

Refugee Newcomers in Surrey

Approaches to building a more welcoming and inclusive community

March 2014

The Surrey Welcoming Communities Project and the Refugee Myth Busting Campaign

As the largest recipient of immigrants and refugees in Metro Vancouver, Surrey has an impressive array of newcomer services. With support from Welcome BC, the Surrey Welcoming Communities Project was inaugurated in 2012 to help administer and coordinate these efforts, under the guidance of an advisory committee drawn from 25 diverse community, business and government stakeholders.

In developing a far-reaching Welcoming Communities Action Plan, the committee identified a need for greater awareness about the refugee experience. The resulting Refugee Myth-Busting Campaign is being directed toward service providers, the education system, businesses and the community at large, and is composed of several distinct elements, including the following:

- An education-sector training series
- The Surrey Museum exhibit “Surrey a Place of Refuge”
- Refugee focus groups and subsequent research into promising practices for the main issues identified during the focus groups
- Media coverage
- A quarterly newsletter focusing on refugees in Surrey

This information package on the refugee system and experience complements other elements of the Refugee Myth-Busting Campaign.



Masses of refugees scatter as shots are heard near the Kibati camp in Nord Kivu.

¹According to 2011 Census, the number of immigrants living in Surrey increased of 25% between 2006 and 2011, compared to a 9.9% increase for Metro Vancouver as a whole. And 18.6% of Surrey population is comprised of new immigrants (less than 5 years).

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Glossary of Terms

CANN	Community Airport Newcomers Network
CBSA	Canadian Border Service Agency
CIC	Citizenship and Immigration Canada
DCO	Designated Country of Origin
GAR	Government Assisted Refugee
IDP	Internally Displaced Persons
IFHP	Interim Federal Health Program
IOM	International Organization for Migration
IRB	Immigration and Refugee Board
IRPA	Immigration and Refugee Protection Act
ISSofBC	Immigrant Services Society of British Columbia
NHS	National Household Survey
PP	Protected Persons
PSR	Privately Sponsored Refugee
SAH	Sponsorship Agreement Holder
SWIS	Settlement Worker In School
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees

Executive Summary

Every year, millions of refugees flee their home to seek protection in another country. A small percentage of these refugees (89,000 in 2012) are given the opportunity to be resettled to a third country such as Canada.

Canada receives three categories of refugees: refugee claimants, government assisted refugees (GARs) and privately sponsored refugees (PSRs). Refugee claimants are assessed by the Canadian Immigration and Refugee Board (IRB), an independent administrative tribunal responsible for hearing asylum seekers and determining whether their claims should be accepted as refugees. GARs and PSRs are selected from abroad by Canadian Visa Post or Canadian private sponsors through the assistance of the UNHCR and resettled to Canada as permanent resident after medical and security screening. GARs receive settlement services and income support for one year through the national Resettlement Assistance Program (RAP) while PSRs are provided settlement and financial support by their private sponsor.

For the past two years, refugee related federal programs and legislation have been significantly revised by Citizenship and Immigration Canada, including a new refugee claim process, cuts to Interim Federal Health (IFH) coverage, and new multi-year resettlement commitments highlighting a reduction in source countries, to name but a few.

Demographic statistics and settlement patterns of refugees are not available at the municipal level. However, as a result of the fact that ISSofBC receives all GARs destined to BC, we are able to produce statistics on GAR settlement and arrival patterns for Metro Vancouver. From 2010 to 2012, the City of Surrey remained one of the most popular destinations for GARs in BC, with 555 of them choosing this city as their new home. During that same period, GARs settling in Surrey came mainly from Somalia, Iraq, Afghanistan, Myanmar and Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC).

Part 1: Refugees in the World

Geneva Convention Definition of a Refugee, 1951, 1967 (signed by Canada and 144 other countries)

A refugee is a person who "owing to well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality and is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country"

Source: "Convention and Protocol Relating to the Status of Refugees"; Office of UNHCR, August 2007.

In general, refugees are people who flee their homeland and seek asylum in another country for fear of persecution or life threats. States signatories to the 1951 Geneva Convention are obligated to protect refugees who are in their territory. UNHCR (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees) is also mandated to protect the rights and well-being of refugees worldwide.

People who cross an international border when fleeing persecution are considered asylum seekers as they seek the protection of another state. Those who do not leave their home country are called Internally Displaced Persons

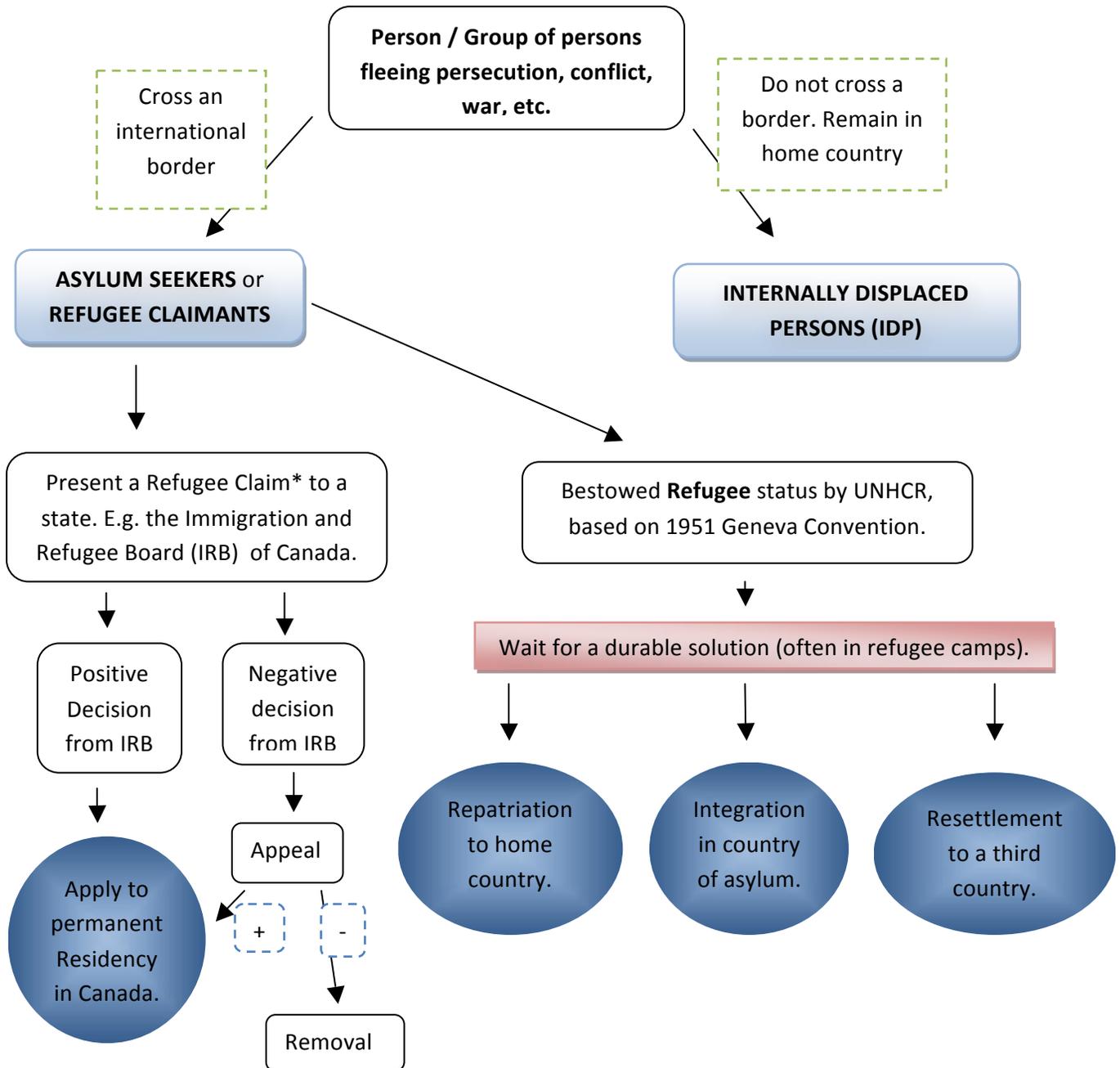
(IDP); they remain under the protection of their home state. Asylum seekers are people who claim protection but whose situation has not been assessed yet (by a state or UNHCR). Once their claim has been validated (by a state or UNHCR), refugee status is officially bestowed to them. UNHCR considers three durable solutions for refugees:

- Voluntary repatriation: when conditions in home country have improved in a lasting and meaningful way and refugees are able to return safely and with dignity.
- Local integration in country of asylum: when refugees are allowed to stay in their country of asylum with rights similar to those of citizens (they can for example work, attend school and freely move in the country).
- Resettlement in a third country: when refugees cannot return to their home country or integrate locally the third durable solution is for them to resettle in another country that will guarantee their protection and civil rights.



Bhutanese of Nepali origin fled to Nepal in the early 1990s.

Fleeing Persecution, Seeking Protection and a Permanent Solution



*See Refugee Claim Process in Canada on page 9.

UNHCR estimated the global number of refugees under its mandate to reach 10.5 million in 2012².

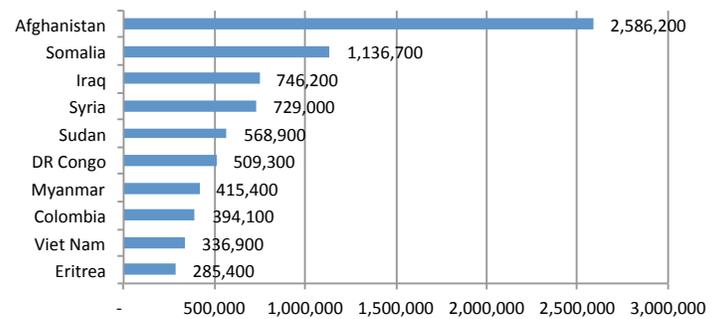
Most refugees live in countries of asylum in Asia, Africa and the Middle East. In 2012 Pakistan was hosting the largest number of refugees in the world (1.64 millions) nearly all from Afghanistan. After Pakistan came Iran, Germany, Kenya and Syria. When using the number of refugee compared to the total population of the hosting country, Jordan, Chad, Lebanon, Republic of Congo and Djibouti are ranking first.

