



UNHCR
The UN Refugee Agency



ARE REFUGEES GOOD FOR CANADA?

A LOOK AT CANADIAN REFUGEE INTEGRATION



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Cover page

Top photo: Somali refugee Iqra Ali Gaal attends ESL classes as part of the Language Instruction for Newcomers to Canada program (LINC) at College Boreal in Hamilton, Ontario. © UNHCR/Chris Young

Bottom photo: Kevork Eleyjian, left, waits for Vigneswaran Thangavelu, right, to set up the glue machine in the pressing department at the Seatply factory in Saint-Laurent, Quebec. Eleyjian is one of the 15 Syrian refugees who work at Seatply, which manufactures curved plywood seats. © UNHCR/Giovanni Capriotti

Acknowledgements

UNHCR is grateful for the assistance of Immigration Refugees and Citizenship Canada's Research and Evaluation Branch and to Statistics Canada for providing the source data on which much of this study is based.

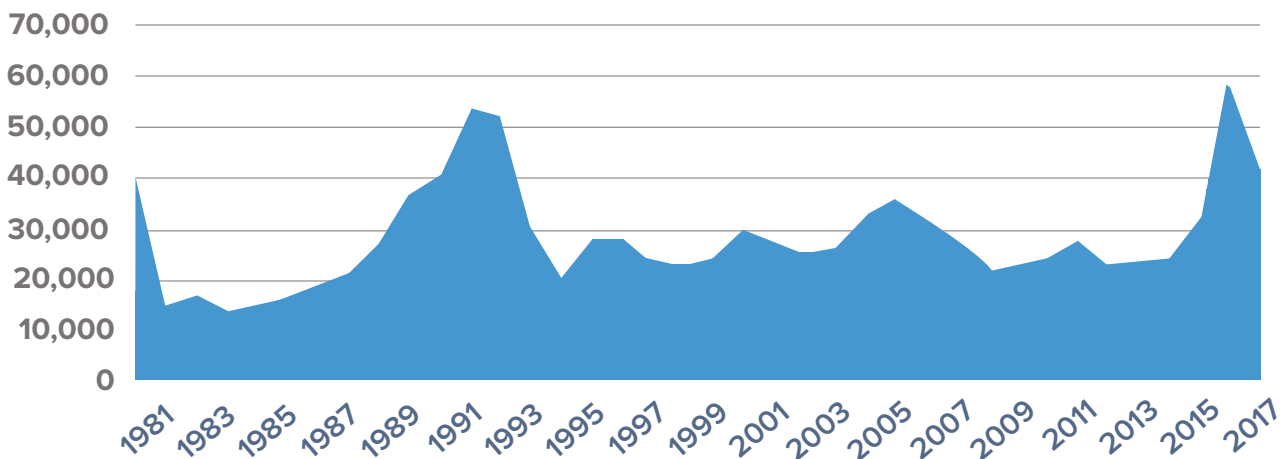
The following study surveys the most recent data and research available to provide a glimpse into the lives and achievements of the one million refugees who arrived in Canada since 1980.¹ Much of the information is based on an analysis of the 2016 Census. It provides facts in an accessible format concerning the Canadian refugee integration experience. It should serve as a useful source for those interested in explaining to various audiences how refugees integrate and contribute to Canadian society and the economy. Most refugees came to Canada with few, if any, financial resources, and often had to learn a new language and adapt to a new culture. Despite these challenges, the results show that refugees do not simply benefit from the safety Canada gives them. In fact, they embrace the opportunity that Canada provides to build a better life and become important contributors to the country's economy and cultural diversity.

1 This study uses the term refugee to describe persons: 1) who were admitted to Canada as permanent residents (landed immigrants) through one of Canada's refugee resettlement programs; or 2) were recognized as refugees in Canada by the Immigration and Refugee Board, and were subsequently granted permanent resident status in Canada.

Canada has a strong tradition of welcoming refugees

Canada has welcomed 1,088,015 refugees since 1980.² This number includes those who were recognized as refugees in Canada or who were resettled from overseas. There are two ways refugees come to Canada. First, they may claim asylum at a border or from inside Canada and then determined as refugees by the authorities. Second, they may be selected overseas for one of Canada’s resettlement programs: the **Government-Assisted Refugees program**, the **Private Sponsorship of Refugees program**, or the **Blended Visa Office-Referred program**.³

REFUGEE ARRIVALS IN CANADA, 1980–2017



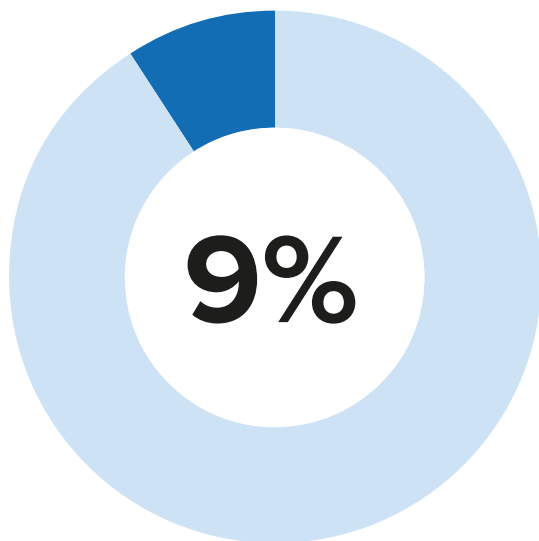
² Adapted from Statistics Canada, 2018 IRCC Permanent Residents Database in Cédric de Chardon, “An Overview of Economic Outcomes and Contributions to Refugees: Towards an Impact Story,” Canadian Council for Refugees Fall Consultation, 27 November 2018, slide 3. This does not constitute an endorsement by Statistics Canada of this product.

