

# NATIONAL YOUTH DIALOGUE STUDENT PARTNERS IN ACTION WITH REFUGEES CANADA





# INTRODUCTION

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Between September and December 2018, WE, student participants from high school spreading coast-to-coast across Canada, came together through virtual connections and an online collaborative classroom to discover, discuss, and dialogue significant and timely issues facing refugees both in Canada and globally. Under the guidance of expert mentors from The Centre for Global Education, TakingITGlobal, UNHCR, OutRight Action International, and the Refugee Sponsorship Training Program, we collaborated on a 3-month learning project. Informed by our schools, communities, regional cities and provincial perspectives, we shared our ideas, knowledge, and lived-experiences. The culmination of these efforts was a final, national dialogue, where we led our peers (fellow students) through a conversation of their concerns, and thoughts on impacts and potential actions surrounding the global refugee crisis. In an effort to capture and capitalize on our shared passion, we have collaboratively written this informative paper, *National Youth Dialogue: Student Partners in Action with Refugees Canada*. This paper is a blend of the thoughts and ideas of the many students across the country based on all of our discussions and research.

This project is very important to us because, as youth, we are the next generation and we want to have our voices heard and to make a change. We see misinformation and fear-mongering in media; but we also see compassion in our communities, and a drive to make a better, more tolerant society in our friends and families. As a very involved group of youth, we are extremely passionate about seeing this tolerant society grow beyond what's just in front of us. Throughout our research, we have discovered four important topics that will frame our conversations and push for a change in society: **Creating a common language; confronting myths and misconceptions; understanding the refugee experience; and, identifying how to move forward.** As Canadian youth, we strongly believe that having common understandings, knowing about myths and undertones, knowing their personal motivations and Canada's role all have a great impact in helping refugees. We believe that Canada does not do its fair share in helping refugees. We want to see a change!



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## National Youth Dialogue

# CREATING COMMON LANGUAGE

The first step in remoulding and maximizing effective communication is creating a common understanding of what words like refugee, migrant, and asylum seeker mean. Language plays a crucial role in shaping culture. The words we choose when we talk to and about people show how they are valued, what is expected of them, and where they stand in society. Therefore, it is crucial to come to a common understanding of what these words mean. Although these words are used frequently by the media and in casual conversation, they are often used incorrectly. Often times, people confuse the many terms that are used for different types of situations, for example, using the terms “illegal immigrant” and “asylum seeker,” or “refugee” and “migrant” interchangeably. Because of the confusion around these words, and the cultural connotations that are heavily associated with them in the current social and political climate, Canadians generally have very different ideas about what they

each mean and who they represent. Canadians who have not had the opportunity to build a common understanding within the language believe that an immigrant is the same as a refugee, or claim that they entered illegally instead of irregularly. All of these different terms greatly impact the ways in which our society constructs the dialogue of the place and openness to new arrivals. It impacts how we view the people around us. Even more importantly,

*“Many people think that refugees are the same as migrants, and don't realize that they are fleeing from their home because of extreme danger and violence, rather than out of choice.”*

*Jamie, Nelson*



it leads to a sense of 'us' and 'them,' and the concerning belief that some 'belong' more to this land and our communities than others.

When someone crosses a border irregularly (without complete governmental permission), many people erroneously call them "illegal." The particular impact of this construction as breaking-the-law causes many assumptions and hardships for this group of asylum seekers. If we say that they have crossed the border illegally, people may view them as criminals as soon as they arrive. The accurate term, of course, is that they have crossed irregularly.

Refugees and asylum seekers often leave their homes with very few belongings, including legal documents like passports and visas. This lack of official documentation may motivate them to enter other countries through places without officials at the border, i.e., irregularly. They may begin as a displaced person – someone fleeing war, for example – but still technically within their own country's borders. However, once they've crossed an international border, they may claim asylum, and subsequently, refugee status. It is important to create informed use of words like 'illegal' and 'irregular' because it helps us to understand why asylum seekers are not consistently crossing at official borders.