In addition to refugees, UNHCR is providing assistance and protection to IDPs (Internally Displaced Persons) who are displaced in their own country by armed conflict, generalized violence and human rights violations. UNHCR estimated at 28.8 million the number of IDPs in 2012, the highest figure in more than two decades.

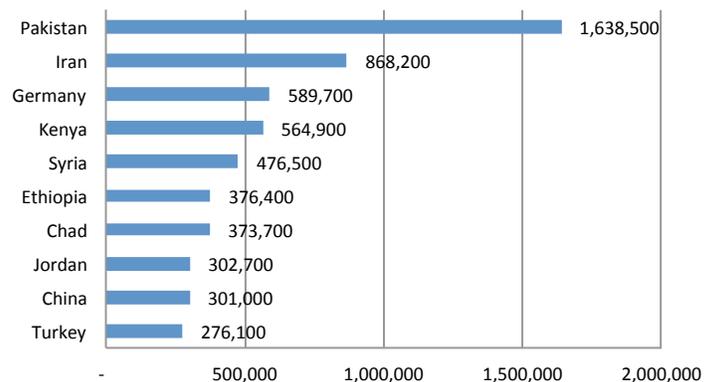
Resettlement of Refugees

Resettlement is a protection tool that provides a durable solution to refugees who cannot be repatriated or cannot integrate in their country of asylum. In 2012, 89,000 refugees were resettled in a third country, including 66,300 to the USA, 9,600 to Canada (Government Assisted Refugees and Privately Sponsored Refugees), 5,900 to Australia, 1,900 to Sweden and 1,200 to Norway.

Major Source Countries of Refugees – end 2012



Major Refugee Hosting Countries – end 2012



Za'atari Camp in Jordan.

²UNHCR, Statistical Yearbook 2012.

Part 2: Refugees in Canada

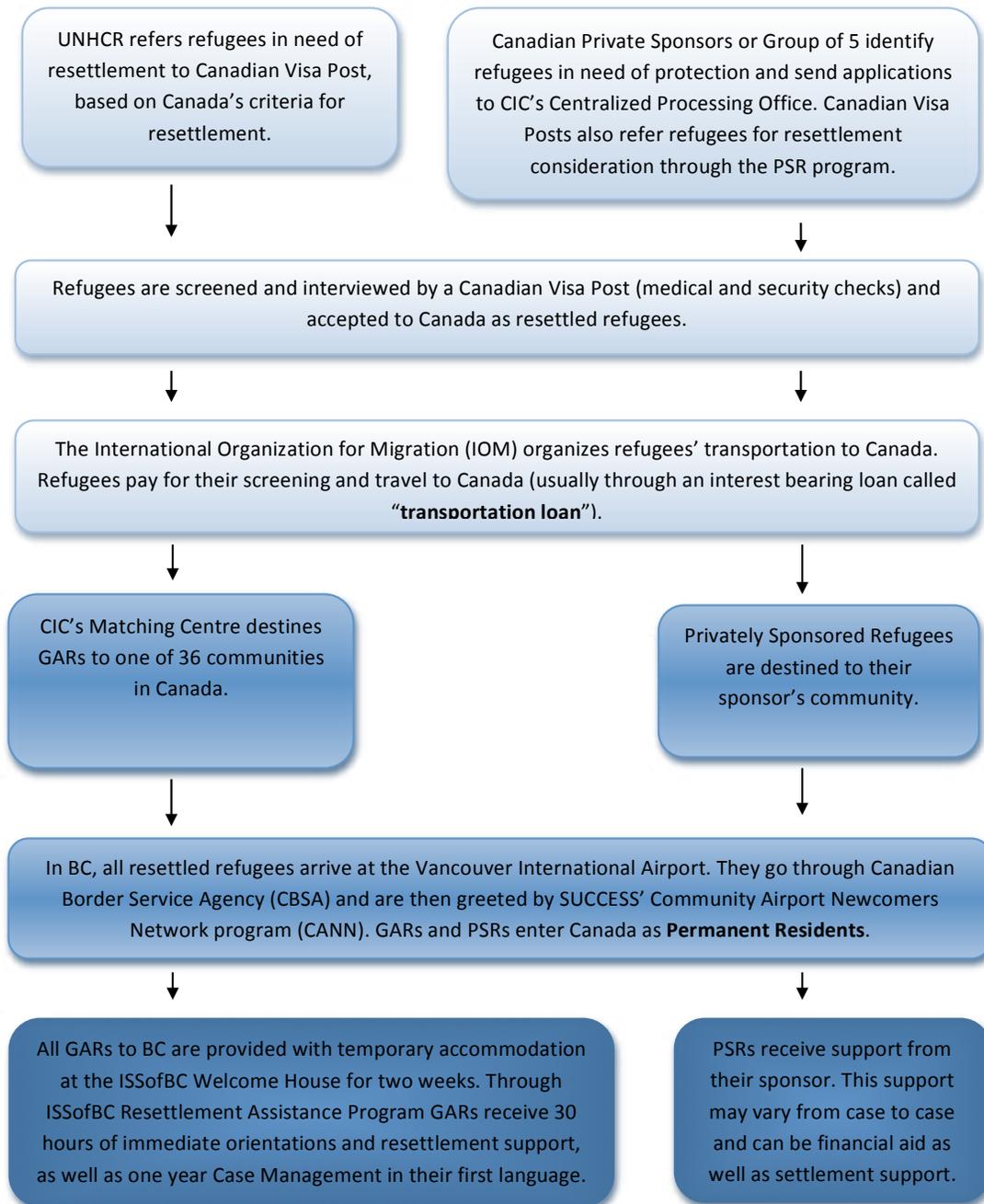
How do refugees arrive in Canada?

There are two ways for refugees to arrive in Canada: either they are selected abroad to be resettled or they come by their own means and present a refugee claim at the Canadian border or once in Canada.

Process for Resettled refugees coming to Canada

In 2012, of the more than 10 million refugees in the world, UNHCR estimated that 800,000 were in need of resettlement. UNHCR refers cases for selection to various resettlement countries based on the refugees' need for protection and the targets and criteria set by each country. For Canada a visa officer will establish whether the refugee is eligible for resettlement in Canada.

Selected refugees have to undergo medical and security checks before being admitted to Canada, the costs of which become part of their transportation loan. They can be sponsored through the Government Assisted Refugee program (GAR) or through the Privately Sponsored Refugee program (PSR). 9,624 persons arrived to Canada in 2012 as sponsored refugees.

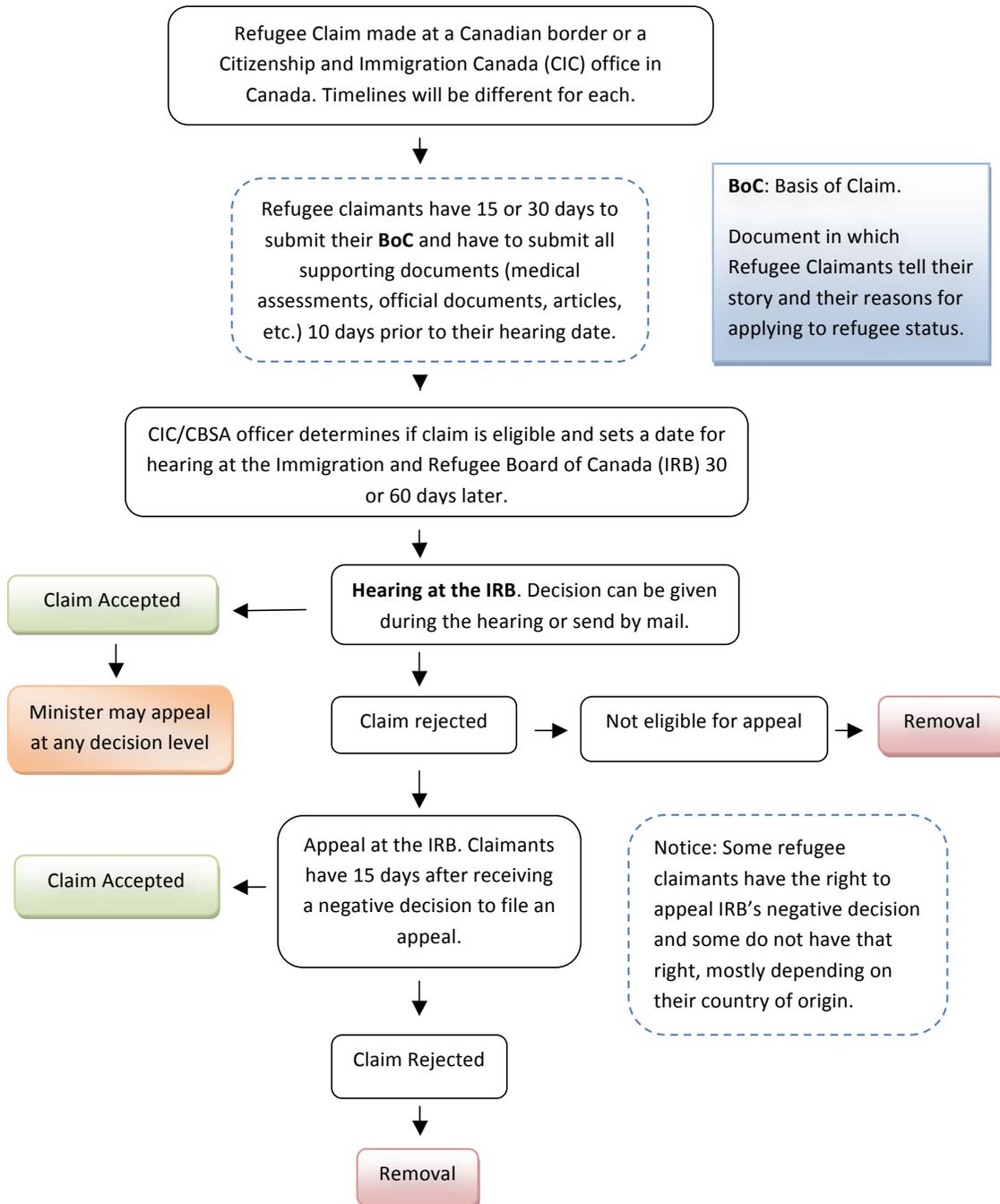


Refugee Claim Process in Canada

(after Refugee Reform, 15 December 2012)

Some people manage to come directly to a Canadian border point and claim asylum there. Their claim will be assessed by the Immigration Refugee Board (IRB), an independent administrative tribunal responsible for hearing asylum seekers and determining whether they should be accepted as refugees. When accepted refugees are usually referred to as Refugees Landed in

Canada. If their claim is rejected, asylum seekers may have the possibility to appeal the decision (depending on whether their country has been considered as “safe” by CIC or not). Those who receive a finale negative decision will usually be asked to return to their home country. In 2012 13,432 refugee claimants and their dependents were landed in Canada.