³ For more details on each program, see: Government-Assisted Refugees program, <https://www.canada.ca/en/immigration-refugees-citizenship/services/refugees/help-outside-canada/government-assisted-refugee-program.html>; Private Sponsorship of Refugees program, <http://www.rstp.ca/en/refugee-sponsorship/the-private-sponsorship-of-refugees-program/>; Blended Visa Office-Referred program, <http://www.rstp.ca/en/bvor/how-can-i-sponsor-a-refugee-to-canada/>.

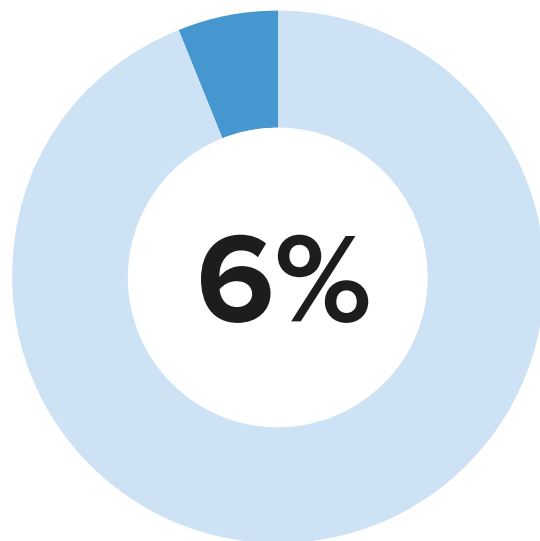
Unemployment rate

Refugees have almost the same unemployment rate as Canadians.

Refugees contribute to the Canadian economy and are not a burden on Canadian taxpayers as few are unemployed. The unemployment rate for refugees aged 25 to 54 is 9%, close to that of Canadian-born citizens (6%).⁴ The situation for refugees improves as they spend more time in Canada. Refugees who arrived in Canada between 1981 and 1990 have an unemployment rate of 6%, identical to those born in Canada.⁵



Refugees



Canadian-born

⁴ Adapted from Statistics Canada, 2016 Census, “Unemployment Rate, All Landing Periods, Aged 25-54,” IRCC Custom Data Table. This does not constitute an endorsement by Statistics Canada of this product.

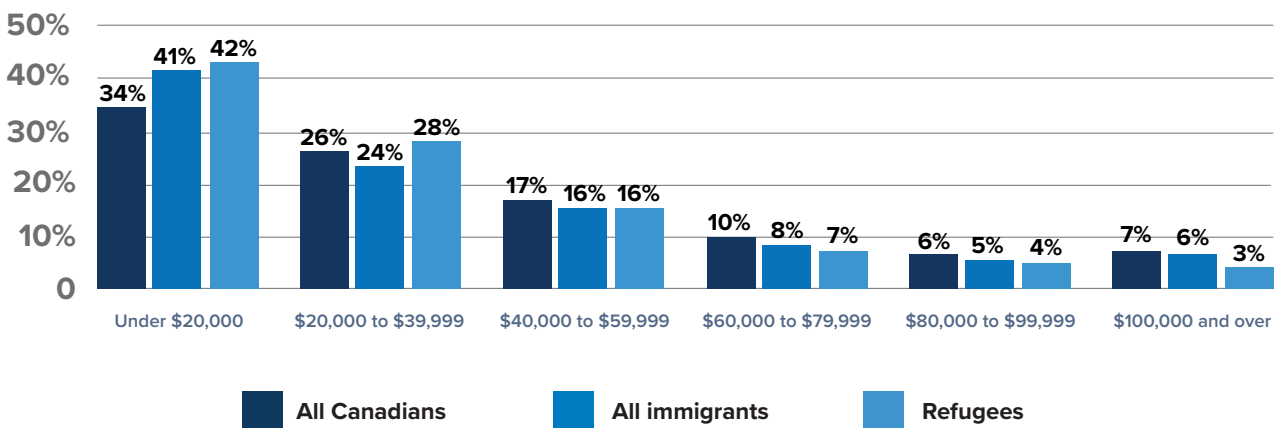
⁵ Adapted from Statistics Canada, 2016 Census, “Unemployment Rate for Refugees, 25-54,” IRCC Custom Data Table. This does not constitute an endorsement by Statistics Canada of this product.

Income

Refugees prosper and join Canada’s middle-class within five years of their arrival. One in four earned between \$40,000 and \$79,999 annually, similar to statistics for Canadians.

