



Private Sponsorship of Refugees:

How the United States Can Learn From Canada's Success

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Introduction

- The United States refugee immigration system has existed for decades without the reforms necessary to reflect the true exigencies of people coming to the U.S. for a better life.
- The private sponsorship model has been very successful in Canada and should be adopted by the U.S. as an initiative to encourage effective support and resettlement of refugees in the United States.

U.S. Refugee Immigration:

Background & Current State

- **The Refugee Act of 1980** is the single-most important piece of legislation determining systematic procedures for refugee selection and arrival to the U.S. It was established to provide opportunities that would enable refugees to achieve economic self-sufficiency.
- Founded in 1975, **The U.S. Refugee Admissions Program (USRAP)** is a collection of governmental and non-governmental organizations that operate on behalf of the U.S. to oversee refugee processing, admissions, and resettlement.
- Former U.S. President Donald Trump **severely restricted the scope of refugee resettlement.**
 - Complicated and lengthened admissions processes by implementing “program enhancements” in the form of additional screenings and changes to paperwork.
 - Lowered refugee admissions from 85,000 in 2016 to just 18,000 in 2020, the lowest number since the Refugee Act of 1980 was enacted.
 - These executive actions reflect the deep polarization of American attitudes toward refugees.

Primary Issues of U.S. Refugee Resettlement

It is evident that there are significant deficiencies concerning refugee migration practices in the U.S. However, foremost are the concerns associated with domestic resettlement practices, as they provide a practical target for preventative intervention:

1. **“Professionalized” nature:** The Refugee Act of 1980 professionalized resettlement and reduced the incentive for domestic USRAP organizations to spend their time thoughtfully engaging with and caring for refugees. The USRAP has evolved to measure the compliance of resettlement agencies, not the agencies’ ability to integrate refugees.
2. **Not conducive to social & cultural realization:** The primary goal of the USRAP is to ensure that refugees are initially provided with necessities and core services and have the resources to become economically self-sufficient. Equating the achievement of economic self-sufficiency with successful integration overlooks the importance of social and cultural integration.
3. **Lack of emotional and mental health support:** There are few refugee-focused mental health programs provided by the arms of the USRAP. This problem is exacerbated by the ignorance of language, cultural, and logistical barriers faced by refugees in making mental health services more accessible.

Canadian Refugee Immigration:

Current State

- In 2018, Canada led the world in refugee admissions by resettling 28,000 individuals in communities across the country, more than any other country in the world.
- Canada goes to comparatively great lengths to help immigrants integrate by providing them with orientation programs, skills training, social services, and pathways to citizenship.
- It is difficult to pinpoint exactly why Canadian support for refugees and immigrants is a top priority, but a likely factor is Canada's value of multiculturalism. Prompted by Pierre Trudeau's multiculturalism campaign aimed at celebrating the "mosaic" of diversity in Canada in the 1970s, multiculturalism has become embraced wholly and inspires Canadian approval of foreign-born persons resettling in Canada.

Canadian Refugee Resettlement Pathways

- There are two pathways for refugees to enter Canada:
 - **Government-Assisted (GARs):** Referred by the UNHCR based on their location and vulnerability and receive government assistance during their transition.
 - **Privately-Sponsored (PSRs):** Not referred by the UNHCR, but instead are referred to come to Canada as a refugee by the affiliated sponsoring group.
- Integration outcomes of PSRs are better than those of GARs, but the outcomes of both are impressive.
 - 80% of GARs and 84% of PSRs reported high levels of satisfaction with their lives in Canada. Refugees in Canada are also very likely to become Canadian citizens: 87% of GARs and 91% of PSRs acquire Canadian citizenship 10 years after relocating to Canada.

Private Sponsorship of Refugees

Support Provided by Sponsoring Groups:

Financial Support	Emotional Support
 Rent & Utilities	 Employment
 Clothing	 Orientation to Everyday Activities
 Food	 Community Connection
 Furniture & Household Items	 Locating Interpreters & Teachers
 Transportation	 Applying for Healthcare

- Private citizens and the community and are directly involved in enabling resettlement efforts.
- **“Naming”** – refugees follow typical government application and screening process, but are referred by a sponsoring group
- **“Additionality”** – private sponsorship takes place adjunct to government efforts
- Rewarding for everyone involved: sponsorship activities cultivate trust, kindness, and genuine connection.

