BACKLASH:** a strong negative reaction by a large number of people, for example to something that has recently changed in society

Oxford English Dictionary

## **STANDING UP TO SYRIAN REFUGEE BACKLASH**

There has been some backlash since the start of Canada's effort to welcome 25,000 refugees. This hostility, whether expressed verbally or through acts of aggression and sometimes violence, comes from distrust, misunderstanding and fear. It is unfortunate, but it can be overcome – with the help of local unions and labour councils through education, advocacy and fellowship.

Unions have a long history of standing up to unfairness and promoting equality. By working with community allies and groups interested in helping Syrian refugees settle into their new homes, we can counter any discrimination and hostility when it happens.

Examples of these allies – individuals and organizations who share the goal of welcoming and helping Syrian newcomers build a new life in Canada – include settlement agencies, the local chamber of commerce, elected officials, faith and cultural groups, schools and youth organizations, service agencies, businesses and health and social organizations.

Here are a few ways that unions and labour councils can help people in their communities stand up to any backlash against local refugees and those trying to help get them settled.

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## EDUCATION

Offer your members opportunities to learn about the Syrian refugee crisis, and what Canadian unions are doing to help with the national effort to bring people into the country. Open your events to the public. Work with community allies to support and promote their events to your members and in their workplaces.

### Here are some things you can do:

- Tell your members about their union's or their local labour council's role in welcoming and helping to settle Syrian refugees and why it is important. Keep them updated and constantly invite members to become involved.
- Include articles, commentaries or blogs in your internal communication networks, so members can learn more about the Syrian refugee effort and how to help. Quickly deal with any backlash from members on your social networks too.
- Invite community allies to your meetings, gatherings and events and give them space to share information about their work and learn about the work that unions and labour organizations are doing.
- Seek out invitations to your allies' meetings, gatherings and events; ask for space to share information about the work that unions and labour organizations are doing. Use the opportunity to think of ways to work together, including joint events.
- Co-host and co-sponsor activities at community events (fairs, festivals, tournaments, etc.) where community members and Syrian newcomers can interact: tobogganing races, hot chocolate or fruit cocktail socials, bake sales, BBQs, picnics, potluck suppers, etc.

In addition to working with allies and other community groups, find ways to learn about the experiences and perspectives of the newcomers themselves. Small gatherings for sharing and exchanging information, even just conversation can break down barriers and build solidarity.

Seek out the leadership of your local Syrian community and the leaders from among the Syrian newcomers in your community. Keep the communication channels open between these people and your local union and labour council leadership.

## **ADVOCACY**

Going public with your union's and your labour council's support for Syrian refugees and efforts to help them settle and build new lives sends a strong signal to everyone in the community. Here are some ways to get that done:

- Write a letter to the editor or an opinion piece for local media. Co-author it with community allies to show there is widespread support.
- Organize a public statement (like a news release) to publicize your support for the Syrian refugee efforts locally and how that connects with efforts across the country. Be sure to talk about how you are helping and invite people to get involved.
- Have local union leaders appear on local radio and TV programs (news, talk shows, etc.) to talk about helping Syrian newcomers get settled and how to stand up to any local backlash.
- Inform local elected officials about how you are welcoming Syrian newcomers.
- Inform your allies – and the newcomers – about your efforts.
- Speak out, immediately, against any backlash or incidents of discrimination against Syrian refugees in your community. Organize with allies and spokespeople from the Syrian community so you can find ways to speak out together.
- Lead by example: immediately speak out against discriminatory words or actions when you encounter them, no matter where you are.



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