Refugees who arrived as adults earn on average \$20,000 in employment income in their first year.⁶ While this is less than half the Canadian average, their annual earnings climb steadily. Data from the 2014 tax year show that a significant proportion of refugees who have been in Canada for at least five years earn middle-class incomes. Nearly one in four refugees (23%) earned between \$40,000 and \$79,999 annually, similar to the percentage of Canadians (27%) and total immigrants (24%) earning a middle-class income.⁷

DISTRIBUTION OF TOTAL INCOME IN TAX YEAR 2014 IMMIGRANTS VS. ALL CANADIANS, 5+ YEARS SINCE LANDING



6 Adapted from Statistics Canada, 2015 Longitudinal Immigration Database (IMDB), “Average Employment Earnings by Immigration Category and Years since Landing Canada (2015),” IRCC Custom Data Table. This does not constitute an endorsement by Statistics Canada of this product.

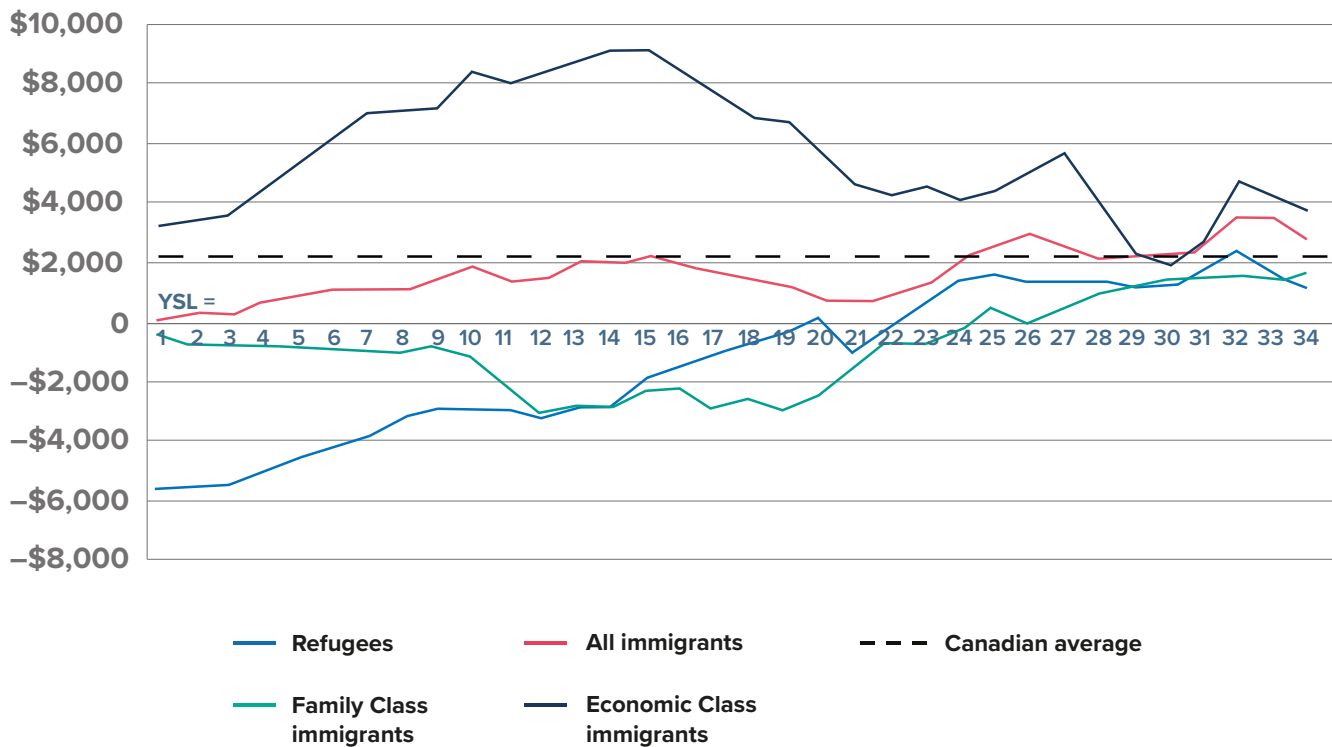
7 Adapted from Statistics Canada, 2014 Longitudinal Immigration Database (IMDB) and 2014 Canadian Income Survey. Quoted in H. Zhang, “2014 Longitudinal Immigration Database (IMDB): Current Measures of Immigrant Economic Outcomes and Strategic Enhancement,” IRCC, Research and Evaluation Branch, 2017. This does not constitute an endorsement by Statistics Canada of this product.

Paying taxes

Canada’s investment in refugees pays off. After 20 years in Canada, refugees contribute more to Canada in income tax – not counting all of the other taxes they pay – than they receive in public benefits and services.