Adapted from CCR document – December 2012

In 2012, 23,056 refugees settled in Canada with their family. The following breakdown provides further insight:

- Out of the 23,056 refugees who arrived in Canada, 9,624 were refugees selected abroad (5,412 GARs and 4,212 PSRs) and 13,432 were refugee claimants and their dependants.
- In 2012, Canada resettled 26% fewer refugees than in 2011.
- The three top countries of origin were Colombia (24,454 refugees), Afghanistan (20,403 refugees) and Iraq (15,409 refugees). But there are significant variations between the three refugee categories. See table below:

	1st	2nd	3rd	4th	5th
GARs	Afghanistan (12,052)	Colombia (11,967)	Iraq (6,701)	Iran (4,546)	DR Congo (4,334)
PSRs	Iraq (8,708)	Afghanistan (8,351)	Ethiopia (4,891)	Sudan (1,731)	Somalia (1,731)
RLCs	Sri Lanka (14,718)	Colombia (12,487)	Pakistan (9,766)	China (8,504)	Mexico (5,022)

- In 2011, the CIC Western Region of Canada welcomed 23% of refugees to Canada. The Eastern Region welcomed 20%, while 57% settled in Ontario. B.C.'s share has averaged 7% of the national total over the last 10 years.

Definition of Terms

Government Assisted Refugees (GAR):

Convention Refugees selected from abroad by the government of Canada for resettlement. GARs hold permanent resident (PR) status upon arrival and receive financial and other support from the government of Canada for up to one year.

Privately Sponsored Refugees (PSR):

Convention Refugees selected from abroad by a private sponsor who agrees to provide financial and other support for one year. PSRs hold PR status upon arrival.

Refugee Claimants:

Foreign nationals who apply for refugee protection from within Canada, or at a port of entry. Once their asylum claims are approved by the Immigration and Refugee Board they can apply for PR status.

Refugee Landed in Canada (RLC):

Refugee claimants who have their asylum claim approved by the IRB.



Colombian refugees receiving humanitarian assistance.

In 2013 the Canadian government announced it will implement new multi-year resettlement commitments in the Middle East, Africa and the Americas, running in parallel with existing commitments for the Bhutanese in Nepal and Iraqi refugees in Turkey. These government-assisted refugee commitments are as follows:

- 4,000 Iraqis out of the Middle East by 2015, toward an overall commitment of 20,000 Iraqis
- 1,000 Bhutanese out of Nepal by 2015, toward an overall commitment of 6,500 Bhutanese
- 5,000 refugees out of Turkey between 2013 and 2018 (mostly Iraqis and Iranians in the short term, although Syrians might arrive later on)
- 200 Syrian GARs out of Lebanon and Jordan in 2013 and 2014
- 900 Colombians out of Ecuador between 2014 and 2017
- 4,000 Eritreans out of Eastern Sudan and Ethiopia between 2014 and 2019
- 2,500 Congolese out of Tanzania and Burundi between 2015 and 2018

CIC also announced that on going Privately Sponsored Refugee population will include refugees from:

- East Africa (Somalis, Eritreans, Ethiopians and Congolese in Kenya, Ethiopia and Uganda)
- South Africa (Congolese, Somalis, Eritreans and Ethiopians)
- Pakistan (Afghans)
- Egypt (Eritreans and Sudanese)
- Middle East (Iraqis in Syria, Lebanon, Turkey and Jordan)

Additionally CIC announced a commitment to take up to 1,100 Syrians through the Privately Sponsored Refugee program in 2014 (in addition to the 200 GARs) as a response to the Syrian crisis.

New Refugee Claim System in Canada

Citizenship and Immigration Canada (CIC) introduced a new refugee claim system on December 15, 2012. This reform was meant to significantly accelerate the claims' processing time. The reform also created two systems based on the country of origin of the claimant. At the end of 2013, a list of 37 Designated Countries of Origin (DCO) had been released by CIC. DCO are considered 'safe countries' by CIC and their nationals have shorter timelines for their claim and are not allowed to appeal a negative decision of the Immigration and Refugee Board (IRB). The DCO list is comprised of countries such as Mexico, the USA and most countries of EU – including Hungary and Czech Republic (two countries of origin of most Roma refugee claimants).

Since the introduction of the new refugee claim process, referrals to the IRB have drastically dropped, from 20,000 in 2012 to 9,700 in 2013.* Refugee claims referred to the IRB have varied between 20,000 and 34,000 in the past decade and numbers in 2013 are the lowest by far since 1989, the first year of the IRB. According to CIC, claims from DCO have declined by 87% in 2013.

*Refugee claim related data provided in this paragraph derives from the IRB and CIC websites and is rounded.

Part 3: Refugees in BC and Surrey

Refugees in British Columbia

All three categories of refugees are represented in B.C. GARs destined for the province receive services at ISSoBC, including resettlement support and temporary accommodation at Welcome House facility.

In B.C. Privately Sponsored Refugees are sponsored by nine Sponsorship Agreement Holders (SAH); one located in Victoria, two in the Interior and six in Metro Vancouver. SAH are organizations that sign an agreement with CIC to sponsor and support refugees for their first year in Canada.

Refugees can also be sponsored by groups of five individuals who commit to provide them with financial and social support.

Very little data is available for PSRs and Refugee Claimants / Refugees Landed in Canada, other than the general CIC statistics for the province. The following table provides data for B.C. that shows that Protected Persons (all categories of refugees) constitute a smaller portion of immigration to B.C. than generally in Canada.

	2010			2011			2012			2010 to 2012		
	BC	Canada	%	BC	Canada	%	BC	Canada	%	BC	Canada	%
Government Assisted Refugees*	743	7,264	10.2%	672	7,364	9.1%	530	5,430	9.8%	1,945	20,058	9.7%
Privately Sponsored Refugees	485	4,833	10.0%	496	5,582	8.9%	355	4,220	8.4%	1,336	14,635	9.1%
Protected Persons in Canada	296	9,041	3.3%	494	10,743	4.6%	366	8,586	4.3%	1,156	28,370	4.1%
Dependants Abroad	143	3,558	4.0%	148	4,183	3.5%	187	23,094	0.8%	478	30,835	1.6%
Total Protected Persons (PP)	1,667	24,696	6.8%	1,810	27,872	6.5%	1,438	41,330	3.5%	4,915	93,898	5.2%
Total Immigration	44,183	280,681	15.7%	34,785	248,748	14.0%	36,241	257,887	14.1%	115,209	787,316	14.6%
% of GARs in total Immigration	1.7%	2.6%		1.9%	3.0%		1.5%	2.1%		1.7%	2.5%	
% of PP in Immigration	3.8%	8.8%		5.2%	11.2%		4.0%	16.0%		4.3%	11.9%	

Source: Citizenship and Immigration Canada, *Facts and Figures 2010, 2011 and 2012*.

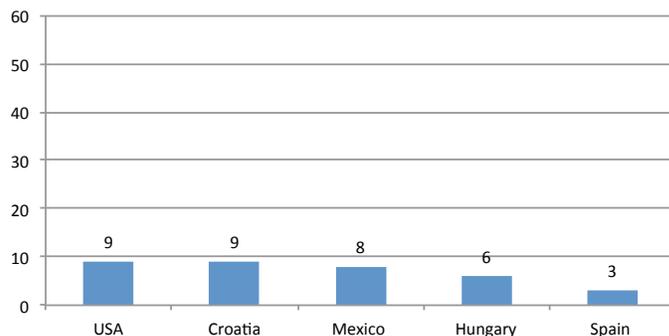
* Please note that CIC statistics for GARs in BC do not match ISSoBC statistics, which are as follow: 763 GARs in 2010, 711 GARs in 2011 and 655 GARs in 2012

Refugee Claimants in British Columbia

Since the new refugee claim system was introduced in December 2012, claims made in the Western Region (BC, Alberta and Manitoba) have been substantially lower than in the previous years (roughly 60% lower from January to August 2013 than the same period in 2012), as observed in the rest of the country. The acceptance rate for the period of December 15, 2012 to August 31, 2013 was at 48% (53% in Canada). From January 1 to August 31, 2013, only 232 claims were referred to the IRB in Vancouver.

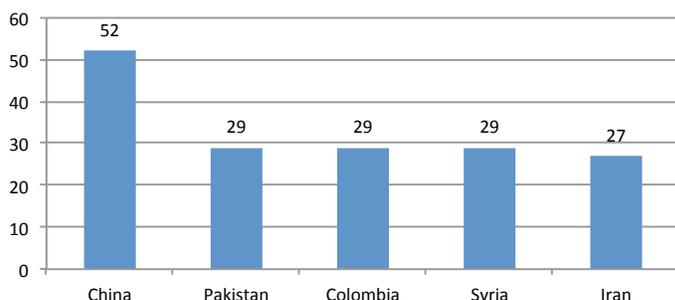
The following charts, indicating the number of claims referred to the Immigration and Refugee Board in the Western Region from December 15, 2012 to August 31, 2013, show that most claims are made by nationals of non Designated Countries of Origin (DCO) since the new system has been in effect. This is a very significant change and it is still too recent for service providers to know

Top 5 Source DCO for Refugee Claims Referred to IRB Western Region - Dec 2012 – Aug 2013



American claimants are usually children of claimants from other countries who were born in the USA.

