

A woman wearing a patterned headscarf is shown in profile, looking out of a window. The scene is illuminated by the warm, golden light of a sunset or sunrise, creating a contemplative and hopeful atmosphere. The background shows the blurred interior of a vehicle or a modern building with large glass panels.

A NEW

HOME

RESETTLING

SYRIAN REFUGEES

TO CANADA



International Organization for Migration (IOM)

The UN Migration Agency

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International Organization for Migration (IOM)

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The UN Migration Agency





# INTRODUCTION



IOM Director General  
William Lacy Swing

At the end of 2015, the Government of Canada requested the International Organization for Migration (IOM) to support the Prime Minister's commitment to admit 25,000 Syrian refugees from the Middle East spanning a three-month operation from December 2015 through February 2016.

IOM quickly deployed logistics and operational staff from around the globe to complete the humanitarian operation on time. IOM worked closely with Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada (IRCC), other relevant government counterparts, United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and various implementing partners to register, process and move refugees from Lebanon, Jordan and Turkey.

During the operation, IOM arranged for 116 commercial flights and 97 charter movements bound for points of entry in Canada, including Toronto and Montreal. In total, more than 26,000 Syrians travelled under IOM auspices by commercial and charter air craft.

This photobook features the stories of Syrian refugees as they went through the resettlement process – from selection to reception. It also highlights some of those who helped make it happen.

The majority of the refugees were resettled out of Jordan and Lebanon; as such, the photobook focuses on pre-departure resettlement support in Amman and Beirut. When speaking generally about IOM's response, however, the text equally includes operations in Turkey. In addition, IOM offices in ten other countries – Algeria, Armenia, Egypt, Germany, Ghana, India, Malaysia, Qatar, Syrian Arab Republic, and the United Arab Emirates – also contributed to resettling around 1,000 people to Canada during this period.

I praise the Government of Canada's leadership in addressing the plight of refugees. In light of IRCC's celebrating the two-year anniversary of Operation Syrian Refugees (OSR), I also wish to extend my gratitude to the IOM staff, individually and as a team, who played a key role in this extraordinary effort in close partnership on the ground with their valued Canadian counterparts.

*William Lacy Swing*







## WHEN CANADA OPENED ITS DOORS TO SYRIANS

“We have a responsibility — to ourselves and to the world — to show that inclusive diversity is a strength and a force that can vanquish intolerance, radicalism and hate.”

THE RIGHT HONOURABLE JUSTIN TRUDEAU,  
23rd Prime Minister of Canada

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“Each person has a name, a story and left their homelands seeking better opportunities and safety for themselves and in many cases for their families – aspirations that all of us strive for.”

WILLIAM LACY SWING  
International Organization for Migration (IOM)  
Director General

# A WAR CHILD NO MORE

The conflict in the Syrian Arab Republic has resulted in the displacement of over four and a half million Syrian refugees in the five countries of Turkey, Lebanon, Jordan, Iraq and Egypt.

In addition, hundreds of thousands of Syrians have fled to Europe by land and sea, undergoing risky and too often perilous journeys. This in turn has created an emergency currently affecting several countries around the Mediterranean and further afield as part of the largest forced migration of its kind since the end of World War II. Millions of families find themselves in limbo as they either hope to return to a peaceful Syrian Arab Republic one day or search for an opportunity to resettle somewhere and finally begin rebuilding their lives.

In late-autumn of 2015, the Government of Canada pledged to welcome 25,000 Syrian refugees to Canada by the Spring of 2016. Shortly after the announcement, the Government of Canada approached and requested the International Organization for Migration (IOM) to provide pre-departure resettlement services and manage movement operations.

Throughout the crisis, despite significant security challenges, IOM offices in Damascus, Amman, Beirut and Istanbul have all continued to carry out resettlement activities. This has included: arranging for travel documents and exit visas; health assessments and fitness to travel checks; pre-departure orientation, information and pre-embarkation briefings; and movement operations including guided airport assistance.

IOM has 65 years of experience in facilitating resettlement for refugees and other humanitarian entrants from around the globe. The task of resettling thousands in the timespan of a few months presented IOM with an ambitious opportunity to ensure that Syrian refugees were able to resettle to Canada in a safe and dignified manner.









AMMAN, JORDAN

## HOST COUNTRY CAPITALS

In **Jordan**, according to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), there are over 635,000 Syrian refugees registered which amounts to 10 per cent of the overall population. While most refugees reside in urban areas within the country, nearly 20 per cent live in refugee camps such as Zaatari and Azraq. Over the years these camps have exceeded their capacity and many of the refugees living in peri-urban or rural setting have difficulty finding work as their refugee status impacts their job eligibility.