Over time, refugees pay more in income tax on average than they receive in public benefits and services. However, this does not represent all taxes paid (like sales taxes) since it only includes income tax. Refugees increasingly narrow the gap between income tax paid and public benefits and services received the longer they live in Canada.⁸

AVERAGE INCOME TAX PAID NET OF TRANSFERS RECEIVED (\$2014) BY IMMIGRATION CATEGORY AND YEAR SINCE LANDING (YSL), 2014 TAX YEAR



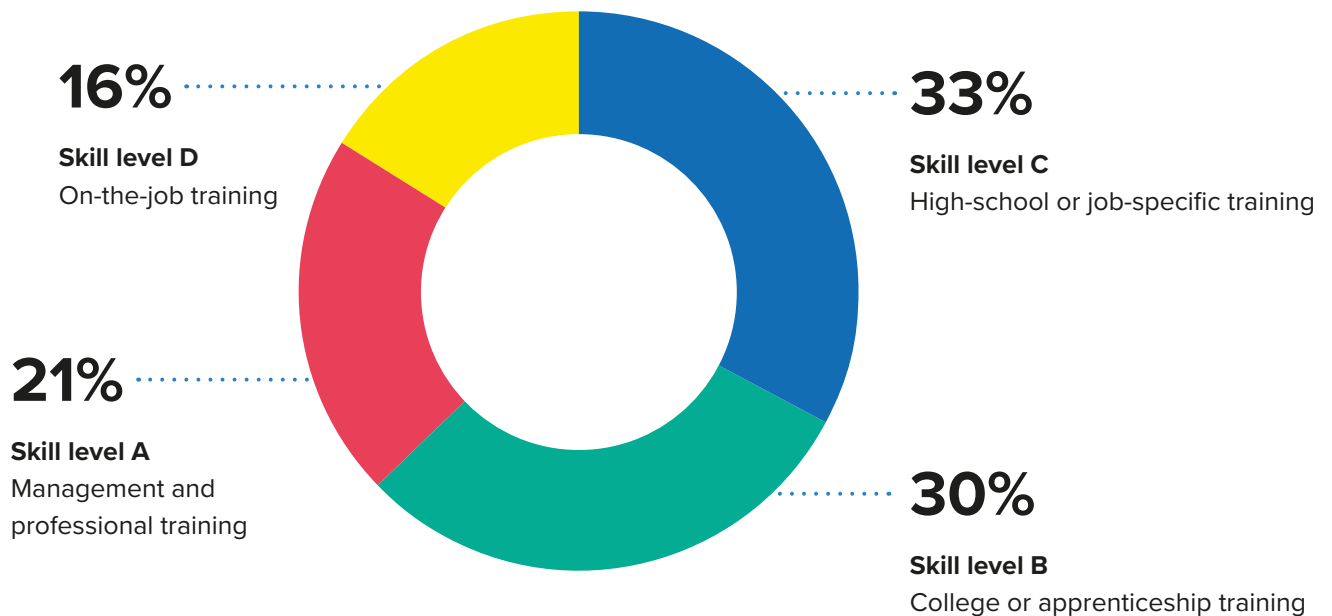
⁸ Adapted from Statistics Canada, 2014 Longitudinal Immigration Database (IMDB) and Statistics Canada, 2014 T1 Family File. Quoted in “Socio-Economic Outcomes of Immigrants and Refugees,” IRCC, DG Forum, 28 March 2017, slide 14. This does not constitute an endorsement by Statistics Canada of this product.

Skill levels

Refugees work in skilled professions, including management and trades.

Half of refugees (51%) working are employed in high-skilled jobs. Which includes doctors, dentists, architects, service managers and software engineers.⁹ In 2016, 33% of refugees worked in jobs that required high school and/or job-specific training (e.g. truck drivers, food and beverage servers, industrial butchers).¹⁰ About one fifth of refugees were employed in professional jobs that required a university degree (e.g. doctors, dentists, architects).¹¹

SKILL LEVEL BREAKDOWN OF REFUGEES AGED BETWEEN 25 AND 54 (2016)



⁹ Adapted from Statistics Canada, 2016 Census in Cédric de Chardon, “An Overview of Economic Outcomes and Contributions to Refugees: Towards an Impact Story,” Canadian Council for Refugees Fall Consultation, 27 November 2018, slide 7. This does not constitute an endorsement by Statistics Canada of this product.

¹⁰ Ibid.

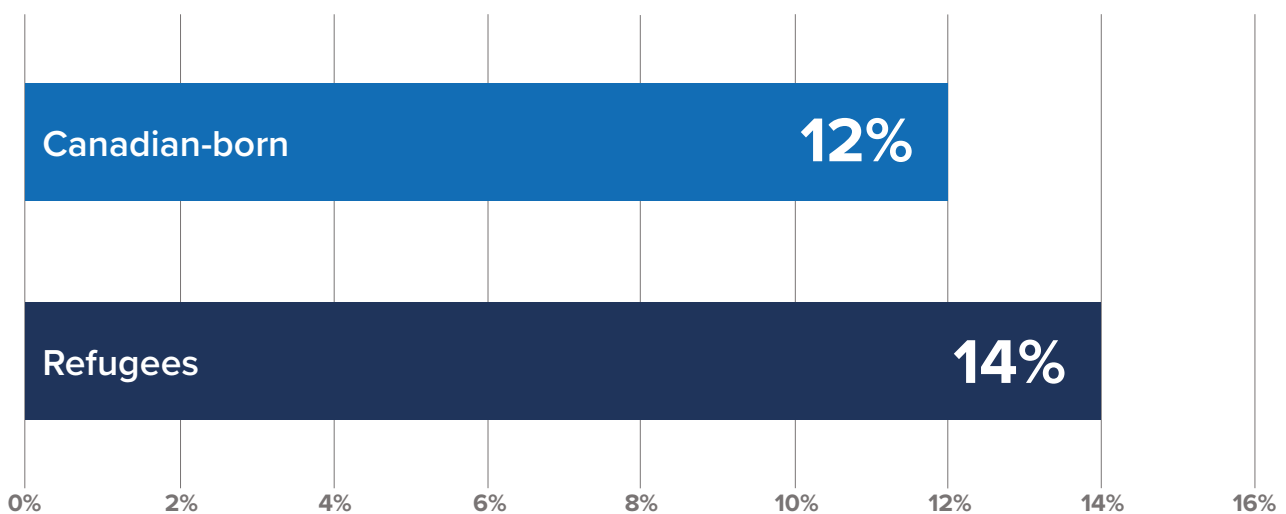
¹¹ Ibid.