Top 5 Source non DCO for Refugee Claims Referred to IRB Western Region Dec 2012 – Aug 2013



what are the implications of that change on the refugee claimants who were making most of the claims under the previous system (e.g. Hungarians and Mexicans).

The IRB in Vancouver indicated that 23% of its non-finalized claims at the end of December 2013 were based in Surrey.

It is also important to note that, effective April 1, 2014, CIC will be repatriating the funding of settlement services in BC. As a result refugee claimants will not have access to some current services. With these two major reforms, and the cuts in the health coverage for refugee claimants introduced by CIC in June 2012, the situation of refugee claimants in Canada has been dramatically reshaped in less than two years.

As statistics on settlement patterns and demographic characteristics are not available for Refugee Claimants or Refugees Landed in Canada, nor for Privately Sponsored Refugees in B.C., the information provided in the rest of this document is based on data collected by the ISSofBC Resettlement Assistance Program and relates only to Government Assisted Refugees.

June 2012 Amendments to the Interim Federal Health Program (IFHP)

The Interim Federal Health is a federally administered program originally introduced to provide health care coverage for all refugees, particularly those who were not covered by a provincial health insurance program. Until June 2012, the IFH covered all categories of refugees, including refugee claimants. On June 30, 2012, the federal government introduced amendments to the IFH program resulted in tiered and unequal health care coverage for refugees. The revised IFH program created three different streams of health coverage. Each stream

caters to different refugee categories and the level of coverage varies accordingly. The Expanded Health Care stream covers GARs, the Health Care stream provides support for accepted refugee claimants and privately sponsored refugees and the Public Health and Safety Health Care coverage is for refugee claimants from Designated Countries of Origin (DCO) list and rejected claimants.*

Streams of health care coverage after amendments to IFHP in June 2012

	Expanded Health Care	Health Care	Public Health and Safety Health
	government assisted refugees	privately sponsored refugees and accepted refugee claimants	refugee claimants from DCO list and rejected claimants
Hospital services	covered	covered	covered only if there is a risk to public health
Doctor and nurse services	covered	covered	covered only if there is a risk to public health
Laboratory	covered	covered	covered only if there is a risk to public health
Ambulance	covered	covered	
Prescribed medication & vaccines	covered	covered only if there is a risk to public health	covered only if there is a risk to public health
Limited vision and dental care	covered		

Government Assisted Refugees in British Columbia

Because government assisted refugees arrive in Canada as permanent residents, they are free to settle anywhere in the country regardless of where they were destined. Of the 2,128 GARs destined to B.C. between 2010 and 2012, 1,924 (90%) settled in Metro Vancouver. The chart to the right shows the settlement patterns of government assisted refugees in Metro Vancouver by municipality.

Between 2010 and 2012, the majority of GARs destined to B.C. settled in Surrey (26%), Coquitlam (22%) and Burnaby (17%).

The number of GARs settling in Surrey in 2010 and 2011 was lower than in previous years and in the subsequent two years (2012 and 2013). GARs' settlement in the different Metro Vancouver municipalities varies with the refugee communities that are destined to BC. Newly arrived GARs usually choose municipalities or neighbourhoods where their own community is already represented. As a result settlement patterns vary from one year to another, depending on which communities are mostly resettled on a given year. For instance, Somali and Iraqi communities that are already present in Surrey will likely "attract" new arrivals from these communities. To the opposite, newly arrived Iranian GARs are more likely to settle in Burnaby and Coquitlam than other communities as they will want to join an already well established Iranian community in these municipalities.

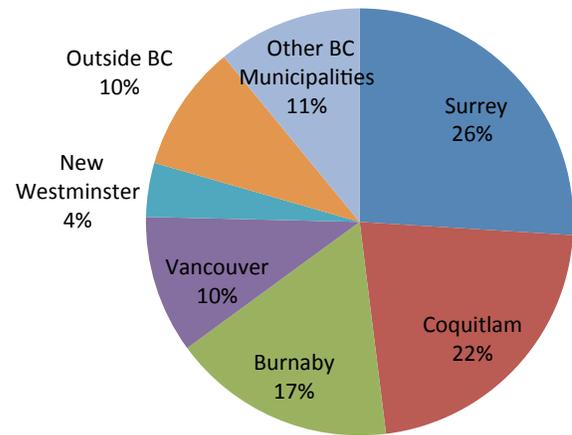
Settlement Patterns of Government Assisted Refugees in Surrey

Settlement patterns, refugee characteristics and the provision of adequate support and housing have been proven to have a significant impact on the settlement outcomes of the refugee population. Data compiled by ISSofBC over three years provides a broader picture of the make-up of newly arrived GARs in Surrey. The following charts provide an overview of some of their characteristics.

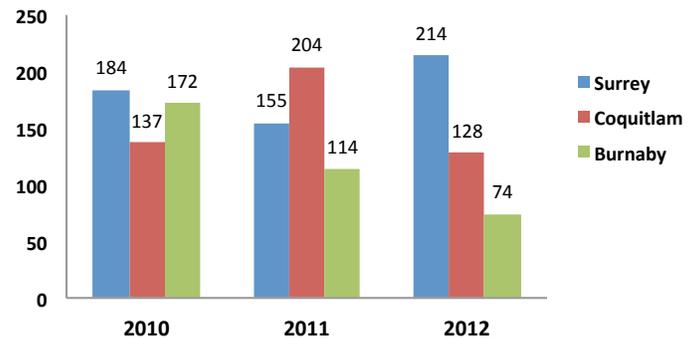
From January 2010 to December 2012, 555 Government Assisted Refugees (GARs) settled in Surrey (183 in 2010, 155 in 2011 and 217 in 2012).

Although statistics are not available, based on national figures it is likely that a similar number of Privately Sponsored Refugees (PSRs) arrived in Surrey during the same period.

GARs destined to BC by Municipalities, 2010 to 2012



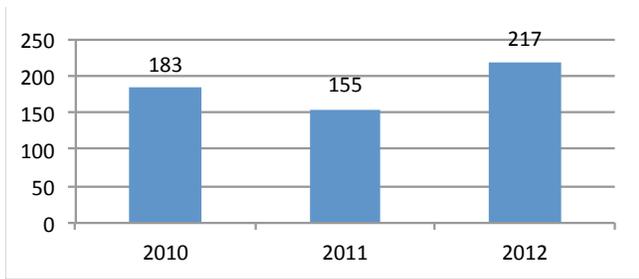
GARs Yearly Arrivals in Top 3 Receiving Municipalities in BC



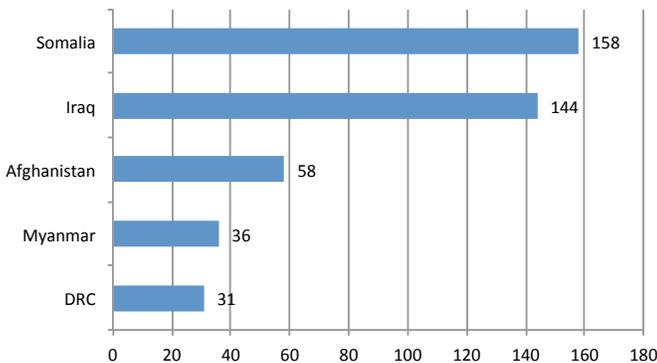
In 2011 there were 34,880 recent immigrants – arrived in Canada less than five years ago³ – living in Surrey. The total number of GARs destined to Surrey between 2008 and 2012 was 1,110. If we compare those two very close five-year periods (2006 to 2011 for recent immigrants and 2008 to 2012 for GARs settled in Surrey), GARs represent 3.18% of recent immigrants in Surrey. GARs arrived in Surrey from 2008 to 2012 represent 0.59% of the total immigrant population living in Surrey in 2011 and 0.24% of the total Surrey population in 2011.

³Statistics Canada 2011 Census & NHS data.

Total GARs Arrivals in Surrey 2010 to 2012



5 Top Source Countries of GARs Destined to Surrey 2010 to 2012



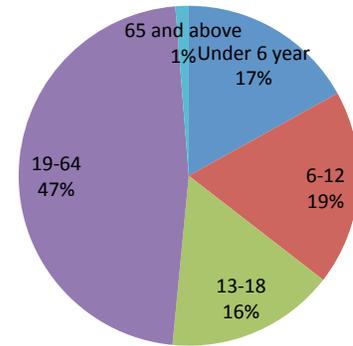
Source: ISSoBC

Settlement service providers in Metro Vancouver face new challenges as the characteristics and settlement patterns of GARs change. In 2002 the implementation of the Immigration and Refugee Protection Act (IRPA) shifted the focus of Canada’s refugee resettlement program away from those with an “ability to establish” in Canada to those “most in need of protection” as determined by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). As a result Canada’s GAR population was significantly altered to include more high-needs individuals facing multi-barriers to settlement, such as:

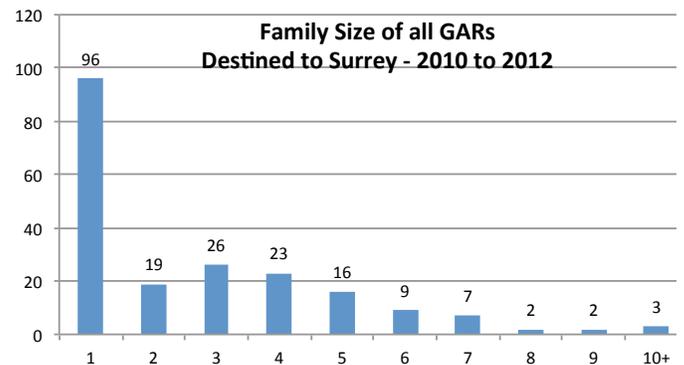
- Low literacy levels in their original languages
- Increased physical and mental health issues
- Larger households
- More households with single parents, mostly lead by women
- Youth with limited exposure to formal education

