







35,147 SYRIAN REFUGEES



November 2015 to November 2016









FCM FEDERATION OF CANADIAN CANADIENNE DES MUNICIPALITIES MUNICIPALITIES

Welcoming Communities – a toolkit for municipal governments

The civil war crisis in Syria has led to a migration of refugees rarely seen in recent history. Canadians recognize the need to reach out, help Syrians who are leaving everything behind in fleeing their homeland and welcome them to a country whose multicultural tradition is known worldwide. And municipal leaders understand they have a pivotal role ensuring their communities are welcoming, open communities for Syrian refugees and for immigrants.

In September 2015, the Federation of Canadian Municipalities formed the Task Force on Syrian Refugee resettlement — recognizing the cultural, social and economic value newcomers contribute to our communities and the essential role local governments play in helping newcomers settle into Canadian life. Since then, cities and communities, big and small, have undertaken to create a place where refugees and immigrants feel valued and included, and to provide adequate housing, accessible transit, employment, language and cultural supports and services to help them succeed.

Every year there are millions of refugees globally. By sharing municipal responses to this crisis, we hope to set the standard for creating welcoming communities and opportunities for success for all newcomers who will come to call Canadian cities and communities home.

Since November 2015, communities across Canada have become home to more than 35,000 Syrian refugees.

Our promise is to continue our work making our communities welcoming communities.

Raymond Louie,

Acting Mayor of Vancouver, Co-Chair of FCM's Task Force on Refugee Resettlement and FCM Past President

Mike Savage,

Mayor of Halifax and Co-Chair of FCM's Task Force on Refugee Resettlement

"Once again, Quebec is showing its openness and ability to welcome people who have been living far too long in extremely precarious conditions."

- Longueuil Mayor Caroline St-Hilaire

"Calgary has a proud history of being a welcoming and open city. We are also a place where we help our neighbours. As the conflict in Syria continues, Canadians have said that we need to do more as a country for these refugees and all those who seek sanctuary. We need better policy at the federal level, but we also need to be ready to welcome these folks at a community level. We all play a role."

Calgary Mayor Naheed Nenshi

"The City of Surrey celebrates its diversity and inclusiveness. The generosity and goodwill the new refugees have come across in Surrey will go a long way in helping them achieve success in our city."

- Surrey Mayor Linda Hepner





The Crisis

The civil war in Syria has led over 4.7 million people to flee their country. The vast majority have taken refuge in neighbouring countries such as Jordan, Iraq, Egypt, Lebanon and Turkey. Hundreds of thousands have sought refuge in Europe. Media reports of refugees drowning off the coast of Greece in the summer of 2015 spurred Canadians during the federal election to demand faster action to welcome refugees. The Liberal Party promised to welcome 25,000 Syrian refugees by the end of 2015 and, upon its election as government, immediately set to work to meet its stated goal by March 2016.

The Response

Canadians rose to the occasion, demonstrating great compassion and generosity. We saw extraordinary efforts of not-for-profit organizations that are on the front line of Canada's efforts to settle newcomers. And we saw all orders of government working together to open doors across the country to tens of thousands in a short period of time.

The Federation of Canadian Municipalities' Board of Directors and its <u>Big City Mayors' Caucus (BCMC)</u> passed an <u>emergency resolution</u> supporting the government's aggressive resettlement plans and quickly created a <u>Task Force on Refugee Resettlement</u>. Both the Task Force and the BCMC have continued to engage directly with the Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship to discuss the government's plan for Syrian refugees, provide insights and propose solutions regarding the situation on the ground.

Across the country, municipal governments responded swiftly, taking numerous actions to welcome refugees. We have captured some of the ideas and actions in this guide to highlight the good work and inspire more.

The Actions

The actions that municipalities take to create more welcoming communities are grouped into eight areas:

- 2 Share information and coordinate services
 3 Support the front lines
 4 Find affordable and appropriate housing
 5 Provide cultural education
 6 Enable access to community services
 - 7 Create connections, support integration
 - 8 Advocate for more welcoming communities

1. Create a welcoming environment



Municipal leaders came out strongly in support of the federal government's ambitious plans to resettle 25,000 Syrian refugees in a short time frame. Canada's mayors, councillors and reeves spoke out as community leaders in favour of rapid resettlement, helping to set a welcoming tone and counter backlash.