IOM set up the operations centre for Syrian refugee processing in Amman which included an area for form filling, interviews, biometric workstations and an IOM field clinic all within the same premises. Not long after, a second clinic run by the Canadian authorities was added to further increase the processing capacities for health assessments, including a laboratory and x-ray machines.

Having an assembly point enabled families to convene at a common location where they were organized into groups before being transported by bus to the processing centre for interviews and medical examinations. Direct bus transportation was arranged for Syrians residing within refugee camps. The assembly point was also used for pre-embarkation procedures before all charter flight departures.





BEIRUT, LEBANON

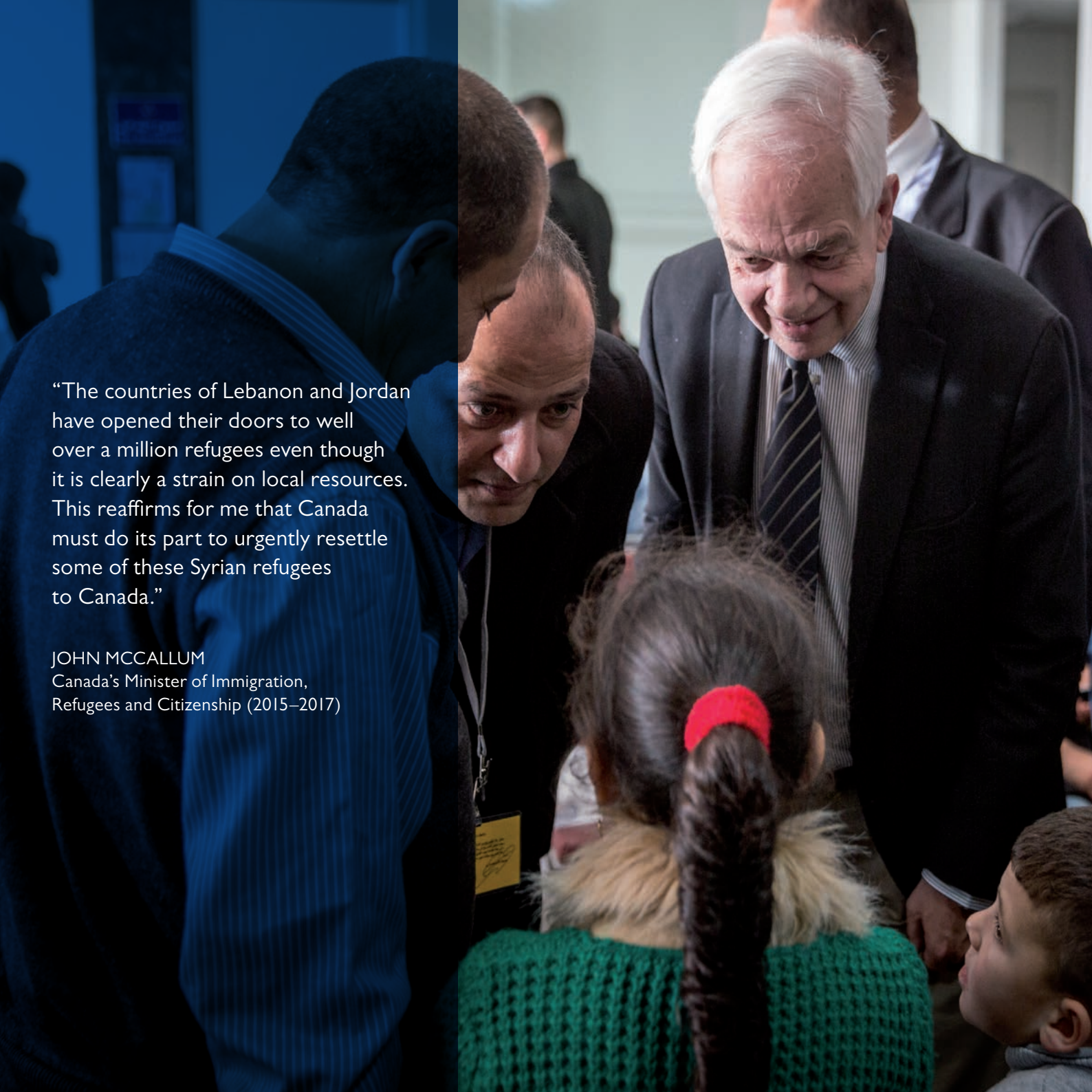
In Lebanon, around one in five people in the country is a refugee. There are nearly 1.1 million Syrian refugees registered with the UNHCR of whom half are women and children. Over 1,400 Lebanese municipalities are hosting those who have fled Syrian Arab Republic with the largest influx in the North of Lebanon and the Bekaa Valley. An overwhelming majority of refugees are located in urban settings and informal settlements and many arrive in Lebanon with little more than the clothes on their backs. Despite large-scale inter-agency response to date, the humanitarian needs in Lebanon continue to grow. Syrian refugees are becoming increasingly vulnerable as their displacement extends and their savings dwindle.