It also indicated a shift of GAR source countries, bringing newcomers from drastically different political, economic and social contexts. Many arrived with special

Age Breakdown for GARs Destined to Surrey - 2010 to 2012



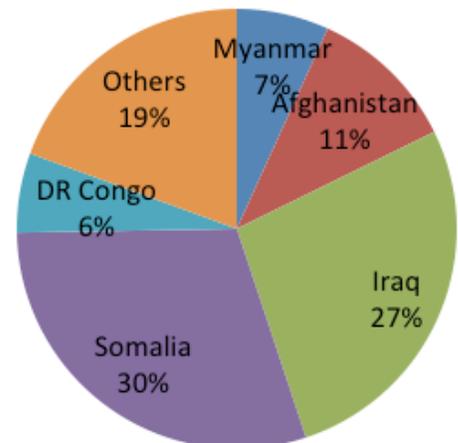
Family Size of GARs destined to Surrey 2010 to 2012



requirements after years of trauma, torture and, in many cases, time in refugee camps due to protracted refugee situations, raising important questions about the settlement needs of post-IRPA GARs.

The chart below indicates the source countries for GARs settled in Surrey from 2010 to 2012. These refugee communities typically present the post-IRPA barriers to settlement (protracted refugee situations, large households and physical and mental health issues are recurring characteristics within the top three communities).

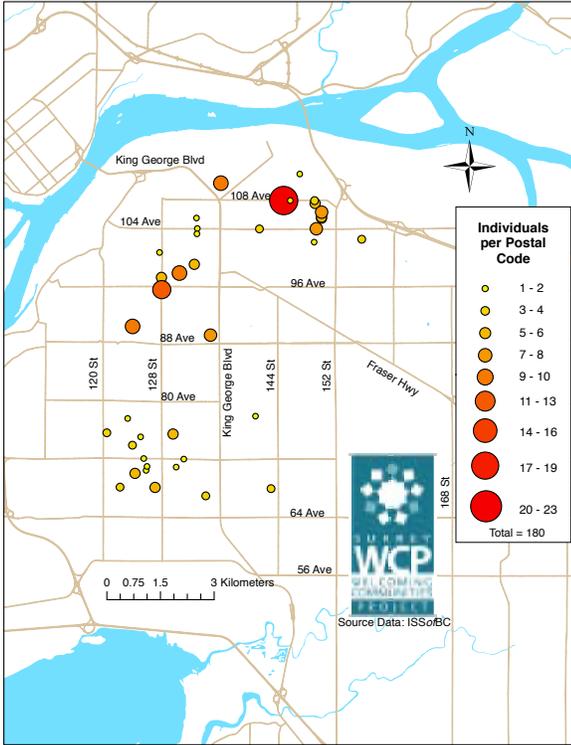
Source Countries of GARs Destined to Surrey - 2010 to 2012



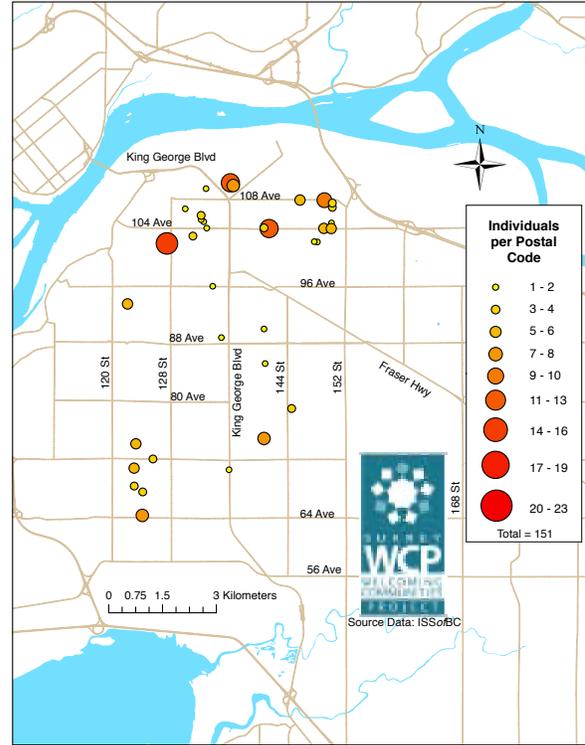
The four maps below represent the settlement of GARs in each of 2010, 2011 and 2012, as well as the cumulative total. These maps show that GARs continue to mainly settle in Whalley, Guilford and Newton.

The following five maps identify settlement patterns for the top five source countries for GARs settling in Surrey in 2010-2012. They show that GARs tend to cluster close to members of their own community: Somalis and Afghans mainly in Newton/Strawberry Hill, Burmese mainly in Whalley and Iraqis mainly in Whalley and Guilford.

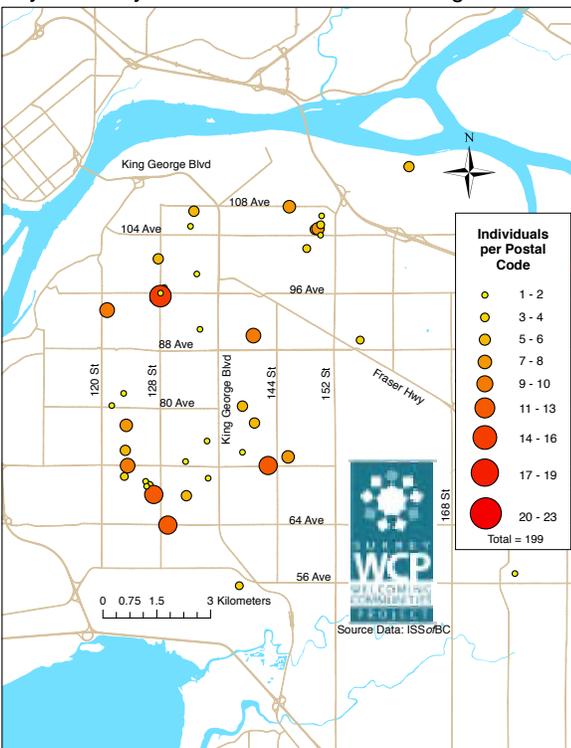
City of Surrey - Government Assisted Refugees - 2010



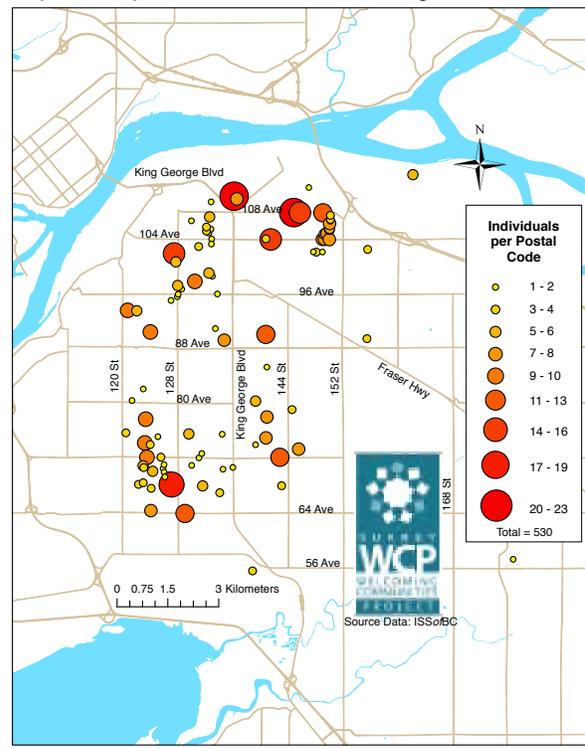
City of Surrey - Government Assisted Refugees - 2011



City of Surrey - Government Assisted Refugees - 2012



City of Surrey - Government Assisted Refugees - 2010-2012



Government Assisted Refugees (GARs), upon their arrival to British Columbia, receive Resettlement Assistance Program (RAP) income benefits that follow the same rates as provincial income support rates for up to one year or

until they are able to sustain themselves, whichever comes first. The following table provides different examples of income support provided to different size GAR families in BC.

RAP Benefits to GARs - March 2014

Family Size	Shelter Allowance	Transportation Allowance	Food Allowance	Total RAP Monthly Allowance	One time start up allowance
Single	\$375.00	\$124.00	\$235.00	\$734.00	\$735.00
Couple	\$570.00	\$248.00	\$307.00	\$1,125.00	\$975.00
Couple and 2 children under 19	\$700.00	\$248.00	\$401.00	\$1,349.00	\$1,667.00
Single parent and 2 children under 19	\$660.00	\$124.00	\$376.00	\$1,160.00	\$1,252.00
Couple and 4 children under 19	\$785.00	\$248.00	\$401.00	\$1,434.00	\$2,443.00
Single parent and 4 children under 19	\$750.00	\$124.00	\$376.00	\$1,250.00	\$2,661.00

The City of Surrey's campaign for the elimination of the transportation loan

Government Assisted Refugees (GARs) and Privately Sponsored Refugees (PSRs) that are resettled to Canada as part of a national humanitarian program must pay for their overseas medical exam and air travel to Canada. Since most refugees can't afford these expenses, Canada offers them a loan. As a result, refugee families may start their new life in Canada with a debt of up to \$10,000. Each loan has an interest free period that varies from one to three years, depending on the total amount of the loan, but after this period, refugees have to pay interest on their transportation loan. Canada is the only country worldwide that issues an interest bearing loan to refugees.