Similarly, the term migrant is sometimes applied to refugees. A migrant is a person who leaves their country voluntarily and can return any time, which is not the case for refugees who are forcibly displaced and cannot return home safely.<sup>1</sup> Refugees are owed specific protections under international law. Misusing the designations 'refugee' and 'migrant' distracts from these specific legal protections refugees need. One prime example of the confusion between different terms is the use of 'refugee' and 'asylum seeker.' A refugee is someone who is fleeing their country due to something or someone threatening their safety that has been approved for refugee status.

An asylum seeker is someone escaping possible persecution or danger. But, more specifically, they are people who have sought international protection and whose claim for refugee status has not yet been determined. The main difference between refugees and asylum seekers is that refugees have gone through the paperwork process and were granted reason to come to and stay in a country under refugee status, while an asylum seeker has to go through that process while already in the new country.

Negative stereotypes and connotations around refugees in our current culture put refugees in a difficult position. With all this confusion around groupings, designations, reasons for fleeing or movement, new arrivals to Canada are often mis-labelled, misunderstood, and experience exclusion/ encounter stereotypes. As Jamie, a student from Nelson, British Columbia said, "Many people think that refugees are the same as migrants, and

don't realize that they [refugees] are fleeing from their home because of extreme danger and violence, rather than out of choice."

*"A refugee is a victim. A refugee is someone that is in desperate need of a new place to call home. Many refugees leave due to the hope for a better and safer future for themselves or their families. Refugees are victims of conflict in their own countries."*

*Farrah, Ottawa*

People underestimate the power they have as everyday citizens to help the common misconceptions and confusion around language and associated "othering." But something as simple as using words in the correct way can help a great deal. When we are conscious of what we are saying, and how people can interpret our words, other people will

*"To me, a migrant is someone who is looking to find a better home; someone who is brave enough to step outside of their borders in search of something new. To some, migrants seem like enemies, some countries see them as job stealers. Though there may not be a clear reason for migration, it should not be seen as a negative move."*

*Olivia, Ottawa*

<sup>1</sup> "'Refugees' and 'Migrants' - Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)" 31 August 2018. <https://www.refworld.org/docid/56e81c0d4.html> Accessed 07 June 2019.

eventually pick up on the correct use of a word. We encourage our peers to challenge when they hear someone using the term “illegal” to describe a person or family. It is important to talk about big issues, such as refugee policies in class and with your friends, and at home with your family. The more people know about the topic and what's happening, the better! It helps to inform people of what's really happening instead of them getting their knowledge from biased sources. A great example of citizens changing Canadian society is from June 2018 when a citizen called out the Immigration Department on their choice of words on their website, “The immigration department changed a web page about asylum seekers to swap the word “illegal” for “irregular” as a debate was erupting between the federal government and Ontario on the issue.”<sup>2</sup> We need to call these situations out when we see them. We need to hold ourselves accountable to the language we use and allow people around us to use as well.

Recommended Resources:

- [Refugee terminology sheet](#)
- [UNHCR Refugees and Migrants](#)

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<sup>2</sup> <https://www.cbc.ca/news/politics/asylum-seekers-immigration-illegal-irregular-federal-government-1.4847571>



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## *National Youth Dialogue*

# CONFRONTING MYTHS AND MISCONCEPTIONS

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### ***Myth #1: All Refugees are Terrorists***

The notion that all refugees are terrorists is simply the ignorance and fear of the unknown. An alarming number of terrorist attacks have occurred in recent years and many people believe that refugees pose a threat. However, these fears have little basis in fact. For example, the Quebec City mosque shooting of 2017 was committed by a Canadian citizen. According to an article posted by CBC, most counter-terrorism experts would agree that the threat to Western democratic societies is not from the outside.<sup>3</sup> Very rarely are refugees or

*“It would be highly unlikely for anyone thinking of committing an act of terrorism to want to go through that screening process. Furthermore, refugees are not looking to hurt people - they are fleeing for their lives, and just want to find a safe place to live.”*

*Emma Leslie, Nelson, BC*

refugee claimants involved in terrorist incidents. One person does not represent an entire population of 25.4 million refugees in the world (not including internally displaced). Background checks are part of the complicated process of entering a host country. The chances of a refugee entering this country that is connected to a terrorist group is extremely unlikely.