Entrepreneurship

**Refugees create jobs for both themselves and other Canadians.
14.4% are self-employed or business owners.**

Including those who are self-employed and those who own companies, 14.4% of refugees who have been in Canada between 10 and 30 years are entrepreneurs compared to 12.3% of people born in Canada.¹² Refugees use their diverse skillsets and talents to start businesses and create jobs for themselves and other Canadians.

RATES OF ENTREPRENEURSHIP



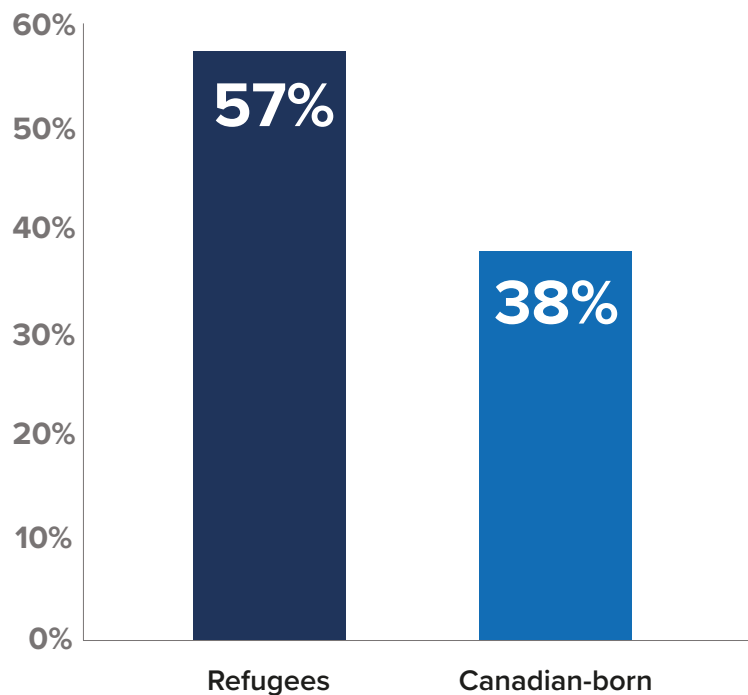
¹² Yuri Ostrovsky and Garnett Picot, “Research Blog: Immigrant entrepreneurs in Canada,” Statistics Canada, 28 August 2018, accessed 14 February 2019, <https://www.statcan.gc.ca/eng/blog/cs/immigrant-entrepreneurs>.

Aging population

Canada has an aging population and needs more young people. Refugees often come to Canada early in their lives, with many years to contribute.

Canada has an aging population, with the average age increasing from 37.7 in 2001 to 41.0 in 2016.¹³ Refugees are on average 11.1 years younger than those born in Canada, which means they are more likely to be working-age. The average age of a refugee in Canada in 2016 was 28.9 years old.¹⁴

PERCENTAGE OF PEOPLE AGED 25 TO 54 YEARS OLD: REFUGEES VS. CANADIAN-BORN CITIZENS¹⁵



¹³ Adapted from Statistics Canada, 2016 Census, “Age and Sex Highlight Tables,” <https://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2016/dp-pd/hltfst/as/Table.cfm?T=31>. This does not constitute an endorsement by Statistics Canada of this product.

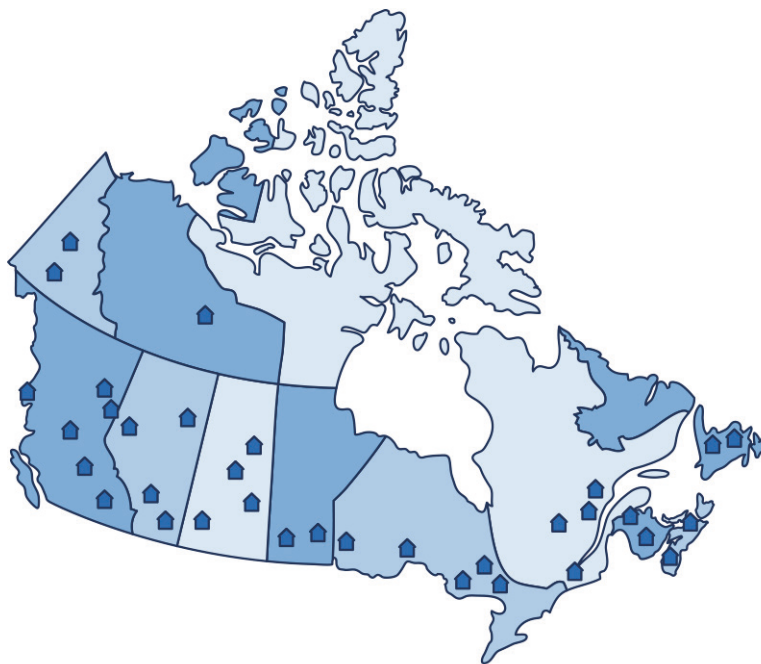
¹⁴ Adapted from Statistics Canada, 2016 Census, “Average and Median Age of Canadian-born and Refugees (including Refugee Sub-Categories), 2011 to 2016,” IRCC Custom Data Table. This does not constitute an endorsement by Statistics Canada of this product.

