

'Discuss the complexity of refugee resettlement in Canada and its political, economic and cultural impact in the past and today'.

Refugees and asylum seekers flee their countries in hope of finding safety abroad. Historically, Canada has assisted many refugees from all over the world. It's a country with a long tradition of welcoming refugees. However that history is full of differing policies that impact the way refugees are treated in Canada and continue to affect thousands of people seeking refuge. Refugee policies are also directly affected by public opinion, current governments and media discourses.

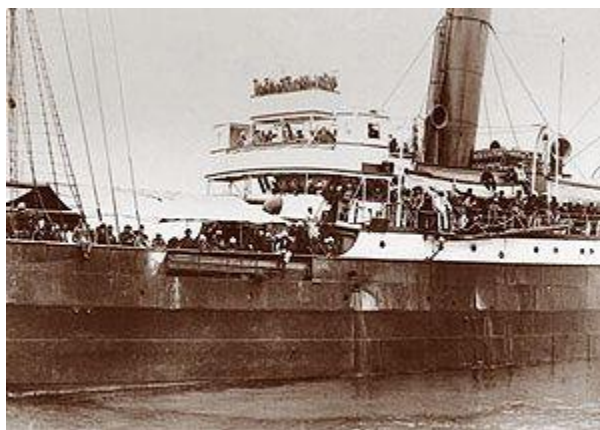


There have been many waves of immigrants arriving in Canada. Beginning with the first wave of Quakers running from persecution in USA in 1770s after the American Revolution and

ending in 2015-2016 with the Syrian refugees.



However, not all migrants were similarly welcomed in Canadian society. Canada turned away ships bearing refugees, such as the 376 passengers, most of whom were Sikhs, on the SS Komagata Maru in 1914, which was not allowed to dock in Vancouver. After 2 months of waiting, the ship was forced to return back across the Pacific Ocean, only to have some of its passengers massacred by the British Indian Police after they arrived in India.



Another test for Canada in defining itself as a country of refuge for the persecuted occurred in the 1930s, when German Jews were seeking admission to any country that would accept them. However, Canadian borders were not open to them. In 1939, hundreds of Jewish refugees on board the ship SS St. Louis were turned away, and had to return to Germany and face death. While Canada eventually accepted 4,000 Jewish refugees from Europe, that number pales in



comparison to the US, which welcomed 240,000.



Every refugee coming to Canada has their own story. One of them is the story of Jihad and Baraa Badr, refugees escaping the brutal civil war in Syria. They spent three years in Egypt in Turkey and then got arrived in Canada as part of the massive wave of Syrian refugees following the last federal election.



Their older son Hussam with his young family arrived a month later. However, two other sons will never arrive. Frustrated by the long wait in Egypt, they paid smugglers to take them across

the Mediterranean Sea to Italy and then made their way to Austria, where they now live.



Shortly after arriving in Ontario in spring of 2016, Jehad enrolled in an English language school. However, because of rising bills he had to drop out in favour of a job at a local patio furniture manufacturer. In contrast, Baraa has stuck with her language training and is now close to graduating. She says that once she's done, she might study more or look for a job. To supplement his income, Jehad has also been doing small jobs on the side.



Another story is that of Trung Pham, one of the refugees fleeing persecution in Viet Nam.

There were nearly 800,000 Vietnamese people that fled repression after the fall of Saigon in 1975.



He reached Thailand and lived in a refugee camp there. Every year he received money from Long, his older brother who was studying in Japan. He used that money to buy papers, watercolors and brushes. He used them to document his life in the refugee camp as he awaited resettlement in Canada as a refugee with his brother. Now he still keeps those pages in the house he built for himself in southern Ontario. Canada has given him the refuge he needed to focus on his work. His paintings and sculptures have been published in some of the country's most prestigious institutions. His most recent sculpture shows a cracked wooden boat with a family of three slamming up against the waves. It's a tribute to journeys similar to his.





While Canada has been praised for having assisted many migrants and refugees throughout its history, there is also opposition to the refugee intake. A 2019 poll suggests that majority of Canadians are against Canada accepting more refugees. Some of their fears include that illegal immigration is becoming a serious problem and that accepting too many minorities will change Canada. 76 per cent of respondents say Canada should do more to encourage skilled labour immigration.

There are many artistic events and museum exhibitions whose goal is to raise awareness about refugee crises. One of them is the "Refuge Canada" travelling exhibition, which draws visitors through its five themes: Life Before, Fear, Displacement, Refuge and Life in Canada.



Through images, soundscapes, first person accounts and artifacts this exhibition highlights that no one wants to be a refugee, but anyone could become a refugee. It does not shy from showing the darker chapters of history, but balances that with hopeful stories of optimism and success.

While there have been many moments in the history of Canada where its relation with migrants and refugees wasn't too good, the country as a whole served as a refuge for many people, majority of them being happy living their new life.