As stated in the UNHCR report titled, “Irregular Arrivals at the Border:

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<sup>3</sup> <https://www.publicsafety.gc.ca/cnt/rsrscs/pblctns/pblc-rprt-trrrsm-thrt-cnd-2018/pblc-rprt-trrrsm-thrt-cnd-2018-en.pdf>



*"The idea that refugees are taking advantage of government services is nothing new, is a tactic that has been used over and over again by multiple governments across the world. The stigma around refugees is very high in certain countries that refugees aren't even allowed to stay in said countries on a temporary basis."*

*Jason, Ottawa, ON*

Background Information JAN - SEPT 2018," less than 1% of asylum seekers crossing the border irregularly had a serious criminal background.<sup>4</sup> As Emma, a student participant from Nelson, BC, said: "It would be highly unlikely for anyone thinking of committing an act of terrorism to want to go through that screening process. Furthermore, refugees are not looking to hurt people - they are fleeing for their lives, and just want to find a safe place to live."

### **Myth #2: Refugees Steal Jobs**

Another common myth regarding refugees are that they steal jobs. This is completely incorrect. Refugees come to a host country because they are fleeing their home in fear of persecution or for their lives, not with the idea to "steal jobs." Beyond moral and ethical obligations to assist refugees through our shared humanity, we need them economically. It is a basic truth that Canada does not have enough workers compared to the jobs available, there are 399,000 jobs that are vacant according to a recent Canadian Federation of Independent Businesses 'help wanted' survey.<sup>5</sup> Many provinces in Canada are also facing zero population growth.<sup>6</sup> Refugees coming into provinces with negative population growth can help stimulate the economy and, in turn, promote economic growth. This could also be done by helping newcomers access resources and support in opening small businesses. Refugees - like all citizens – have the ability to spur innovation and economic growth, be self-sustaining, and create new jobs as a result. An example of this is how many success stories came out of the Vietnamese refugees of the 70s and 80s. When refugees arrive, they do require the investment of time, resources, and monetary funds to get started. But once integrated successfully into their environment, refugees contribute to the economy in a positive way. By encouraging refugees to settle throughout the provinces, we can further strengthen growth: Not only benefiting Canada, but also saving the lives of refugees. Aside from the fact that refugees boost our economy, they also often fill low-paying, low-skilled jobs that few Canadians want to do. These jobs such as hard-labour, farm-hand, and factory-line work is often low wage, high-risk, non-unionized, precarious, and/or in undesirable working conditions.

*"Many people believe what they're told, even if it is untrue. Without knowing the truth and busting misconceptions, people will gain prejudice for or against certain things just because other sources state it as true. This is a big deal because those who believe the myths may monger fear and become biased against refugees and immigrants."*

*Ahlan Farhan, Edmonton*

### **Myth #3: Refugees are an Economic Burden**

The idea that refugees are taking advantage of government services is another myth. In 2015, The Globe and Mail published an article debunking the myth that refugees are an economic burden and shed a positive light on them.<sup>7</sup> Gillian Zubizarreta, who works at a refugee clinic in Halifax, shared, "From what we see, our clients are so entrepreneurial in spirit, and the moment they have work authorization they are out there doing whatever they can, even those who barely speak English are taking jobs that are well below their expertise."<sup>8</sup> Refugees are filled with motivation and hard work and have no intent to rely on social assistance. In an interview with CBC, Easa Al-Hariri, who is a refugee from Syria, shared his thoughts on his current situation: "I am very depressed, for me, it's not just a matter of finding a job or not, to make a living. It's a matter of success