U.S.–Canada Refugee Matters: Sharing the Burden

- Historically, both countries have recognized their duty to accept refugees and those seeking asylum. However, in recent years Canada has become a significantly more attractive destination for refugees because the U.S. has truncated many of its immigration programs for refugees, putting pressure on Canada's capacity to admit refugees.
- The countries' recent divergence in approach is largely a result of the Trump administration's hard line against foreign-born persons.
- The upward trend of U.S. immigration officials using detainment as a penalty against refugee claimants and asylum seekers has raised questions about the U.S. status as a "safe third country" under the Safe Third Country Agreement. In July 2020, a Canadian federal court judge ruled the bilateral pact invalid.
- **If the U.S. continues to follow the path foreshadowed by Donald Trump, it may exacerbate pressure on Canada to shelter vulnerable refugee and asylum-seeking populations or permanently damage the working relationship that exists for handling refugee matters at the border.**

Recommendation:

Launch a Private Sponsorship Program for Refugees in the U.S.

Why a Private Sponsorship model vs. other options?

- It is a feasible alternative to current resettlement programs.
- The necessary infrastructure and resources to launch this program are already available.
- It is scalable so long as additionality requirements are met.
- Its recognized success in Canada verifies its value.

Effective refugee resettlement is necessary.

REFUGEES ARE ECONOMIC CONTRIBUTORS

Top 3 Industries That Employ Refugees:



20%
Manufacturing



14%
Health Sector



10%
General Services



In 2015, over 181,000 refugee entrepreneurs generated \$4.6 billion

Implementing a Private Sponsorship Program

- The legal authority for the creation and launch of a pilot private sponsorship program lies within the executive branch of the U.S. government. It is the norm that the president makes these decisions in consultation with the USRAP and Congress.
- Before its formal launch, the program's mission, direction, procedures, and limitations would need to be documented, creating predictable and referenceable guidelines for the program that:
 - **Defines the scope of the UNHCR in privately-sponsored refugee activities.**
 - **Identifies the USRAP organizations responsible for overseeing the program.**
 - **Adopts naming and additionality principles.**
 - **Outlines the sponsorship application process and defines the responsibilities of the sponsor(s).**
 - **Creates a roadmap for refugee integration and pathways to citizenship.**
 - **Establishes a systematic way of measuring the program's failures and successes.**
- After the launch and exercise of this program, local agency leadership, sponsors, and refugees would regularly meet to review the challenges and successes of the program and adjust as needed.

Outcomes of Private Sponsorship

By encouraging a higher degree of engagement and fostering stronger connections between refugees and their host communities, private sponsorship would amplify refugee fulfillment beyond modest economic self-sufficiency.

Private sponsorship has the potential to:

1. Help avoid the drawbacks of “professionalized” resettlement by reallocating the responsibilities of local resettlement agencies, easing their bureaucratic burden.
2. Alter the nature of resettlement by adding a level of humanness and empathy to the relocation experience.
3. Encourage greater social and cultural integration as a result of one-on-one support and regular and earlier contact with their host community.
4. Develop emotional peer-support for refugees and promote access to mental health resources.
5. Provide refugees with a strengthened social network that can be leveraged in times of emotional hardship.
6. Energize local communities around a specific, human cause and convert communities and their residents from defensive reaction to proactive engagement in refugee matters.
7. Inspire the creation of innovative models and approaches to private engagement in refugee issues.

Hopes for the Future

- Canada's private sponsorship model would supply a verified template to the U.S. Canada would be able to transfer expertise and experience to the U.S. program, leveraging geographic & diplomatic closeness and increasing the program's chances of success.
- A private sponsorship program would help:
 - **Realign** the U.S. with its original commitment to protect vulnerable populations.
 - **Reestablish** the U.S. as an attractive migration destination.
 - **Redistribute** the refugee burden between Canada and the U.S.
 - **Restore** Canada's faith in the ability of the U.S. to properly provide for vulnerable populations.
- Adopting a private sponsorship model may be just one piece to help solve the complex puzzle that is refugee immigration. Its success in Canada, desired outcomes, and scalability provide good reason for the U.S. to launch such an initiative.
- As a global influencer, the U.S. choice to adopt Canada's model for private sponsorship would likely inspire and motivate other countries around the world to adopt the model as well.