While bigger cities may be traditional landing hubs for new refugees, the resettlement of 25,000-plus newcomers was truly a pan-Canadian effort. Over 300 communities have welcomed Syrian refugees.

Mayors greeted newcomers in person, through video messages and in letters to help foster community acceptance and create positive relationships.

Municipal leaders also sent a strong signal to the federal government that the municipal sector is an essential partner in ensuring successful resettlement.

How the municipal sector helped create a welcoming environment

Engage nationally - FCM Task Force on Refugee Resettlement

To amplify the effectiveness of local initiatives already underway, a Task Force of municipal leaders was launched in November 2015 to coordinate the efforts of cities and communities across the country. This national table shared on-the-ground realities in a series of meetings with the federal government, helping to shape the federal response.



Raymond Louie (far right), FCM past president, co-chair of FCM's Task Force on Syrian John McCallum (centre), minister of immigration, refugees and citizenship, met with Refugee Resettlement and acting mayor of the City of Vancouver, spearheaded municipal efforts to bring and settle Syrian refugees in Canada. Also pictured here from left are Vancouver Mayor Gregor Robertson; John McCallum, minister of immigration, refugees and citizenship and Edmonton Mayor Don Iveson.



FCM representatives to discuss municipal involvement in welcoming and resettling Syrian refugees. Listening intently here are Winnipeg Mayor Brian Bowman (left) and London Mayor Matt Brown.

Involve the media

Municipal leaders used their influence to show support for rapid resettlement of Syrian refugees by <u>speaking to the press</u>, writing <u>opinion pieces</u> for local papers and communicating support to millions of Canadians for #WelcomeRefugees on social media.

Pass council resolutions

Several city councils passed resolutions to show their support for Syrian refugees resettling in their communities.

Halifax adopted <u>a motion</u> assuring Canada's minister of immigration, refugees and citizenship that it would provide a welcoming environment for refugees. The motion also asked staff to prepare a report on ways the municipality and its community partners could take in settling refugees if there were a sudden influx. The city supported relief on recreation fees while Halifax Transit committed to providing temporary transit passes to refugees for the first year of settlement.

Peel council endorsed Mississauga <u>Mayor Bonnie Crombie's motion</u> to develop a solid, official plan to accommodate refugees properly. This motion directed staff to report back as soon as possible with an analysis of the region's capacity to meet the demand precipitated by the influx of Syrian refugees.

"We are lucky that you have chosen London as your new home. I am excited to meet you and welcome you personally to our community. I wish you the very best as you build a new life in London."

- London Mayor Matt Brown

2. Share information and coordinate services



It takes a community to welcome newcomers. With a federal commitment to resettle at least 25,000 newcomers within four months, municipal governments partnered with immigrant and refugee settlement organizations and citizen groups, hosting information forums and creating centralized information hubs. This helped service and community organizations, housing providers, settlement agencies, private sponsors, and individual citizens engage in and coordinate resettlement efforts.

To develop a comprehensive, coordinated and collaborative strategy for settling and integrating newcomers to their communities, local governments helped create partnerships between municipalities and local stakeholders. Municipal governments also created coordination offices to support a holistic approach among community-based and government organizations that provided specialized services in housing, language, education, employment, health, social supports and emergencies.

How the municipal sector helped share information and coordinate services

Engage the community

Municipal leaders participated in or hosted information forums to bring together residents and community groups who wished to help, and provided them with the knowledge and contacts to make their involvement possible.

Ottawa Mayor Jim Watson hosted a public forum during which approximately 1,000 attendees were provided the <u>information</u> they needed to get involved and in turn maximize Ottawa's capacity to welcome refugee newcomers.

Mississauga hosted a <u>Case Information Session</u> for the Syrian-Canadian community at city hall. The session offered an opportunity to discuss the refugee application process, the community's responsibilities as Canadian contacts for the newcomers and their role in helping new arrivals settle and integrate into the broader community.

Moncton, in partnership with **Riverview**, **Dieppe**, the <u>Multicultural</u> <u>Association of the Greater Moncton Area</u> and FCM, held a public information session on the services provided for Syrian refugees and how to sponsor families privately. Over 250 community members attended and the event garnered a great deal of media attention, facilitating the engagement and mobilization of community members and key partners.