In Lebanon, IOM's main role as an implementing partner was to schedule interviews for the refugees, organize the transportation to and from the interview and health centres,

and arrange the charter flights to move them to Canada. Operation centres were established to support interviews, medical assessments and manifesting of passengers for international movement.

Sometimes, some of the greatest challenges faced by the operation were natural ones such as weather. For example, during winter the road to Zahlé, a mountainous region of Lebanon, can be dangerous with heavy snow storms and black ice, restricting access. As a result, in order to accommodate the families living in this area, medical appointments needed to be scheduled with a certain degree of flexibility.





“The countries of Lebanon and Jordan have opened their doors to well over a million refugees even though it is clearly a strain on local resources. This reaffirms for me that Canada must do its part to urgently resettle some of these Syrian refugees to Canada.”

JOHN MCCALLUM  
Canada's Minister of Immigration,  
Refugees and Citizenship (2015–2017)





## A NEW BEGINNING

Canada's ambitious programme to resettle 25,000 Syrian refugees within just three months was successfully completed in February 2016. Working closely with the relevant governments, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), and other implementing partners, IOM was a key actor in the registration, processing and movement of refugees out of Lebanon, Jordan, Turkey and Egypt. The vast majority of refugees bound for Canada were processed in Amman and Beirut.

"I am delighted we passed such an important milestone in resettlement," said IOM Jordan Chief of Mission Enrico Ponziani. "This was largely due to the excellent coordination between the Governments of Canada, Jordan and Lebanon, as well as our partner agencies."

"Our staff's willingness to work around the clock, as well as the partnership with the Governments of Canada, Jordan and Lebanon, contributed to the operation's success," said IOM Lebanon Chief of Mission Fawzi al Zaioud.

## THE PROCESS AHEAD

In Jordan and Lebanon, UNHCR made resettlement referrals to Canada. Whether refugees were living in an urban setting, camps, or informal settlements in rural areas, all refugee applicants first came to an assembly point or operations centre to prepare for the next phase: the processing of their case.

In Jordan, most of the resettlement operations took place within a vast hangar located in Amman. IOM successfully transformed the open space into a fully functional processing centre housing all the essential facilities necessary for families to be able to be registered and evaluated. Refugees began to arrive at sunrise, six days a week. As a number of families travelled several kilometres to reach the assembly point, IOM reimbursed their travel expenses.

The centre was equipped with a waiting area, cafeteria, biometric facilities, form filling areas, interview areas, medical areas, prayer rooms, a children's playroom, and an office for IOM and Canadian staff members to collaborate. The facility offered more than enough room to house the nearly 500 applicants that came through the facility daily as well as the over 300 staff members who assisted them.

On arrival at the processing centre, families had to undergo biometric registration, which included fingerprint scanning and taking photos of each and every member. Throughout the entire process, families were accompanied by IOM interpreters, who played a key role in ensuring non-English speakers were fully aware and informed. Following biometric registration, families proceeded to form filling, where they were assisted by IOM staff members in filling out correct and complete applications for refugee status which provided the selection authorities with accurate, detailed and objective information in standard formats.







FAMILIES ARE CHECKED PRIOR TO BOARDING THE BUS TO THE MAIN FACILITY IN AMMAN TO BEGIN THEIR RESETTLEMENT APPLICATION.









IN ZAHLÉ, IOM STAFF ENSURE THAT ALL PASSENGERS ARE ACCOUNTED FOR AS FAMILIES BOARD BUSES HEADED FOR THE CASE PROCESSING SITE IN BEIRUT.









IOM STAFF SPEAK WITH REFUGEES TO SCHEDULE THEIR PROCESSING APPOINTMENTS AT THE CALL CENTRE IN BEIRUT.









## GETTING TO KNOW YOU

Families were interviewed by a representative from the Government of Canada, where they went over their personal history including work, family composition, education, life in Jordan, as well as other areas in order to gain an insight on their lives before and after the war broke out in Syrian Arab Republic.

The interview served as a critical step in determining initial eligibility. One of the most critical components of the interview process was the interpreter who served as a lingual and contextual bridge between the Canadian officer and the refugee families.



A WOMAN HAS HER FINGERPRINTS TAKEN AS PART OF BIOMETRIC REGISTRATION AND IDENTIFICATION WITH CANADIAN AUTHORITIES.





A YOUNG BOY HAS HIS PHOTO TAKEN AT THE PROCESSING CENTRE IN AMMAN.