Arising from a local study and initiative, the *At Home in Surrey Refugee Housing Study*⁴ commissioned by the City of Surrey noted that the current requirement for Government Assisted Refugees to repay their transportation loan is a significant burden to these low-income refugee families. Nevertheless, the repayment rate on the transportation loan is over 90 percent. One of the study's recommendations was for Surrey's Mayor and Council to lobby the Union of British Columbia Municipalities (UBCM) and the Federation

of Canadian Municipalities (FCM) to join the campaign to eliminate the transportation loan program for Government Assisted Refugees coming to Canada.

In October 2009, the City of Surrey put forward a Resolution to the Union of BC Municipalities' Annual Convention, calling for the termination of the transportation loan program for refugees. The Resolution was passed and endorsed by all BC municipalities.

The Federation of Canadian Municipalities (FCM) passed a similar resolution in September 2010. As a follow-up, a letter was sent to the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration Canada asking the federal government to cancel outstanding loans and terminate the transportation loan program for refugees.

In November 2013, the City of Surrey launched a petition to collect signatures from local residents in support of eliminating the transportation loan.⁵

⁴At Home in Surrey, The Housing Experiences of Refugees in Surrey BC, ISSofBC, 2009.

⁵From the City of Surrey website's page on the transportation loan: <http://www.surrey.ca/community/13788.aspx>

Settlement patterns of GARs from Somalia

Following the fall of the Somali President, Mohamed Siad Barre in 1991 and the subsequent power struggle in south and central Somalia, an estimated one million Somalis remain displaced outside Somalia. Among them are some 10,000 refugees in Dadaab camp who represent the second generation born in exile. However, since 2012 Somalia has experienced possibly the most decisive, even if still fragile, improvement in its political and security situation since 23 years. As a result, the UNHCR has been facilitating an ongoing tripartite dialogue with the Government of Kenya (where most Somali refugees live) and the newly established Somali Federal Government. Refugees and Internally Displaced Persons have been spontaneously returning to their home since 2013 and the UNHCR is hoping to intensify repatriation operations in 2014.

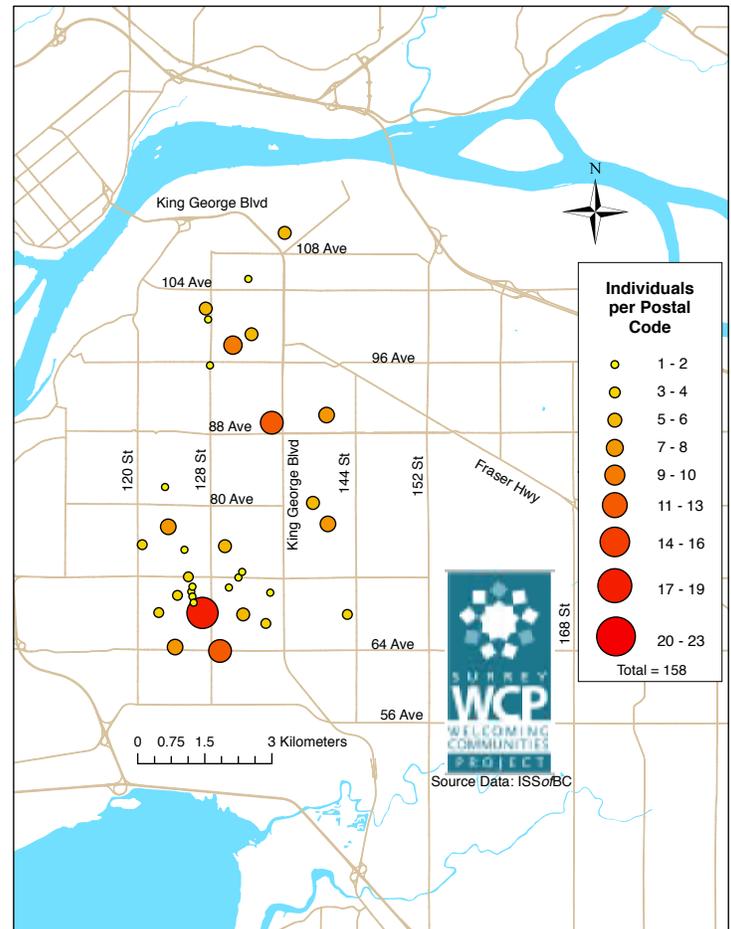
Ethnically and culturally, Somalia is one of the most homogeneous countries in Africa. Although there are minority groups of Bantu descent and Arab enclaves in the coastal cities, the majority are ethnic Somalis who speak dialects of the same language, Somali, and who practice the same religion, Islam. In Metro Vancouver, many Somali GAR households are headed by single parents – particularly women – with an average of 4 to 9 children in each household unit.

Between 2005 and 2012, a high percentage (between 62% and 70% depending on the years) of all Somali GARs settled in the City of Surrey (323). Other Somali GARs mainly settled in Burnaby, Vancouver and Richmond or outside of the Lower Mainland (18 Somali GARs self-transferred to Alberta in 2012). In Surrey, Somalis GARs mostly settled in the Newton area.

In its new multiyear resettlement commitment, CIC has not identified Somali refugees as a target population. So it is likely that their number will start decreasing as Canada enters its new system. However Somalis are still on the list of refugees that can be privately sponsored.

The settlement patterns of **158 individuals, or 30% of GARs settled in Surrey between 2010 and 2012**, are displayed on this map.

City of Surrey - Government Assisted Refugees from Somalia - 2010-2012





Abdirashid Jamal

Abdirashid Jamal's memories of fleeing Somalia to a refugee camp in Northeast Africa still haunt him today. But the past experience of the 24-year old hasn't deterred him building a better life for himself and his family in Surrey.

Life was very difficult for Abdirashid as a Somali high school student living in Mogadishu, "the most violent city in Africa". Finally at the age of 19, he and his family fled to a refugee camp in Massawa, Eritrea.

"The life in the camp was really hard. You cannot find everything you need. Life was tough both inside and outside the camp," recalls Abdirashid.

After five years struggling in the camp to make ends meet, the Canadian Government accepted him and his wife as Government Assisted Refugees (GARs). With the help of a friend from the refugee camp already living in Surrey, he and his wife resettled to the community in December 2012 determined to build a better life.

"The refugee experience was one of the worst in my life. I came here and have an excellent life," Abdirashid said.

He said there are many more opportunities for him and his family to live comfortably.

"If you take advantage of the opportunities you can achieve a high level of happiness."

One opportunity Abdirashid seized was going back to school. He recently completed a pipefitting program at UA piping Industry College of BC with the hopes on working in the oil and gas industry.

But Abdirashid hasn't stopped there. He is also determined to give something back. In his spare time between work and family, he volunteers assisting other young refugees to land on their feet through an organization called Somali Youth of BC.

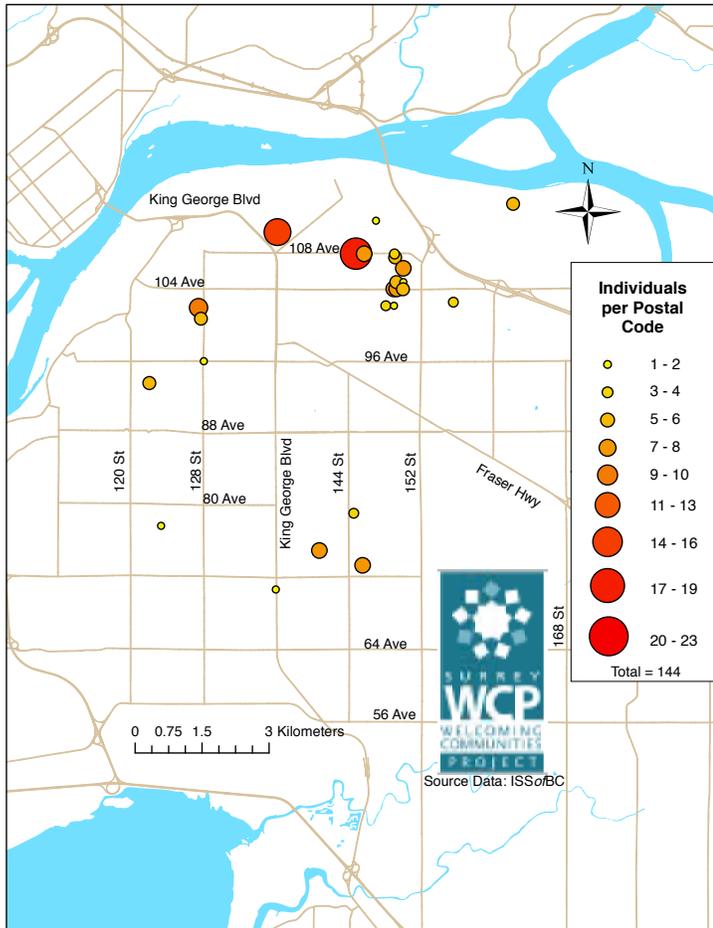
Settlement patterns of GARs from Iraq

The United Nations estimate that 2.2 million Iraqis fled their country as a result of 2003 Iraq war and subsequent conflicts. Another two million were internally displaced. Many Iraqis sought asylum in neighbouring Jordan and Syria. When the civil war intensified in Syria in 2012, a majority of the million Iraqi refugees in the country had to flee from violence another time. Many returned to Iraq at that time, others crossed the Turkish or Lebanese border with Syrian refugees.

Iraqi GAR resettlement to Canada dates back to 1996, but a recent decision by the Canadian government to prioritize Iraqi refugees has sharply increased resettlement from 2008 to 2011. There was a decrease in the number of arrivals in BC in 2012 (87) and 2013 (74) due to the civil war in Syria and the closure of the Canadian Embassy in Damascus, but the Canadian government has reiterated in 2013 its commitment to sponsor a total of 20,000 Iraqis out of the Middle East, with 4,000 more individuals by 2015.