Centralize information

Cities have created online information hubs for current residents to learn more about supporting and welcoming refugees. The websites have information about helping refugees settle in their new communities and provide links to resources about donating, volunteering, sponsoring and the settlement process. Websites for the cities of **Calgary**, **Edmonton**, **Gatineau** and **Montréal** are good examples.

Coordinate efforts

<u>Gatineau</u> has served as a liaison and played a supportive role for organizations mandated to welcome refugees. The city is working in collaboration with the Government of Quebec to assure a welcoming system is in place for families.

<u>London</u> created a community task force of existing service agencies to identify needs and coordinate services.

Saskatoon gathered input from key stakeholders in the community. Several possible initiatives to improve and enhance existing services were identified and new ideas generated on what could be done regarding refugee settlement and integration. This report was approved by the city's standing policy committee responsible for planning, development and services.

Refugee 613 is coordinating **Ottawa's** resettlement efforts and collecting and disseminating information about refugee resettlement. It aims to be the go-to source of information for people who want to help and offers several ways to do so. In providing reliable information on local and global efforts, Refugee 613 hopes to inspire others to step up for refugee relief. The City of Ottawa provides in-kind supports to Refugee 613 and participates in its working groups.

To assist in better coordination among orders of government, **Ottawa** Mayor Jim Watson and Councillor Michael Qaqish hosted an information session with Ottawa MPs and MPPs to brief them on municipal efforts.

Vancouver, in partnership with the Morris J. Wosk Centre for Dialogue at Simon Fraser University, hosted the <u>Vancouver Welcomes Refugees Forum</u> in April 2016. The forum brought together over 170 participants representing service providers, other levels of government, youth groups, businesses, voluntary associations, faith groups and other organizations. The goal was to continue dialogue on the best ways to support refugees arriving in Canada and BC, as well as to raise awareness about refugees globally and locally.

Waterloo has facilitated an <u>immigration partnership</u> since 2010 and has been deeply involved in supporting the Syrian resettlement initiative. The partnership hosted a planning session for service providers in the region, in collaboration with emergency management offices across the province. This turned into a highly effective model for collaborative leadership between municipal and community interests. The partnership also formed nine working groups focused on community emergency management, international skills and employment, education, children's services, health and mental health care, housing, community integration and language supports, volunteers and donations, and transportation. The working groups were coordinated through a steering committee that was jointly chaired by municipal and community partners, the medical officer of health for the Region of Waterloo and the executive director of the Reception House resettlement agency.

"I'm proud of the many Edmontonians that have come forward and stated their willingness to help those in need. They know Edmonton is not just for Edmontonians; it is a city open to our brothers and sisters from around the world; it is an Edmonton for all."

- Edmonton Mayor Don Iveson

3. Support the front lines



Municipal governments support front-line settlement and refugee-serving agencies by donating and raising funds as well as providing storage and office space. They also support community organizations to raise funds so refugees can be privately sponsored.

How the municipal sector helped support the front lines

Create community partnerships

Toronto has <u>partnered with community groups</u> to enhance their capacity to provide supports to sponsors and refugees and to facilitate housing. City hall coordinated with COSTI Immigrant Services and city divisions to implement programming for government-assisted refugees staying at hotels. Toronto has also worked to provide space in city facilities for community partners to deliver settlement services.

Mayor Matt Brown and a number of **London** community groups are working together to sponsor several families from Syria. In December 2015, they supported the creation of London United for Refugees, a partnership with United Way London & Middlesex and the Cross Cultural Learner Centre, to provide a variety of programming and supports for the refugees.

Consider financial and in-kind contributions

Fredericton city council offered the Multicultural Association of Fredericton (MCAF) temporary use of the former Wilmot Park caretaker's house to assist in resettling refugees. The house is directly across the street from MCAF, home base for resettlement services in the Fredericton area. The city also provided storage for furniture donations.

In December 2015, **Laval** Mayor Marc Demers announced <u>a financial</u> <u>contribution</u> from the city to support intercultural organizations in welcoming Syrian refugees.

Ottawa is a partner in the fundraising effort, <u>United for Refugees</u>. This community initiative aims to support sponsorship and settlement of people affected by the Syrian crisis, and focuses on getting resources to where they are needed the most and will have the greatest impact.