¹⁵ Adapted from Statistics Canada, 2016 Census, “Age Breakdown for Non-Immigrants, All Immigrants, and Refugees, 2016.” This does not constitute an endorsement by Statistics Canada of this product.

Settling across Canada

Many refugees choose to settle in smaller Canadian cities and towns, not just in major urban areas.

Refugees have resettled in every part of Canada – as far north as Whitehorse, Yukon; as far east as St. John’s, Newfoundland; and as far west as Prince Rupert, British Columbia. Recent census data show that newcomers, led by refugees, are more likely to move to other parts of the country. Of refugees who arrived between 2011 and 2016, 48% live in smaller cities and towns,¹⁶ compared to 44% of all immigrants.¹⁷



16 Adapted from Statistics Canada, 2011 and 2016 Census, “Refugees Living in MTV (between 2011 and 2016 Census),” IRCC Custom Data Table. This does not constitute an endorsement by Statistics Canada of this product.

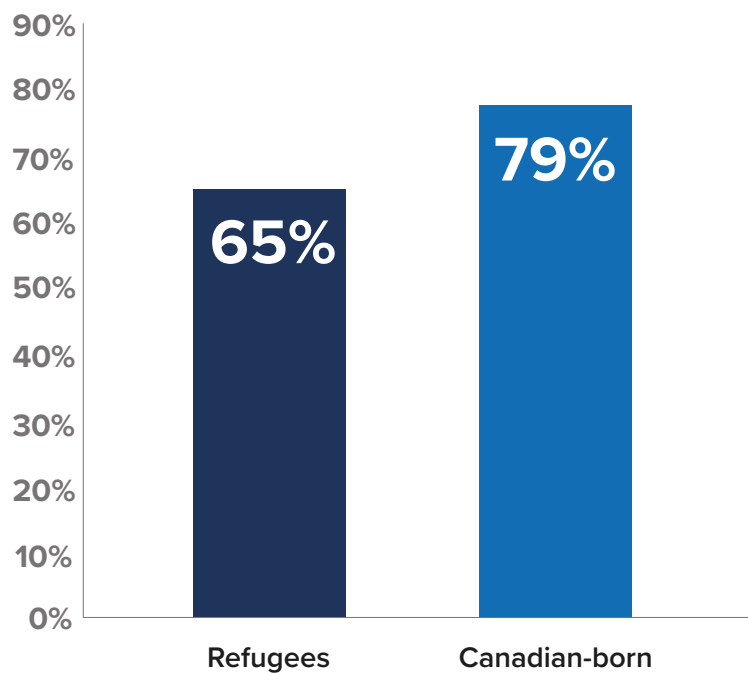
17 Adapted from Statistics Canada, 2016 Census, “Immigration and Ethnocultural Diversity: Key Results from the 2016 Census.” This does not constitute an endorsement by Statistics Canada of this product.

Home ownership

Two out of three refugees in Canada become home owners after ten years.

Home ownership is an indicator of a household’s financial health, as well as a family’s commitment to a community. Despite their initial lack of financial resources, 65 per cent of refugee families who have been in Canada for 10 years or more live in homes they own, compared with 79 per cent of Canadian-born citizens.¹⁸ About one-third of refugee families managed to buy their own homes within their first five years in the country.¹⁹