A photograph of a family of four sitting in a room. A woman with red hair is seated in a patterned armchair, holding a young child on her lap. Another child is seated next to her. A man is seated in a similar patterned armchair to the right, holding a tablet. In the foreground, the back of a red upholstered chair is visible. To the right, a table with a green felt top is partially seen. The room has a window with curtains in the background.

# INTERVIEWS





A REFUGEE FAMILY BEING INTERVIEWED BY A CANADIAN OFFICIAL AND AN INTERPRETER IN BEIRUT.

# THE INTERPRETERS

“An interesting part about being an interpreter is that sometimes the officer might not feel as connected with the family because they do not understand the language so they might not catch some of the subtle nuances that I do but I’ve also noticed the same thing with how the families connect with the officer. I am like a link for everyone in the room because I speak both languages,” said Aliza, an interpreter in Beirut who worked with Canadian officers conducting the interviews.

As an interpreter and a Lebanese national, this was not the first time she had worked with Syrian refugees. “I had been working as an interpreter for more than a year now for different operations doing cultural orientations and resettlement interviews for Syrian refugees. We used the notes gathered from the families while they were doing their form filling but once you heard them tell their story you could really [feel] their emotion as they told it.” Aliza, like many interpreters involved in this operation in both Lebanon and Jordan, interpreted dozens of interviews a day.

It came as little surprise that interpreters and officers began to develop a close working relationship between each other. “Sometimes once an interview was over I would just sit with the officer and just share my thoughts and emotions with them. Due to the confidentiality of these interviews, we really relied on each other for support. It was an emotional process and we only had each other to talk about it.”













## THE STORY OF KHALED AND ISMAH

Khaled, 29, and his wife Ismah, 19, applied to be resettled in Canada. Prior to arriving in Jordan, Khaled had worked in Dubai where he learned some English before travelling between Lebanon and Syrian Arab Republic and eventually deciding to settle in Jordan once the war had escalated.

Arriving in Jordan with no family, Khaled soon spotted Ismah in an adjacent apartment building. “From that moment, I knew I wanted to be with her. So I put my number onto a rock and threw it towards her hoping it would catch her attention. Luckily she eventually called me and the rest is history”.

Prior to living in that apartment block in Amman, Ismah had spent over a month living in the Zaatari refugee camp after she fled Syrian Arab Republic. “It was absolutely terrible, we lived in tents, had no access to water outside of common water points which I would have to go and carry large buckets of water every day.”

After going through the various processes including health assessments, Khaled and Ismah look forward to the chance to go to Canada and begin a new chapter in their lives.

“I’ve heard that in Canada, people from all countries and religions live together and learn from each other. I want to be able to tell others about the Syrian Arab Republic that we remember growing up in, not the one that is in the news now. It was not always like this, people were happy. Most of us remember this version of our home and I hope I can find something close to this in Canada.”

# WELLNESS COUNTS

Health is a fundamental aspect of refugee resettlement. The pre-departure health assessments are aimed at protecting the health of refugees, as well as receiving communities. IOM is accustomed to adjusting its migration health assessments to the resettlement needs of destination countries, having a comprehensive set of refugee health assessment services in over 60 countries so far.





“The kinds of assessments that we are doing here are still the same as you would see in other resettlement operations” said Migration Health Physician, Dr Wala Hajsaleh, in between physical examinations.

“We initially planned to conduct fit-to-travel assessments to see if individuals were healthy enough to travel, and figure out if they have any medical necessities that stretch beyond what is normally required for healthy individuals while travelling. That has now been expanded to include a full physical examination, blood tests and chest x-rays.”

“To do all of this for everyone was very challenging, but once we began to work with the families and saw how excited they were to go to Canada, it became immensely rewarding work. You truly feel the effort you are putting into this work is paying off.” In order to meet the medical demands of thousands, IOM’s medical staff partnered with a team of Canadian counterparts.







WAITING

IN QUIET

ANTICIPATION





TWO SYRIAN WOMEN WAIT IN ANTICIPATION AT THE PROCESSING CENTRE IN AMMAN.

# ABDELSATER'S STORY

Abdelsater and his family of eight are among the 25,000 Syrian refugees who migrated to Canada during this resettlement process. He shared his story at the Canadian resettlement processing centre in Amman, prior to the family's departure.

"We had been in Irbid, Jordan for more than three years now, and it feels like our life had been paused since we arrived.

"My father was a chef, and for many years in Homs I had a shawarma shop with my brother. Since the war broke out in Syrian Arab Republic, and we had to leave to Irbid, I hadn't been able to practice my trade. We had to move out of town because the rent was too expensive and my children had to leave school.