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.unhcr.ca/wp-content/uploads/2018/12/IRREGULAR-ARRIVALS-AT-THE-BORDER-JAN-SEP-2018-with-IRB-stats.pdf>

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.cfib-fcei.ca/en/media/record-399000-job-vacancies-q4-2017>

<sup>6</sup> <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/91-215-x/2018001/sec1-eng.htm>

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.theglobeandmail.com/news/politics/canada-and-the-refugee-crisis-four-things-to-know-before-youvote/article26363975/>

<sup>8</sup> <https://globalnews.ca/news/2228972/reality-check-are-refugees-an-economic-burden/>

or failure. This is what I think about. Because already we receive social assistance, actually this is for me very embarrassing, I used to help people, not people help me."<sup>9</sup> Regarding refugees who are privately sponsored, an evaluation from Citizenship and Immigration Canada found that "privately sponsored refugees tend to become more self-sufficient sooner and are less likely to go on to social assistance."<sup>10</sup>

Canada does not do enough to educate the public on the importance of understanding the word refugee or what their intentions are. We need to address all these myths and misconceptions regarding refugees that mass media portrays as well as address the negligence of society in doing their "homework" before they speak. We need to tell stories of those who have left their homes and understand that they are not criminals; but are seeking a better life, just like you and I.

Recommended Resources:

- [Canada Refugee Resettlement Facts](#)
- [Irregular Crossings at The Border: Challenging Myths and Preconceptions](#)
- [The cost of healthcare for refugees and refugee claimants amounts to a fraction of that of other Canadians](#)

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<sup>9</sup> <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/nova-scotia/syrian-refugees-struggling-social-assistance-language-barrier-1.4368833>

<sup>10</sup> <https://globalnews.ca/news/2228972/reality-check-are-refugees-an-economic-burden/>





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## *National Youth Dialogue*

# UNDERSTANDING THE REFUGEE EXPERIENCE

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What is the motivation behind refugees leaving their homes?

When we think of refugees, we tend to think of them as a homogenous group, when really, they are individuals seeking aspirations, hopes and dreams for a better life. It is important that we address the myths, misconceptions, and negative propaganda around refugees that make them seem like an intimidating mass group of an unknown and unknowable 'other.' We need to understand who they are and understand the reasons they are leaving their countries. Of course, they are fleeing primarily for personal safety; however, refugees are people, with a shared humanity. They have the same hopes for a better life like everyone else. What we need to realize is there are personal sacrifices for refugees leaving their homes. Some individuals have to leave part of their families and familiar culture. For most, it is not predictable of knowing the outcome of leaving their homes, and if they can safely make it to their destinations. In addition, it is not always logistically possible for refugees to leave their countries.

Some refugees relay the realities of fleeing their country. They speak of having minimal time to gather belongings, or to seek the proper paperwork to leave the country. Passports for most cases are almost

impossible or accessible to get, nor in the means of being affordable. The State Department in the United States of America suggests that only thirty-four percent of Americans and sixty percent of Canadians hold a valid passport.<sup>11</sup> This is due not only to the lack of interests in travelling but the affordability of travel costs and the fees associated with applying for these documents. If a huge percentage of the world's population is stable, democratic countries do not hold valid passports, why do we have such a strong expectation for refugees to have them? In other cases, passports or proper documentation can be destroyed due to corruption, leaving refugees with no choice but to leave without the required paperwork. If the cards were turned, and Canadians found themselves in a similar situation, it would be near impossible for everyone to have proper documentation in a timely manner. The average waiting time in Canada can be up to a month or more. Now imagine waiting for months while in a state-of-emergency, where your family is facing immediate stress of food shortages, violence, and/or health crises. Can you picture yourself waiting that long? In most cases, refugees leave with nothing but the clothes on their back. The other harsh reality of these occurrences is a large percentage of families are separated during this process. Separation is common in moments of having to flee when looking for means of transportation, or upon arrival in another country.