HOME OWNERSHIP: REFUGEES (10 YEARS AFTER ARRIVAL IN CANADA) VS. CANADIAN-BORN CITIZENS



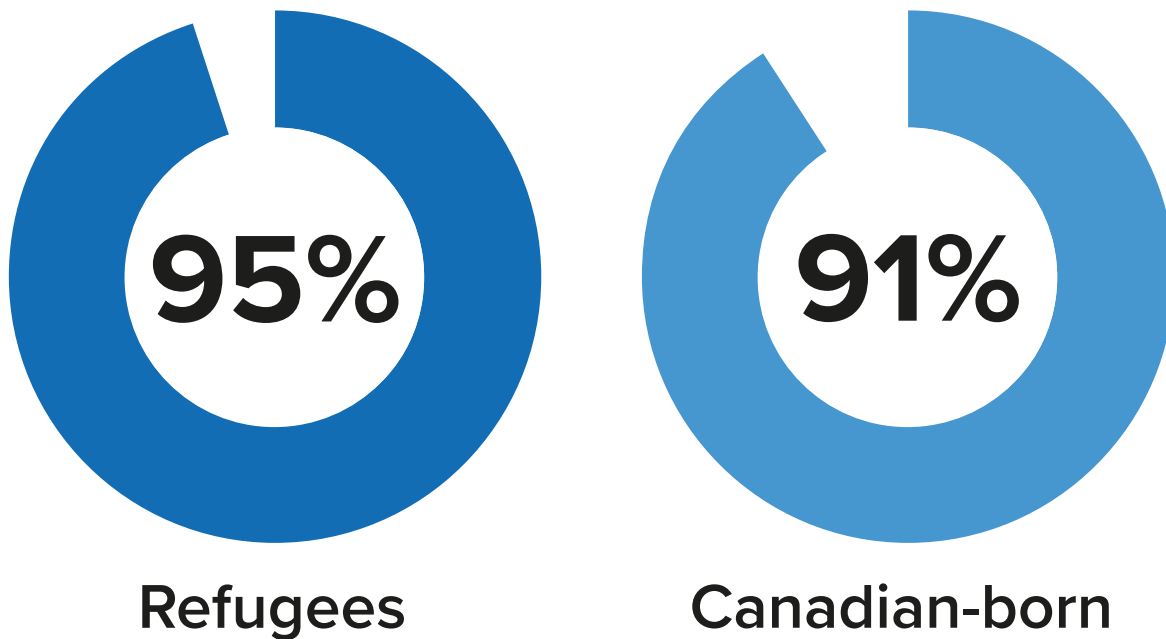
¹⁸ Adapted from Statistics Canada, 2013 General Social Survey in Carla Painter, “Sense of Belonging of Immigrants: Results from the General Social Survey,” Citizenship and Immigration Canada, 2015 CARFMS Conference, slide 18. This does not constitute an endorsement by Statistics Canada of this product.

¹⁹ Ibid.

Sense of belonging

Refugees report a strong sense of belonging to Canada.

Refugees report a higher sense of belonging to Canada than people born in Canada, with 95% of refugees feeling a “strong” sense of belonging to Canada compared to 91% for the Canadian-born.²⁰ Refugees’ strong sense of belonging to Canada demonstrates their commitment to integrate into Canadian society and to call this country home.



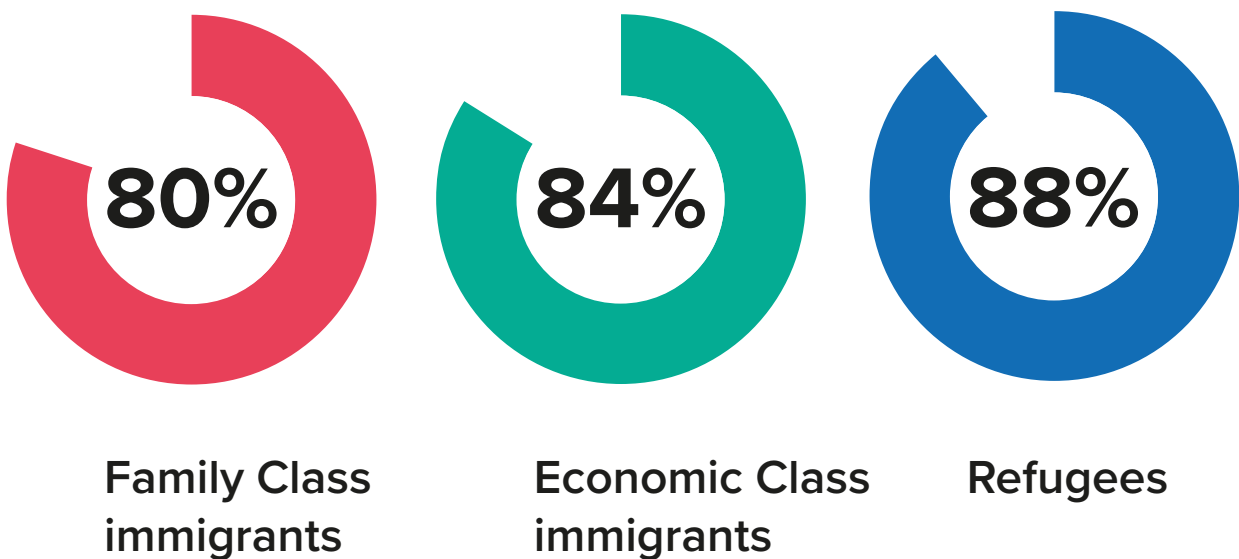
²⁰ Adapted from Statistics Canada, 2013 General Social Survey in Cédric de Chardon, “An Overview of Economic Outcomes and Contributions of Refugees: Towards an Impact Story,” Canadian Council for Refugees Fall Consultation, 27 November 2018, slide 11. This does not constitute an endorsement by Statistics Canada of this product.

Citizenship

Refugees have the highest citizenship uptake rate of all immigration categories.