"We were so relieved when we heard we had the chance to go to Canada. On the news, we see so many people dying while crossing the Mediterranean in boats. They will do anything to get to Europe and have a second chance at life. This way seems much better: to be able to go legally and by airplane.

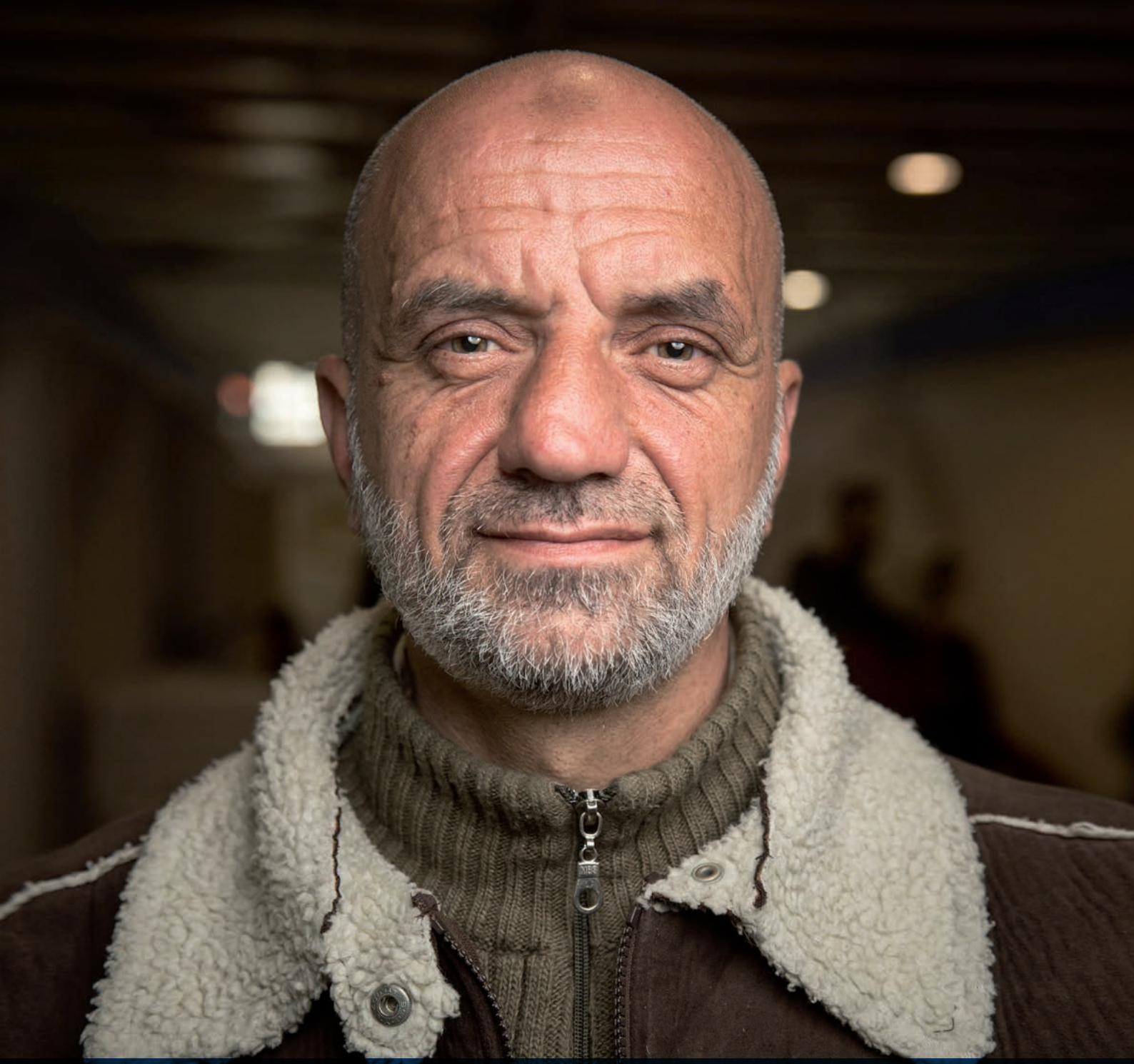
"We see how generous Canadians are, and how they welcome refugees.

"We saw people on television in Canada demanding that their government take in refugees like us. It shows the generosity of the Canadian people. We think of Canada as a parent who is taking care of children and keeping the family together.

"As Syrians, we can be respected and taken care of by an organized effort that will help us reach safety. We don't have to throw ourselves in a boat and risk death to take our chance of a new life. I don't want to beg anyone. I look forward to finding work in Canada, doing whatever I can to give back.