Vancouver Mayor Gregor Robertson and financial cooperative Vancity challenged other Lower Mainland BC mayors and business leaders across the province to contribute to the <u>Vancity Humanitarian Fund</u> in support of local agencies that help refugees in Vancouver. The city also <u>provides annual community service grants</u> to non-profit organizations that support refugees and newcomers. Approximately \$1 million in grants was provided to a range of community service organizations supporting immigrants and refugees and to other neighbourhood groups.

Donating 800 computers, the City of **Montréal** helped <u>Computers for Schools Quebec</u> give computers to Syrian refugee families.

4. Find affordable and appropriate housing



With low vacancy rates and long wait lists for affordable housing, accommodating a sudden influx of refugees stretched resources and required creativity. Municipal governments rolled up their sleeves to work with housing providers to find innovative solutions, and municipal leaders also advocated for more affordable housing for refugees. FCM's Task Force on Refugee Resettlement and Big City Mayors' Caucus met with the minister of immigration, refugees and citizenship on a number of occasions to find solutions to the housing crunch. The municipal sector is united in advocating for a long-term National Housing Strategy that increases affordability for everyone, as housing is the foundation of welcoming communities and a bright future for newcomers.

How the municipal sector helped find safe and affordable housing

Develop temporary accommodation

<u>Vancouver's Welcome House</u> provides temporary housing for refugees upon arriving in Canada and is the first of its kind in the world. This initiative brings together several organizations, public institutions, government services and programs under one roof to address the immediate needs of refugees and immigrants arriving in BC. The City of Vancouver supplied the land (valued at approximately \$3.4 million), \$310,000 in financial support and a reduction of levies estimated at \$670,000.

Gather and exchange housing information

As part of **Toronto's** Refugee Resettlement Program, WoodGreen Community Services has launched a website called H.O.M.E., or <u>Housing Opportunities and Marketplace Exchange</u>. The website helps Syrian refugees who are settling in Toronto by matching them with housing, goods and services from corporate and individual donors.

The Office municipal d'habitation de Montréal (OMHM) supported front-line organizations by identifying and validating available accommodation during the intensive period of welcoming refugees. Under an agreement with the OMHM, the city allocated \$120,000 to enable the referral service to provide housing searches for Syrian refugees. Montréal also developed a tool to determine whether a property should be added to the list of available housing. The decision support tool is a set of choices in the graphic form of a tree and was developed following review of safety query data and the register of declarations on bedbugs.

Hamilton created a <u>Mayor's Advisory Committee on Syrian Newcomers</u> that brought together key community organizations, partners and city departments with a central focus: To work together to ensure the health and well-being of Syrian newcomers in Hamilton. A Housing Working Group was struck to support the newest residents and a guide was produced to help them find housing. This housing guide was made available online in Arabic, English and French.

5. Provide cultural education



Welcoming communities embrace diversity. Cultural training helps communities and front-line workers better understand the needs and potential contributions of newcomers, ensuring improved long-term success and helping to overcome racism. Municipal governments offered public cultural competency training and trained front-line employees.

How the municipal sector helped provide cultural education

Provide employee training

Moncton offered cultural competency <u>training</u> to 150 front-line employees to ensure a safe and welcoming home for refugees. To inform residents about the perceived definition of culture, crossculture communications and the value of diversity to society, the city also offered a free training session to the public.

Share cultural information

In March 2016, **Saskatoon** hosted a <u>Syrian Cultural Experience</u> event which offered various opportunities for the community to expand its knowledge about Syrian culture. Learning about cultural differences can be helpful for residents who want to welcome new Syrians.

Although **Joliette**'s population is relatively small, the city made big efforts to welcome the 50 refugees joining their community. <u>Joliette's website</u> provides residents with information about cultural practices and communication tips for welcoming Syrian refugees to the community.

"As Canada plans and prepares for the arrival of refugees, I believe Winnipeg is ready to do its part to welcome new families to our community and help ensure they receive the supports they need to settle into a Winnipeg, and Canadian, way of life."

- Winnipeg Mayor Brian Bowman

6. Enable access to community services



To reduce isolation and support a sense of belonging, municipalities provided newcomers with access to public transit and public spaces such as libraries and recreation facilities. Enabling access to these services helps newcomers integrate into the community.