Most Iraqi GARs have come to Canada from camps in

City of Surrey - Government Assisted Refugees from Iraq - 2010-2012



Syria, Jordan, Turkey and to a lesser extent Egypt after fleeing the Sunni-Shi'a conflict in Iraq. Although their dominant language is Arabic, some also speak Kurdish or Chaldean Neo-Aramaic. Most Iraqi GARs are Muslims and are divided between Sunni and Shi'as, but some are Christian. Although the level of education varies among Iraqi GARs, most of them are literate in their first language and some hold university degrees. Still, even among those who are well educated, few Iraqi GARs can communicate well in English.

Many Iraqi GARs are coming to BC with recent emotional and physical scars as a result of the Iraqi war. ISSoBC has observed an increase number of single men and women as well as families arriving that are not intact. Some Iraqi's have arrived with significant mental health issues including depression and trauma as well as chronic physical health conditions. ISSoBC has recently observed a sharp increase in the number of Iraqi GARs who have arrived requiring special supports e.g. deaf – Arabic sign language interpreters, blind, etc.

Iraqi GARs are also arriving to BC with limited pre-existing community support and as such are part of a new and growing community.

Most Iraqis settled in Surrey (32% of Iraqi GARs arrived in BC between 2010 and 2012) – particularly in Guildford – and Burnaby with smaller groups in New Westminster, Coquitlam and Richmond.

The settlement patterns of **144 individuals, or 27% of GARs settled in Surrey between 2010 and 2012**, are displayed on this map.



Kanar Barinj

After a long journey that took her to Jordan, Thailand and Cambodia, Kanar Barinj arrived in Canada in April 2004. She fled Iraq, her war-torn country, with her husband and three sons in 1998. While they were trapped in Cambodia with no money to continue their journey, cousins who had already settled in BC managed to sponsor them to come to Canada as Privately Sponsored Refugees (PSRs).

The Barinj family was in the service industry in Iraq so it is very natural Kanar started working in a Vancouver based restaurant as a cook. Through her hard work and determination she is now in the second year of running her family owned restaurant in Guilford called Ishtar Donair. Recently her second son entirely renovated the

establishment and everyone in the family lends a hand for busy events such as the Surrey Fusion Festival. However like any small business owners in their first years, Kanar worries about paying the bills and attracting more customers.

But she remains hopeful of her life in Surrey and she is happy her three sons are all working and studying in Canada “where they have a future and they can do anything,” she says.

Settlement patterns of GARs from Afghanistan

Afghans are the largest refugee population in the world. In 2012, UNHCR estimated the total number of Afghan refugees at 2.5 million, which represented 24% of the total number of registered refugees that year. They have fled from armed conflict, finding sanctuary in neighbouring countries such as Iran, Pakistan, Russia, India, and elsewhere. Another 600,000 were displaced inside Afghanistan.

Most Afghan refugees have waited since 1992 in camps and/or urban areas of neighbouring countries, where the capacity of the UNHCR is inadequate due to the ongoing regional conflict and safety concerns. As a result, generations of children are born and grow up in camps, deprived of access to health care, education, income earning opportunities and other basic needs. Despite the unstable security situation, 5.7 million Afghans have voluntarily returned home since 2002, the world's largest repatriation operation. However, the returnees face many challenges when reintegrating in the Afghan society and often don't access basic services.

The Afghan families that settle in BC tend to be large by Canadian standards. Single parents, mostly mothers who have lost husbands in the war, are commonly the breadwinners for large families with an average of six children. Low literacy as a result of little or no formal education in war zones and inconsistent and inadequate education in refugee camps makes learning a new language and the overall settlement process slower for number of Afghans than for other newcomers. For some, living for decades in an environment of war and refugee camps has also created a low self-esteem, low motivation, and extremely limited opportunities for utilizing previous skills or acquiring new ones. Racial profiling of Middle Eastern communities since September 11, 2001 has left a strong impact on new immigrants, including Afghan children.

Despite these challenges, Afghan GARs sustain close-knit family relations and depend on each other for cooperation and mutual support. The two main Afghan languages (Dari and Pashto) are in the same language family as that in Iran (Farsi).

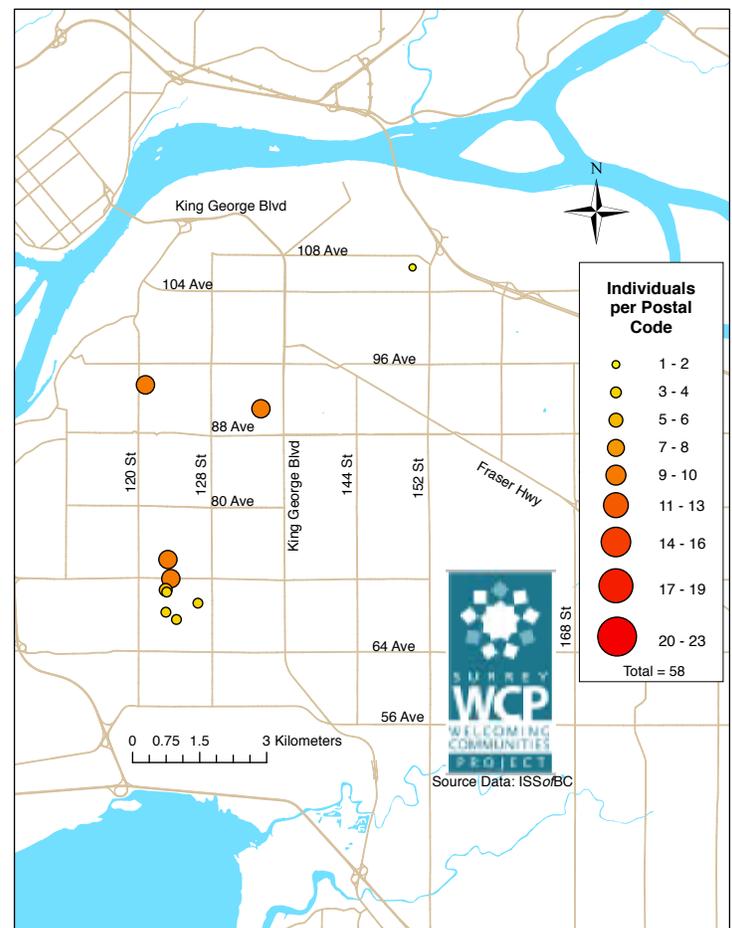
Afghanistan has been a top GAR source country in BC since 2003. However, the number of individuals arriving in Canada is slowly decreasing. Afghans settled mainly in

the cities of Coquitlam and Surrey where until 2009 they made up the largest proportion of GARs in both municipalities. They have also been one of the largest GAR groups to settle in Burnaby, New Westminster and Vancouver.

Fewer Afghan GARs were resettled in BC in 2010 (74) and 2011 (39). Consequently, few settled in Surrey during those two years (0 in 2010 and 17 in 2011). However, a large number of Afghan GARs arrived in BC in 2012 (165), mainly through the Canadian Task Force Sponsorship program, for Afghans who worked with the Canadian forces in the Kandahar Province.

The settlement patterns of **58 individuals, or 11% of GARs settled in Surrey between 2010 and 2012**, are displayed on this map.

City of Surrey - Government Assisted Refugees from Afghanistan - 2010-2012





Wagma and Zarifa Ahmedzai

Wagma Ahmedzai, her mother and five siblings left Takhar, in Northern Afghanistan in 2004 because of safety concerns and for the girls in the family to be able to pursue formal education. The family spent the next seven years in neighbouring Pakistan until they resettled in Canada in 2012.

“We arrived in Vancouver in March, 2012 and I still remember knowing that our dream had come true. When we arrived here, it was my first time seeing so many people happy.” said Zarifa, Wagma’s mother.

Wagma remembers when she arrived how sad she felt for leaving all she knew behind, but also feeling free and empowered in her new country.

Wagma and her sister were immediately hired as interpreters and quickly became facilitators for ISSofBC. They helped Afghan families to settle, understand Canadian society and navigate the system.

Zarifa, who was illiterate and didn’t speak a word of English when she arrived, is now in English Intermediate class and wants to become a nurse. Her six children are each on their way to pursuing their dream careers in social work, medicine and architecture.

Because of their new experiences, connections and enthusiasm, each family member is now following his or her own dream only after two years of setting foot in Canada.

Zarifa says she now knows she made the right decision when she left her home town in Afghanistan ten years ago.

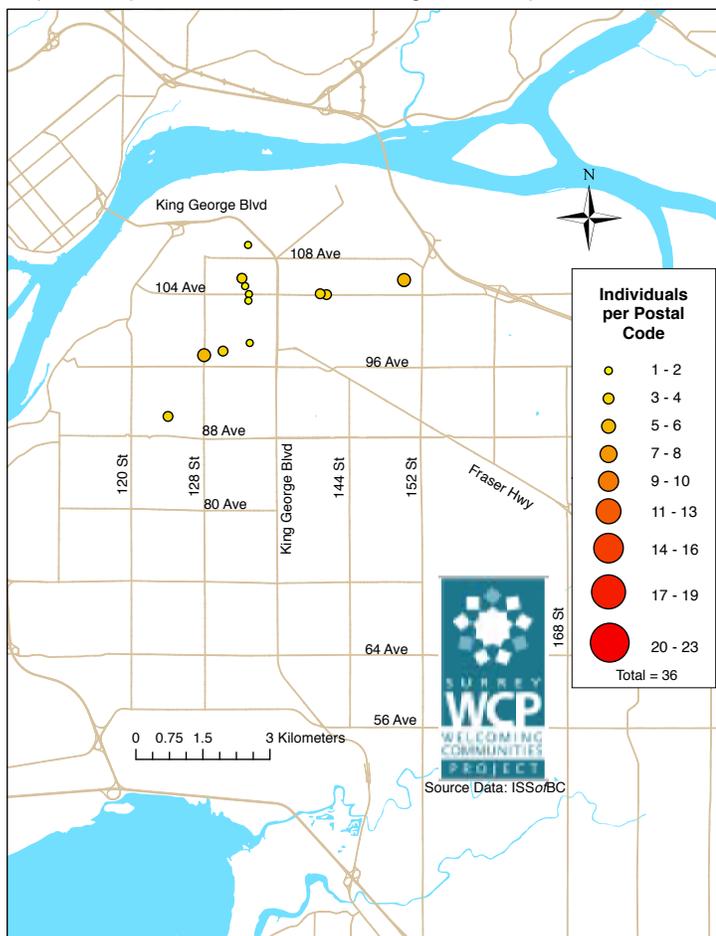
Settlement patterns of GARs from Myanmar

The majority of GARs from Myanmar belong to a minority ethnic group called Karen. They are a relatively new group to settle in BC, arriving after the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) recognized Karen refugees as a distinct group with particular protection needs and called upon the international community to assist in their resettlement. For over 3 decades, Myanmar adopted a policy of forced relocation and assimilation so that the Karen and territories dominated by insurgent groups could be monitored and controlled by the central government. As a result of the subsequent human rights abuses, many Karens fled to the borders of Thailand and were confined to remote jungle refugee camps by the Thai authorities. Approximately 140,000 Karen refugees have lived in the camps for the past 20 years. Literacy among both adults and children is relatively low due to years spent evading the army to reach the Thai border and the lack of educational opportunities in the camps. Most Karen

speak S'gaw or Pwo while a few speak Burmese as an additional language. The vast majority in BC are Baptist Christian, while a minority are Seventh Day Adventists or Buddhists.