*"Many people think of refugees as one solid mass of strangers from a strange land, coming into their cities to take over and destroy their way of life. But by showing people these pictures, I think many could be persuaded otherwise. These are human beings, individuals with thoughts and feelings and hopes and dreams and goals."*

*Emma Leslie, Castlegar, BC*

### Challenges Faced by Refugees During Movement

Fleeing towards Europe, some refugees do not have any way to access safe travel. We are familiar with the news coverage of refugees that need to make perilous journeys, by foot and boat, and, unfortunately, do not make it due to drowning. While in Canada, it is common to have refugees arriving at borders either by plane, bus, car, or even walking. The extreme measures and risks that refugees are willing to take with themselves and their families are a sign of the desperate and serious situations they need to leave.

The key way to combat ignorance is through education. If the government makes funding education and awareness programs within schools across Canada a priority, youth will be more knowledgeable, and inherently be more equipped with the social tools to assist within their community, and understand the greater context of what is going on, and the greatest needs to be addressed. Although we all have access to information to educate youth about refugees through internet resources and media, by having this officially implemented into school curriculum, this knowledge and awareness will reach all students across Canada to be fully aware of this complex situation into greater depth.

In addition to elementary and secondary education, we need to develop awareness within post-secondary education to prevent these myths from progressing or continuing any further across campuses. Groups within post-secondary schools (university, colleges, and technical institutes) can educate other students with this knowledge to develop productive and efficient ways of creating awareness. It may require for post-secondary students to approach the dean for grant money to develop these awareness "projects," which could in-turn be funded by the government.

Adults also need to be included in this; not everyone is educated on the realities and 'truth' of this global situation. By funding special projects that encourage the interaction of Canadian adults and refugees or asylum

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<sup>11</sup> [https://travel.state.gov/content/travel/en/passports.html/ppi/stats/stats\\_890.html](https://travel.state.gov/content/travel/en/passports.html/ppi/stats/stats_890.html); <https://www.newswire.ca/news-releases/government-of-canada-doubles-the-number-of-locations-where-canadians-can-get-their-passport-702928631.html>



seekers can help mingle the two groups and give a better understanding of who/ what/ why of refugees living in our communities. These programs could be administered at the local YMCAs, churches, NGO offices, legions, and other community centres so that locals who go there regularly can now take part in meeting refugees and understand where they are coming from and who they are. This is important because not everyone has a positive attitude towards refugees. It is the responsibility of governments, education sectors, and citizens to all work together to change the negative cultural myths, stereotypes, and conversations we have allowed to spread throughout our society.

Recommended Resources:

- [Fundraise With UNHCR Canada](#)
- [Canada Refugee Resettlement Facts](#)

*"I am no longer surprised from what I hear. I am becoming more and more aware of the refugee crisis. What I am surprised about is the lack of help and compassion the rest of the world provides. And how can someone stand by and watch these stories. We need more people to create change and to help families start better lives. We can't change the past but we can change the future."*

*Kirsten Jansen, Nelson, BC*



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### *National Youth Dialogue*

# IDENTIFYING HOW TO MOVE FORWARD: CANADA'S ROLE

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#### Local

When refugees arrive in Canada, providing them with a 'home' means more than just providing them with a physical space to live. Home is a place of happiness and comfort and creating a permanent sense of safety and belonging. People across Canada can help rebuild a home for refugees by welcoming them and promoting diversity rather than assimilation. It is key to not just let refugees into our country but to make sure they are properly integrated within communities so that their sense of home can be rebuilt. It is not just about tolerating them, but about making space and accommodations in our lives, routines, intentions, and thought processes that actively help refugees build this sense of home through three levels of change: community-level, provincial-level, and national-level.