How the municipal sector helped enable access to community services

Hold welcome celebrations

Immigrant Services Association of Nova Scotia, in partnership with the **Halifax** Central Library, hosted a Lunch, Launch and Workshop celebration to welcome refugees, recognize the contributions they make to Nova Scotia and share knowledge about refugee rights and advocacy. This event featured short videos of former refugees who live in Nova Scotia.

Simplify and centralize processes

Calgary's Fair Entry — a single-entry service model consolidating all city subsidy application processes into one intake and approval system — was promoted to Syrian refugees, sponsors and service agencies as the "one-stop shop" to access subsidized services. A non-profit organization, Ahlain, developed an instructional video to help Syrian refugees understand the application process and required documents for city subsidy programs and services such as transportation and recreation. Calgary created a process map which was circulated to support agency staff who inform Syrian refugees about the process for applying to Fair Entry and the documents required.

Québec City's <u>Centre multiethnique</u> resettles government-sponsored refugees. Services include providing temporary and permanent housing to newcomers, as well as integrating children into the city's school system. The centre also supports <u>summer camps</u> across the city in July and August to help camp councillors register children from immigrant families, overcome language barriers and integrate multicultural approaches.

Take advantage of existing organizations and services

Brampton's Emergency Management Office partnered with Parks and Recreation to provide the <u>Active Assist</u> program, helping newcomers get active and connected through recreation centres. The Office worked with the Brampton Library as well to provide access to computers and the internet, along with other useful resources. It also partnered with Brampton Transit to make transportation assistance available through funds coming from donation kiosks at Pearson International Airport.

The <u>Welcomed In Halifax</u> - Initiative for Refugees provides free transit for Syrian refugees for one year and free access to recreation at municipally owned and operated facilities for the same period. The program recognizes that connection to community is particularly important for refugees as they have fled persecution.

7. Create connections, support integration



Creating community connections, fostering social and professional networks and enabling a sense of belonging are critical to the long-term success of newcomers. Municipalities are undertaking a range of actions that support newcomer integration by introducing them to the community and its services while providing opportunities for social engagement. The formation of diverse networks and supporting Arabic language interpretation and translation when possible are important in creating these connections.

How the municipal sector helped create connections and support integration

Organize community events

In January 2016, **Halifax** hosted <u>Winter By the Sea</u>, a celebration to encourage new residents to feel comfortable outdoors in the winter. The event's activities included sledding, skating and simply playing in the snow on the Halifax Commons.

Ottawa held a <u>welcome party</u> for newcomers to the city in May 2016. Newly arrived Syrian refugees got a warm Ottawa welcome from Mayor Jim Watson and Councillor Michael Qaqish, special liaison for Refugee Resettlement, during a sponsored community celebration at Lansdowne Park. More than 1,200 refugees came to peruse information booths about city and community services and to enjoy free activities and snacks.

As part of its efforts to welcome and engage with Syrian and other newcomers, **Calgary** organized the <u>Calgary Welcome and Newcomers Fair</u>, held in the Atrium of the Municipal Building in March 2016. More than 30 city business units and community organizations set up booths, enabling newcomers to learn more about available services and resources. Arabic-speaking volunteers were on hand to help with interpretation. About 1,300 people attended. Many provided positive feedback about the event itself as well as the sense of welcome they felt.

Moncton held a series of activities on Sundays to welcome refugees and connect them with the community. Transportation was provided to and from the popular events. More than 350 Syrians attended each week. The city also hosted a women's night which saw over 100 Syrian women join female leaders from the community.

Offer free tours

London rolled out the welcome mat to <u>share the city's finest artists and art organizations</u>, historic buildings, museums and unique multicultural experiences with Syrian refugees. In partnership with local arts and culture organizations — including the Cross Cultural Learning Centre, the London Arts Council and the London Heritage Council — new arrivals were offered complimentary tours as a welcome to the city.

Organize courses and workshops



Winnipeg Fire Paramedic Service (WFPS) partnered with community organizations to deliver free public education courses for newcomers on 9-1-1 and the role WFPS plays in public safety. Library tours and orientations for settlement agencies and sponsor groups are available on request to introduce newcomers to the library system resources which include help for learning English, free use of computers and WiFi, and programs such as English conversation groups, concerts and family story time. Winnipeg offers newcomers the option to receive information about city services and services from 311 in their language of

choice through immediate interpretation services provided on contract by CanTalk. The city also hosted a welcome event that included fun family activities.