"Before the war, we were dignified in our country. I strongly feel that this process has given us a sense of dignity we haven't had since we left Syrian Arab Republic. I know life will be difficult at first in our new home, but we will learn English and do our best to adapt. My children can go to school again and have a good future."





"WE SEE HOW GENEROUS CANADIANS ARE, AND HOW THEY WELCOME REFUGEES.  
I KNOW LIFE WILL BE DIFFICULT AT FIRST BUT WE WILL DO OUR BEST TO ADAPT."





A WINTER

WONDERLAND





A SYRIAN WOMAN, ISMAH, LOOKS AT A SNOW COVERED LANDSCAPE ON HER MOBILE PHONE.

# CANADIAN ORIENTATION ABROAD

Pre-departure orientation, as done by the Canadian Orientation Abroad (COA) programme, prepares refugees by providing practical and factual information on Canada, while at the same time helping refugees to develop the skills and attitudes they will need to navigate and succeed in their new environment. Multilingual, multiethnic trainers are well positioned to help refugees anticipate integration challenges and guide them through the integration process. Trainers may be previously resettled refugees, or intimately familiar with both cultures, and serve as credible role models who have successfully navigated the often unfamiliar, complex political, social and cultural norms of new countries. Sessions typically provide key information on travel preparations, their legal status and local laws, government and host society expectations, education, employment, as well as daily life, cultural adaptation and a comprehensive list of all Government-funded services available to them in Canada.

During sessions in Beirut, Mr Joseph Helou, the COA Coordinator and trainer, spoke about the training approach. “We do not want the refugees to leave their culture behind; so we tell them about Canada’s multiculturalism and the fact that Canada becomes a more enriched country with each new migrant.”

Having emigrated to Canada and lived in Montreal for many years, Mr Helou, a Lebanese Canadian national, understands how it feels to move away from one’s home and start in a new country. “COA trainers are the first point of contact with Canada. They play an instrumental role in bridging refugees between the country where they are from and the country where they are to resettle. One of the immediate areas of focus, during a COA session, is to dispel myths and rumours and to have a clear idea of what the refugees know, what they want to know and what their most pressing concerns and fears are. There are also the usual questions about the Canadian climate. Many are afraid of the winter weather and sometimes think that it is cold all year round. COA trainers use a variety of tools such as movies, photos, and the internet to demonstrate the four seasons, how people dress and how each season can be enjoyed. If a family is selected for a particular province or city, COA trainers will provide additional information specific to that city. All in all, it is all about giving them an objective, accurate and realistic picture of Canada prior to departure”.





TERRITORY

9,750 ft.

Mountains

NORTHWEST TERRITORIES

COAST

BRITISH COLUMBIA

ROCKY MOUNTAINS

ALBERTA

Charlotte Islands

Victoria

Vancouver

Calgary

Edmonton

SASKATCHEWAN

Carcross

Whitehorse

Ross River



Skagway

Teslin

Tutchitua

Watson Lake

Fort Simpson

Fort Liart

Dease Lake

10,289 ft.  
Mount Ratz

Stewart

Prince Rupert

Terrace

Kitimat

Prince George

Bella Coola

Port Hardy

13,176 ft.  
Mount Waddington

Kamloops

Williams Lake

Mount Robson

12,872 ft.

Janet

12,280 ft.

Revelstoke

Kelowna

Grand Forks

High Level

Marmoring

Dawson Creek

Peace River

High Prairie

Grande Prairie

Edmonton

Fort Tveit

Calgary

Red Deer

Medicine Hat

Wainwright

Regina

Saskatoon

Swift Current

Yorkton

North Battleford

Estevan

Delisle

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MR RONY JALKH, COA TRAINER AND PART-TIME LECTURER AT THE AMERICAN UNIVERSITY OF BEIRUT, SPEAKS AT AN ORIENTATION SESSION FOR SYRIAN REFUGEES IN ORDER TO PREPARE THEM FOR THEIR UPCOMING DEPARTURE FOR CANADA.



MR JOSEPH HELOU, COA LEBANON COORDINATOR AND TRAINER.





Another fear that is often heard is about learning one of the two official languages of Canada. “We inform them that the Government has many mechanisms in place for newcomers to either learn English or French. There are language instruction classes which are set up to help ease their way into daily life more quickly. Learning the language is the key to success, and this is repeated over and over again in each COA session.”

Mr. Rony Jalkh is part of a team of six COA trainers in Lebanon. Just like his other training colleagues, he has lent his skills and time to empower people with the information needed to make informed decisions. “Working with refugees is what I enjoy the most. This dialogue helps give hope to the departing families. Sometimes, one partner in a couple may not be entirely convinced about this resettlement to Canada. It is our role, as COA trainers, to impart our knowledge, to find ways to make them fully understand the situation while keeping in mind the interests of their children,” said Mr. Jalkh.