Citizenship rates for refugees are higher than for other immigration classes.²¹ To become Canadian citizens, refugees must live in Canada for at least three years, pay a fee, and pass a test on their knowledge of Canadian history, geography, economy, government, laws and symbols. 89% of refugees become citizens compared to 84% of Economic Class immigrants and 80% of Family Class immigrants.²²

CITIZENSHIP UPTAKE RATE OF REFUGEES VS. OTHER IMMIGRANT CLASSES



²¹ Adapted from Statistics Canada, 2016 Census in Cédric de Chardon, “An Overview of Economic Outcomes and Contributions of Refugees: Towards an Impact Story,” Canadian Council for Refugees Fall Consultation, 27 November 2018, slide 11. This does not constitute an endorsement by Statistics Canada of this product.

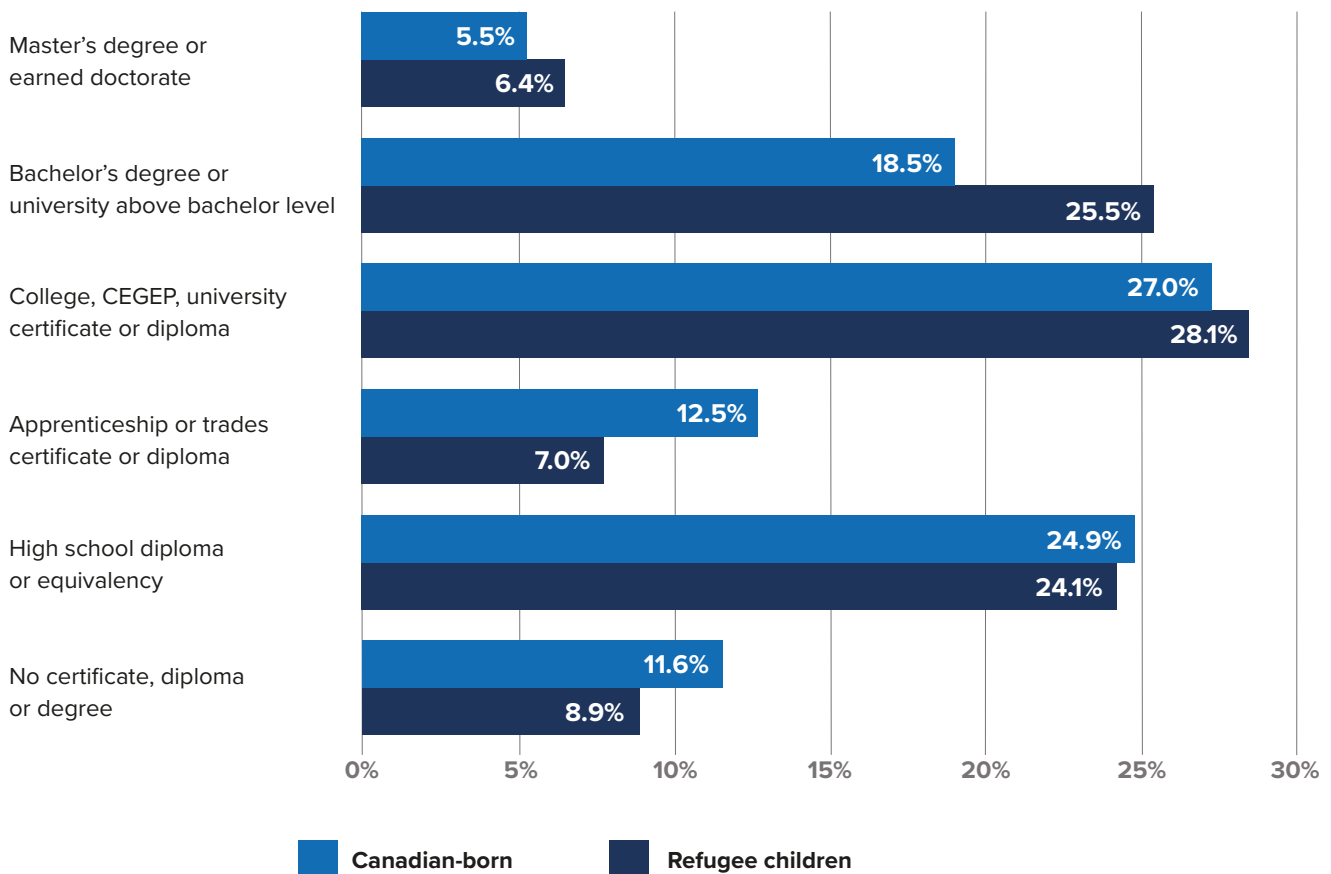
²² Ibid.

Education

Refugee children²³ perform as well in school as Canadian-born children, and their knowledge and skills contribute greatly to Canada’s workforce.

Refugees who arrived in Canada as children have a higher completion rate of high school, college, university and graduate degrees compared to children born in Canada.²⁴

HIGHEST CERTIFICATE, DIPLOMA OR DEGREE: REFUGEE CHILDREN VS. CANADIAN-BORN CITIZENS



²³ “Refugee children” refers to refugees who landed in Canada before the age of 15.

²⁴ Adapted from Statistics Canada, 2016 Census, IRCC Custom Table. This does not constitute an endorsement by Statistics Canada of this product.



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