#### Community

On a community level, to create meaningful change we must harness the ability of all the people in our communities, both youth and adults. It is important to invest in education, social services, and have many non-governmental organizations, churches, and community groups. We can also harness the interest, engagement, and desire for change within youth by creating Youth Advisory Councils (YAC) and through social media. YACs



*“Home is not only having a roof over your head, but home is also having a sense of community around you, friends and family near you, a sense of comfort and happiness. Refugees face so much hardship the least we can do is help them integrate into their new homes and welcome them with love and support.”,  
Kristin Orlando, Montreal, QC*

allow youth to bring different perspectives and backgrounds together to create effective plans to deal with identified issues. YACs are perfectly situated to forward ideas to their town councils to take steps in the right direction at a local level.

Another way to reach teens and young adults is through social media. Using applications like Instagram, Facebook, Snapchat, and Twitter allow youth to become interested and involved with refugee and resettlement issues. Displaying ads and using popular hashtags can increase our social media platform, not only connecting Canadians with each other, but with people from around the globe.

In addition, we feel that more things could be done to help support the integration of refugees at a grass-roots level. People within communities and schools can start a donation box for clothes and food and other basic needs year-round for refugees. This would help refugees who struggle with money to find a footing and make it easier for them to work on their career or find new jobs to support themselves. Even organizing social events such as open mic nights can aid in the development of new discussions centred around refugees within their own community.

#### Provincial

Although as individuals we can make conscious choices to play a role in welcoming refugees to our communities, we, the youth of Canada participating in this project, also feel it is important to work with governments – at all levels – to champion and support citizenship and resilience in our communities. Curriculum and education priorities are set at the provincial level by the respective Ministries of Education. Embedding tools, resources, and knowledge pertaining to the global refugee crisis would help facilitate discussions between youth and within schools nationwide. Professional development of teachers could then focus on how to navigate and integrate these discussions into everyday educational experiences and opportunities, to make this not just a movement, but the norm.

As well, implementing different arts programmes within schools and communities such as dance, arts & crafts, and theatre can help connect refugees with community members, while also giving them creative outlets to deal with traumatic experiences. Art can be used as a powerful advocacy tool to communicate stories and raise awareness. Additionally, art created by refugees could be sold, with the money raised put towards organizations that helping additional refugees.

#### National

Many organizations show exemplary results and drive towards helping refugees on a nationwide scale. Examples of these organizations would be the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, who work with the Canadian government and private sponsorship groups to help facilitate resettlement opportunities within Canada. We feel that more organizations like the UNHCR should receive funding.

Some refugees who come to Canada had high paying jobs in their country of origin, such as doctors, engineers, and computer scientists. However, in Canada, they work jobs far below their pay scale and certification. Their previous education is not often not recognized by the Canadian government, universities, and accreditation bodies. This poses a severe problem because it forces refugees to get an education that they already have acquired, while also making them pay huge sums of money for skills they already possess. Implementing a way to streamline and fast-track recognition of pre-existing certifications will prevent refugees

from having to undergo this time consuming and costly process entirely. If they do need some additional courses or skills, we are advocating for a shorter process that still lets them receive education here, but for less time and cost compared to rectifying entirely.

### Welcoming and Integrating Refugees

Technology plays a major role in Canada; but for some refugees, technology is a new way of life. Therefore, it is integral that support groups of host families teach and establish how to use technology so they may stay interconnected to their families and friends. "For a refugee, having access to connectivity often means being able to re-establish a lifeline with family and friends, and being able to obtain life-saving information and services."<sup>12</sup>

Incorporating mandatory programmes or clubs within schools will help integrate refugees within their community. Programmes that help refugees make new friends will also allow them to learn more about their community but new languages as well. Helping refugees have a stronger sense of place and belonging will lead them to be successfully integrated into their new surroundings.