Speaking to refugees about Canadian culture goes far beyond simply sharing information about the receiving country, it can prove to be the moment when refugees decide to finally go through with resettlement as a durable solution. “The other day this man came up to me and gave me a hug thanking me because he said I had convinced his dad to go to Canada. For him, many misconceptions were cleared now. My mission is to clarify things they are afraid of and let them make an informed decision.”







ELBA

THE WAIT  
IS ALMOST OVER

Provided by the European Union

IOM • OIM

الأردن  
موقت  
JORDAN

8-10375

FAMILY BOARDING THE BUS TAKING THEM TO COMPLETE FINAL PROCEDURES AT THE PROCESSING CENTRE IN AMMAN.





A CANADIAN FLAG ADORNS A WINDOW AT THE FLIGHT GATE WHERE PASSENGERS AWAITED THEIR DEPARTURE.





In December 2015, less than a month since the beginning of the resettlement operation out of Jordan, the first flight flew out of Amman to Canada.

Upon confirmation, families were given a few days' notice that they would be flying to Canada. During this time, they quickly arranged their affairs and packed their belongings before returning to the assembly point on the morning of their departure.

"It's bittersweet," one woman said. "I am happy that I am going to Canada with my family, but also saddened that I left a lot of them behind in Jordan and in Syrian Arab Republic. I do not know when I will see them again."

The assembly point, which served as a starting point for the entire resettlement process, also became the last chapter for departing individuals who bid farewell to their loved ones as they embarked on their journey to Canada.

# REFUGEES HELPING REFUGEES

“My name is Khaled, and I am from South Kordofan, Sudan. I am a refugee who helps move refugees. I have worked with IOM for over 20 years, since I came to Lebanon as a refugee myself, after leaving Sudan because of the war there. I am here with my family, as are most of the guys who work here. We come from all over Sudan—Khartoum, Darfur, South Kordofan. Sudan and Syrian Arab Republic had an agreement about visas so we went there first and then crossed to Lebanon. I know how hard life can be for refugees.

“I also know operations here at IOM inside out. I have done many jobs over the years: a driver, security related, or resettlement operations.”

Khaled led the team of operational support staff for the resettlement of over 13,000 Syrian refugees out of Lebanon to Canada.











KHALID AND HIS CREW STAND READY TO ASSIST SYRIAN FAMILIES AT BEIRUT AIRPORT.









IOM STAFF STOW TRAVEL LUGGAGE AS FAMILIES BOARD BUSES FOR BEIRUT. ON THE DAY OF THEIR FLIGHT, IOM STAFF ALSO PROVIDE THE REFUGEES WITH GUIDED AIRPORT ASSISTANCE.





Departure West  
Dipart Ouest

←  
←  
←

ST AIRLINE

CHG 010 24-240  
ALJUSTA, ALJUSTA  
15  
60010733  
IOIM  
INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATION  
FOR MIGRATION

IOIM









## CANADA BOUND

As the Syrian refugees boarded the flight, a mix of excitement, anxiety, and relief could be felt onboard. For many, this flight to Canada would also be their first time flying in an airplane.

“We are going to a city called Vancouver,” said a woman with her family of five. After seeing a picture of the west coast city she asked “Is there a sea around it? I have never seen the sea before.”

IOM arranged a total of 99 transatlantic charter flights carrying Syrian refugees from various points of embarkation in the Middle East and Turkey to the Canadian ports of entry of Toronto and Montreal. Some families had further onward domestic travel until reaching their final destination in Canada.

Over the course of the 12-hour journey, flight attendants handed out everything from hot meals to diapers, meeting the needs of all the passengers aboard. In addition, officials from the Canadian Government and IOM medical and/or operational escorts were on board the flights to provide additional assistance.







A FAMILY GAZES OUT THE WINDOW AND TAKES PICTURES AS THEY FLY OVER THE SWISS ALPS.



A person is seen from behind, holding a Sony smartphone to take a photo of a sunset through an airplane window. The phone's screen shows the sunset scene. The background is the interior of an airplane cabin with blue lighting.

BRIGHT NEW

HORIZONS

BECKON

# ABDURHALAM'S STORY

Abdurhalam and his family of five were among the first Syrians from Amman to fly to Canada where they looked forward to building a new life.

“Back in Hama, I used to own a store where I would sell different dairy products like cheese and yogurt. Once we get to Canada I would like to open up another store to sell goods again,” Abdurhalam said, prior to their departure.

He had left Hama with his family to Amman, three years ago as the amount of shelling near his home began to rise in frequency. Like many families selected to resettle in Canada, Abdurhalam was curious about work opportunities, education, health care, and opportunities for him and his family and how they were going to integrate into Canadian society.