Together with a group of students from the University of Montréal, **Montréal** offered summer immersion courses for 80 young people, ages 12 to 18, from Syrian refugee families. The aim was to inform them about academic programs and opportunities for further studies in Montréal. The city also worked with the <u>Chamber of Commerce of Metropolitan Montréal</u> to host a professional networking day for Syrian refugees. Several potential employers, including the city, were on-site to meet the participants and evaluate job candidates.

Montréal has published <u>a guide for new arrivals</u>, available in Arabic, on their website. The guide contains information about getting around the city on public transit, community services and upcoming activities and festivals. Montréal also created a hotline, managed by the Information and Referral Centre of Greater Montréal, to support refugees. In service since December 2015, it has received over 1,400 calls.

Publish community information

Sherbrooke has a <u>website</u> uniquely dedicated to newcomers with details about integrating into the community. It provides information on housing, health care and school systems, and a wealth of other resources describing life and activities in Sherbrooke.

"Laval is the city that has attracted the second largest contingent of immigrants in Quebec. The harsh reality of the Syrian refugees concerns us all and Laval will do what is necessary to support the organizations that are facilitating their integration into the community."

- Laval Mayor Marc Demers

8. Advocate for welcoming communities



Municipalities, big and small, are finding new ways to attract, retain and integrate newcomers, and are part of a national solution to resettle refugees and immigrants successfully.

Municipal governments build welcoming communities by creating an inclusive environment and working to provide every opportunity for newcomers to succeed.

The federal government must collaborate with municipal governments and local settlement organizations to develop a plan to expand newcomer services in urban and rural regions across Canada. A robust plan will address employment, language and cultural services and support access to adequate and affordable housing and transit.

Cities and communities across Canada are committed to working with all orders of government and other partners to create more inclusive and welcoming communities. Newcomers and the communities they call home depend on a strong collaborative approach.

How the municipal sector has helped advocate for welcoming communities

Affordable housing is a crucial element in making our cities and communities welcoming places to live, work and start a business. It's also integral to providing opportunities to thrive. Yet there are serious cracks in our housing foundation. Local governments are finding innovative ways to tackle Canada's housing crisis. But the scope and magnitude of challenges are too complex for any one order of government to solve alone. FCM has successfully brought municipal housing issues to the national forefront. In the 2016 federal budget, we saw a shift to prioritize investments in social housing in the short term and a commitment to start working towards a long-term National Housing Strategy. FCM will continue to advocate to make Canada a welcoming and affordable place for people to live and build a future.

"When I recently spoke with Prime Minister Trudeau, one of the first things I expressed was the willingness of Vancouver to help with the successful integration of refugees in our communities. The City is proud to support refugees and we will continue to work with federal and provincial partners as well as local community groups to help give our new arrivals a true Vancouver welcome."

Vancouver Mayor Gregor Robertson

RESOURCES

Community Foundations of Canada

Municipal Resources

- Welcoming Syrian Refugees to Montréal
- WoodGreen
- Réfugiés syriens : qui sont-ils?
- Refugee Resettlement Program
- Gatineau accueille les réfugiés syriens (in the original language)
- Syrian Refugees
- Ottawa United for Refugees
- Refugee 613
- Centre multiethnique de Québec
- Halifax Regional Council Minutes September 8, 2015
- Support for Refugees Council Report
- Mayor Crombie Calls for Action Plan

Welcoming packages in Arabic

- <u>Calgary</u>
- Montréal

Other tools for municipalities to mainstream cross-cultural considerations into existing services and departments, e.g. health services, transit etc.

- Advancing Equity and Inclusion
- Anti-Racism and Anti-Discrimination for Municipalities
- Diversity Plan 2012-15

Government and Inter-governmental Resources

- Welcoming and Receiving Resettled Refugees
- The Integration of Resettled Refugees
- Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada
- More Support on the Way for Service Providers
- Welcome to Syrian refugees
- Migrants and Cities: New Partnerships to Manage Mobility
- Migration, The Global Network of Cities, Local and Regional Governments