We believe that Canada is not taking in as many refugees as it could. Canada is not even in the top five hosting countries in the world. To give more perspective, 84% of refugees who are fleeing their countries origins are being taken in by developing countries.<sup>13</sup> Canada, the second-largest country in the world and with many resources and wealth, should be closer to the top five hosting countries. These statistics need to change.

*"Many refugees who come to Canada had high educations and great jobs like doctors, engineers, computer scientists and when they come to Canada they get jobs like taxi drivers and janitors. Not like they are bad jobs but they aren't the jobs they studied for and their education levels were not acknowledged by the Canadian government and universities. When refugees try to upgrade their degrees to the Canadian standards of education, it takes the same amount of time for them to restudy their degree. It also costs the refugees and immigrant a lot of money, which most cannot afford. We should be more aware of this and discuss ways to help this problem."*

*Student, Queen Elizabeth High School, AB*

#### Recommended Resources:

- [Irregular Crossings at The Border: Challenging Myths and Preconceptions](#)
- [Canadian welcome: Warm greetings for refugees at airports](#)
- [Government of Canada announces \\$50 million in funding for temporary housing for asylum claimants](#)

<sup>12</sup> <https://www.unhcr.org/innovation/work-mobile-network-operators-lessons-tanzania/>

<sup>13</sup> <https://www.unhcr.org/globaltrends2016/>



# CONCLUSION

Throughout this project, we learned from other academics, experts, agencies, other students, and refugees themselves about how words matter and can be sources of both good and harm. What a person is called creates ideas about what we expect of them, from them, and for them. It sets limits on what we believe as acceptable behaviour and even their freedom and individual identity. By educating our peers and fellow students about words and their true meanings, we were able to see and feel these changes reflected in assumptions and values. The impact of a new language is a way of interacting that goes deeper into the core of peoples lived-experiences. We think that by emphasizing the use of correct language will have a positive effect – it will replace the sometimes-dehumanizing language we hear on tv and on social media, with language that communicates inclusion, partnership, and equality. It will impact not only society but also how refugees feel about themselves and how they feel a part of daily life in Canada. Words can make our world; we can change our culture by changing our language.

Through addressing myths and misconceptions around refugees and the refugee crisis, we were impacted and moved by many personal stories. The purpose of relocating in a new country varies from individual-to-individual, family-to-family, and place-to-place. Whether temporary or permanent, the reasons one is likely to choose to leave their homeland is because they are facing real political, economic, religious or ethnic persecution or that they are seeking asylum because the situation in their country is getting worse, whether for justice, economy, education or just a better lifestyle in general. We, the youth of Canada, feel that there is tremendous importance in discussing and demystifying the myths and misconceptions that we hold about refugees and the refugee crisis. We feel that there is incredible value in hearing first-account stories and challenges faced by refugees as a tool to understand. We believe that schools and education systems need to shift the way they discuss these topics, the age at which they introduce them, and the humanity that they use to bring these stories and situations to life for many of us who have not been in the situation of being a refugee.

Beyond education, we believe that there is still much to be done on local, provincial, and national levels. Through our conversations and collaborations, we became intensely aware of the need for greater advocacy and action. We need local citizens to call their government representatives and hold them accountable for change in language, education, and policy shifts. We need to work together to form and support organizations that provide better supports for displaced persons around the globe. These need to not be short-term or temporary, but long-term strategies and changes that are sustainable and create greater opportunities for people to come to our country. Assistance to refugees with resettlement is a great investment, not only in people but in Canada.

In our current world, with the enormous numbers of displaced peoples, alongside increasingly negative media and politics, we feel there has never been a more important time for this conversation. There is still so much to be done, but we feel better equipped to make changes in our communities and to lead others to make changes in theirs. We want to thank the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), The Centre for Global Education, and TakingITGlobal for their partnership on this project, and continued support of and belief in the ability of Canadian youth to change the world.

## THANK YOU TO OUR PROJECT PARTNERS

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