Karen resettlement to Canada began in 2006, but a coup in Thailand in 2008 disrupted the process. Those selected for resettlement in 2007 and 2008 mainly arrived between 2009 and 2011. In 2010, 50 GARs arrived from Myanmar in BC and 21 of them settled in Surrey (13 were Karen, the others spoke Bengali, Rohingya and Burmese). In 2011, 51 GARs arrived in BC from Myanmar, only 10 of which settled in Surrey (2 were Karen, the others spoke Chin and Burmese). Only 5 individuals from Myanmar arrived in 2012 and they all settled in Surrey. Outside of Surrey, Burmese GARs arrived during the 2010 – 2012 period mainly settled in Langley – for the Karen, and Vancouver – for the Chin.

City of Surrey - Government Assisted Refugees from Myanmar - 2010-2012



GARs from Myanmar tend to live in a few concentrated areas to support each other and depend heavily on the extended family structures developed previously in the camps. Gaining employment and access to health care needs are two of the many challenges they face due to language barriers and unfamiliarity with the Canadian system. Because of their limited income and the high cost of housing in Metro Vancouver, many of the Karen live in crowded apartment suites. It is common for 6 people to live in a 2 bedroom apartment or 4 people to live in a 1 bedroom apartment; teenagers and children often have to share a bedroom with their parents.

CIC has not yet indicated if a refugee community from Asia will be part of the multiyear resettlement commitment, but it is unlikely that more Karen refugees will come to BC in the next future.

The settlement patterns of **36 individuals, or 7% of GARs settled in Surrey between 2010 and 2012**, are displayed on the following map.



Tha mie

After fleeing her homeland of Burma to escape killings and torture by the military regime and enduring 15 years in a refugee camp in Thailand, Tha mie resettled in Surrey in 2009 with her husband and five children.

Once she arrived in Surrey, she was faced with many difficulties including language barriers and a lack of formal education. But that didn't stop her from achieving her goal of finding employment.

"I don't give up easily. For me as long as I put my passion in there, I can work," she said.

Through immigrant and community service employment programs, networking and job searching, Tha mie spent countless hours determined to find work. Finally after networking within the Karen community she was offered a position at a fish processing plant in Surrey.

While she said she still struggles with English, she is very grateful to have the opportunity to work in Canada.

However, despite Tha mie's hard work ethic, misconceptions about the refugee experience still exist and Surrey is no exception.

"Many people don't understand our situation. We have been through so much. I want to encourage people to not judge appearances. As long as I am healthy I want to be active," she said.

Regardless of the difficulties, Tha mie is truly grateful to be in Canada where it's safe and secure for her family.

She hopes by sharing her story, people in Surrey can gain a better understanding of the challenges refugees face and their determination to work hard to build a better life here.

Settlement patterns of GARs from Democratic Republic of Congo

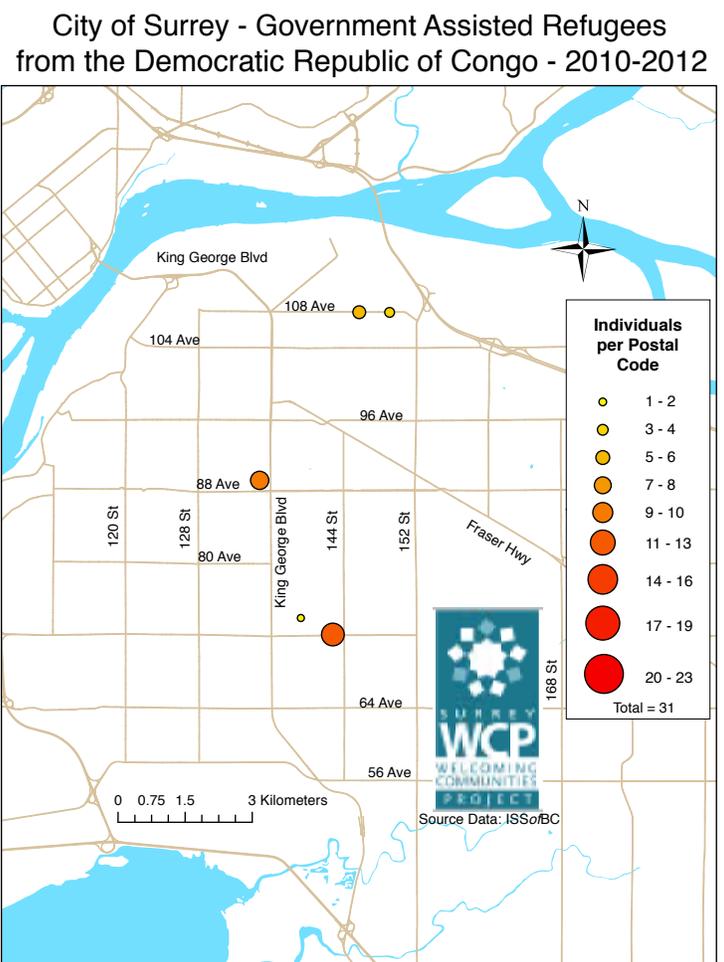
Decades of dictatorship in currently named Democratic Republic of Congo (former Zaire) characterized by oppression, torture and murder for political opponents and journalists have led many Congolese to flee their country and seek asylum in other African countries, Europe or North America. In addition, the long lasting war in the eastern province of Kivu with its daily reality of village vandalizing, rape or sexual slavery of women of all ages continues to result in massive displacements of populations. Some of these displaced persons are able to return to their home in a few weeks or months, but others have to stay in camps in the neighboring countries with meager hope to ever see their home again.

According to UNHCR⁴, more than 550,000 Congolese were refugees or Asylum Seekers by mid 2013. Recent outbreak of violence in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) have led to new internal displacement of more than one million people in 2012, as well as to outflows of tens of thousands of Congolese, mainly to Uganda, Rwanda and Burundi. At the same time, 71,900 Congolese refugees returned to their home country. However, the unstable situation in that region and the lack of durable solutions for many Congolese refugees in the Great Lake has led UNHCR and resettlement countries to adopt an initiative in the end of 2012 that foresees the resettlement of 50,000 refugees from DRC, currently living in the region. Canada will participate in this four year action plan and committed to take 2,500 Congolese out of Tanzania and Burundi between 2015 and 2018.

Congolese GARs arriving to BC speak a large variety of dialects or languages as their mother tongue, such as Tshiluba, Kihema, Mashi, Fuliru, Kihunde, Mahavu, Kinyarmulenge or Kinyabwisha, but most will also speak Swahili, French or English (mainly those who have spent years in English speaking countries of asylum such as Uganda and Tanzania).

Over the last 3 years (2010 to 2012), 61 Congolese GARs arrived in BC and 51% of them settled in Surrey (31 individuals). This was a huge drop in number of arrivals after 132 Congolese GARs arrived in BC in 2008 and 2009. Based on the announcement of a multi-year commitment from Canada to resettle Congolese refugees, it is expected that number of arrivals will substantially grow as of 2015 for a 2 to 3 years period. Looking at the pattern for the 2008 to 2012 period, it is very likely that a good number of these GARs will choose to settle in Surrey (45% of Congolese GARs arrived in BC during this five year period, settled in Surrey).

The settlement patterns of **31 individuals, or 6% of GARs settled in Surrey between 2010 and 2012**, are displayed on this map.



⁴UNHCR, Statistical Yearbook 2012 and Mid-Year Trends 2013.



Safari Kabumbe

A tailor from the South Kivu province of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Safari Kabumbe was lucky enough to find work when he fled his home to Uganda due to war and violence. Two years later he was joined by his wife, baby and younger brother. Seven years and two more children later, he set foot on Canadian ground, as a Government Assisted Refugee (GAR) and a permanent resident to his new country.

He settled in Surrey Newton where other Congolese live and started to connect with the Swahili and Francophone communities.

“Although my kids speak good English, I registered them to the Francophone school, as this is our language,” he said.

It was difficult in the beginning for the nine and seven year old children, as they were used to speaking English and Luganda in Uganda. However, the settlement worker in school told them about an after school homework program and the children have now successfully transitioned and added a fourth language to their arsenal.

Now that his family is somehow settled in Surrey, Kabumbe is actively looking for employment. His younger brother, now a young adult, found a job in a fast food restaurant through community connections.

Kabumbe is determined to use his 15 years experience as a tailor in Canada. In the past he worked in the Ugandan fashion industry and has dreams of putting on fashion shows in Vancouver.

ISSofBC produced this document as part of the Surrey Welcoming Communities' Refugee Myth Busting Campaign (April 2013 – March 2014).

If you are interested in learning more about refugees in BC you can find several reports and publications on ISSofBC website at www.issbc.org.



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