“For my family, our biggest priority is for our children to be able to continue their studies. Two of our girls were able to resume their education when we arrived to Jordan, but my youngest was not old enough at the time. One of the main reasons we decided to go to Canada was so that they would have more opportunities for their education.”

Sarah, who is 15 years old, is eager to study English so she can become an English teacher one day. Laja (10), wants to become a teacher as well.

Even as they were on the flight to Canada, he remained in a state of disbelief that this was actually happening. “This whole experience feels like a dream. It is simply incredible,” said Abdurhalam.















## A NEW HOME

As many as 40 per cent of Syrian refugees arriving in Canada have been privately sponsored by Canadians throughout the country. Many of them form groups of five or more as they pool together funds to support refugee families. In addition to the Canadian government assisting in the formal process to support Syrian families, local non-profit organizations have provided training and assistance to would-be sponsors.

TORONTO SKYLINE ON THE EVE  
OF THE NEW YEAR (2016).





# WARM CANADIAN WELCOME

Ashley McCall and her family are among several Canadians who opened their homes and privately sponsored a Syrian family resettling in Canada. “We are very conscious of what is going on in the world, as well as the plight of many of these Syrians. We have been trying to find a way to help out,” Ashley explained.

“We heard about a local organization that helps Canadians interested in sponsoring refugee families. My husband and I spoke about this with our children and we all felt very strongly that this was something that we should do.”

“Afterwards, we found a group of friends who also wanted to get involved. We all decided to partner with a local university who helped us with coordination. We actually decided to do this long before the government even announced that they would resettle 25,000 Syrians here.”

As Ashley spoke of her decision to sponsor a family, her teenage daughter Claire sat next to Hamza, the father of a family of four, and taught him some English words which he scribbled down.

“After the election (Canadian federal election in October 2015), everything moved so fast with the resettlement and we saw other people become engaged in this cause. At first we were worried that it would be difficult to fund-raise the necessary amount but it turned out to be really successful and we discovered many people who wanted to help.

“Since the Morad family arrived, when we have taken them to get their essentials such as their health card numbers, people have come up and greeted the family. A lot of people who have been migrants themselves have also been really engaged.”

“The apartment we found for them is owned by a Hungarian who was a refugee himself at one point. In Canada, people generally are empathetic towards migrants and it makes me feel proud to be Canadian. Canada is one of the few countries that has private sponsorships for migrant families in this manner.”

“For us, this felt like an opportunity to help and we acknowledge that we feel very privileged for what we have in this world. We have peace and safety, so to be able to provide that to others is truly great.”

# MEET THE MORADS

It is a mild New Year's Eve in Toronto and Ghader and her husband Hamza are closing 2015 in their new home. "We are very happy. It's a great feeling to be here in Toronto," says Hamza.

Originally from Homs, the Morad family had a small business where they sold desserts. Living in a besieged area in Homs, the Morads eventually fled to Jordan. "The desserts were a local delicacy in Homs, very unique. Since my family and I had to flee to Jordan, I did not have the equipment or the ingredients needed to make them again."

Having now arrived in Canada, Hamza says he is more focused on learning the local language than resuming his family business. "Right now, my main priority is to learn English so that I can start working."

New Year's Day is a truly special day for Ghader, as it is also her birthday. "I am already getting messages wishing me a happy birthday and new year from my friends and family back in Syrian Arab Republic," says Ghader, as her phone continues to light up with best wishes from halfway across the world.

Like many families being resettled in Canada, Ghader and Hamza have left behind loved ones in Jordan and Syrian Arab Republic who they do not know when and if they will see them again.

Throughout the entire process, Ghader remembers the kindness she and her family received from all those who helped them to come to Canada. "Everyone we met was so kind. Seeing that kindness in so many people really made us look forward to seeing how the rest of Canada would be like."

Now in Toronto, the Morads welcome their sponsoring family, the McCalls, with warm cups of tea and chocolate. The McCalls, fluent in English and French, try to bridge the language barrier through the use of translation applications on their mobile phones.

Their eldest daughter Houda, 6, looks forward to going back to school so that she can one day become a pediatrician. "After seeing how sick her brother was with leukemia, she wanted to become a doctor so that she could treat more children like him one day," says her mother.

Feras, 4, is much more interested in becoming an investigator or a policeman one day. "He sees how torn apart Syrian Arab Republic is and wants to be able to fight against injustice, wherever it might be."

As midnight draws closer, the Morads prepare to have dinner with the McCalls, in what they hope will be the first of many New Year's celebrations in their new home.









A CANADIAN FLAG ADORNS A BOUQUET GIVEN TO A NEWLY ARRIVED SYRIAN FAMILY.

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