

Insights on Canadian Society

Results from the 2016 Census: Syrian refugees who resettled in Canada in 2015 and 2016



by René Houle

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Results from the 2016 Census: Syrian refugees who resettled in Canada in 2015 and 2016

by René Houle

Today, *Insights on Canadian Society* is releasing a study based on 2016 Census data in order to examine the demographic situation and socioeconomic conditions of the Syrian refugee population living in Canada in 2016. This study benefited from analytical work done by Nazih Nasrallah on the situation of refugees in Canada.



Overview of the study

In this study, data from the 2016 Census are used to examine the sociodemographic profile and employment situation of Syrian refugees who resettled in Canada between January 1, 2015, and May 10, 2016, and who were still living in Canada at the time of the census. Data from the 2016 Longitudinal Immigration Database (IMDB) are also used to examine the income situation in 2016 of refugees who were admitted to Canada in November and December 2015.

- According to the 2016 Census, approximately 25,000 Syrian refugees landed between January 1, 2015 and May 10, 2016 and were still living in Canada on Census Day. Among these, 53% were assisted by the government.
- Syrian refugees are younger than refugees from other countries. Also, couples with children accounted for 85% of Syrian refugee families. This compared with 63% among refugee families from other countries.
- About 20% of government-assisted Syrian refugees knew English or French, compared with 67% of privately sponsored refugees. Less than 3% of government-assisted Syrian refugees had a university degree, compared with 25% of those who were privately sponsored.
- At the time of the 2016 Census, 33% of Syrian refugees were living in the Montréal and Toronto census metropolitan areas (CMAs). In comparison, 29% of refugees from other countries lived in these two CMAs.
- In 2016, 24% of male refugees from Syria were employed, compared with 39% among those from other countries. Among Syrian female refugees, 8% were employed, compared with 17% of female refugees from other countries.
- The difference between the employment rates of Syrian refugees and refugees from other countries was mostly due to the admission period, because Syrian refugees landed in Canada more recently than refugees from other countries.

Introduction

On September 8, 2015, 4.1 million Syrian refugees were registered with the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), including close to 2 million in Turkey and over 1.1 million in Lebanon.¹ Based on the most recent UNHCR data, there were an estimated 6.3 million Syrian refugees at the end of 2017, or 2 million more than in 2015, the majority of whom were still living in Turkey and Lebanon.² In 2015 and 2017, Syria had the largest population of displaced refugees in the world based on UNHCR criteria and, by the end of 2017, nearly 1 in 10 of the world's refugees were from Syria.³

In recent years, Canada welcomed a number of Syrian refugees. According to the Census, Syria was the main source country of refugees who recently landed in Canada (between 2011 and 2016) and who still lived in the country in 2016.⁴ While the number of Syrian refugees who settled in Canada has increased since then,⁵ the 2016 Census data enumerated 26,550 Syrian refugees who landed between 2011 and 2016, the majority of whom arrived between December 2015 and February 2016. There is little socioeconomic information about this population—despite ongoing discussion in the media about the difficulties that they can face, for instance in finding employment.⁶

This study uses 2016 Census data to obtain a profile of the Syrian refugees who resettled in Canada in 2015 and 2016, and to examine their labour force participation rate. Resettled refugees refer to those “who have been selected abroad while outside of their home country or country where they normally lived

and who were granted permanent resident status on the basis of a well-founded fear of returning to that country.”⁷ The first section of this paper discusses the immigration context of the Syrian refugees who resettled in Canada. The second section examines some of their sociodemographic characteristics, including age and family structure, level of education, and knowledge of official languages. The third section focuses on labour force participation, which is measured by the employment rate at the time of the census.⁸

Canada and the Syrian refugee crisis

The war in the Middle East and the refugee crisis it created have led to the wave of Syrian refugees who have immigrated to Canada in the past few years. After it broke out in 2011, the war in Syria rapidly transformed into a complex armed conflict involving, to varying degrees, numerous warring players and several foreign countries.⁹ The exodus of millions of Syrians to neighbouring countries has been a direct and ongoing consequence of this war. On November 24, 2015, the Government of Canada announced a “plan to resettle 25,000 Syrian refugees” in Canada.¹⁰ The selection and welcome plan for Syrian refugees was based on several parameters.¹¹

First, the plan's target was to welcome 25,000 Syrian refugees by February 2016, including 10,000 who were expected to land by December 31, 2015, and 15,000 between January 1 and February 29, 2016. It was also expected that there would be more government-assisted refugees than privately

sponsored refugees (sponsored by non-governmental organizations, individuals, or groups of individuals).

Second, the plan indicated that Canada would collaborate with the UNHCR and the Turkish government to identify refugees in Jordan, Lebanon and Turkey. More specifically, Canada asked the UNHCR and the Turkish government to “prioritize vulnerable refugees who are a low security risk, such as women at risk and complete families.”¹² These conditions applied to government-assisted refugees, but not to those who were privately sponsored; however, the latter still had to be selected according to the conditions set out in the Immigration and Refugee Protection Regulations.¹³

Third, it was expected, as per the plan, that after their arrival by chartered flight to Montréal or Toronto, the refugees would be relocated in various areas of the country. Privately sponsored refugees would continue on to where their sponsors lived, while government-assisted refugees would continue on to their new community.¹⁴

In light of the parameters developed in the Syrian refugee selection and welcome plan, the first questions examined in this study are: How many Syrian refugees were government assisted? How many were privately sponsored? How many arrived in 2015 or in 2016?

The second set of questions examined in this study relates to the selection criteria for Syrian refugees. Are there more children and families in the Syrian refugee population than in other refugee populations? Are Syrian refugees

more vulnerable than refugees from other countries and, if they are, how so? Are the characteristics of Syrian refugees linked to the admission category? Are their socioeconomic characteristics comparable to those of refugees from other countries admitted during the same period?

The study also sheds light on their place of residence in Canada at the time of the 2016 Census. Where in Canada did the Syrian refugees settle? Are they concentrated in a few large urban areas or have they settled throughout the country? Is their geographic distribution similar to or different than that of refugees from other countries?

Lastly, 2016 Census data are used to assess and understand the economic situation of Syrian refugees by analyzing their employment rate. Because of their vulnerability, Syrian refugees may find themselves at a disadvantage in the labour force. As mentioned above, the issue of employment among Syrian refugees has been raised on several occasions by the national press over the last two years and was also the subject of targeted investigations.¹⁵ Government-assisted refugees share two characteristics that can hinder entry into the labour market: limited language skills and lower education levels.¹⁶

Privately sponsored refugees, like government-assisted refugees, are helped by a sponsor during their first year in the country. The private sponsor—be it an organization or a group of individuals—commits to providing financial support, as per the sponsorship program’s requirements. Furthermore, private sponsors may continue to help refugees beyond the one-year requirement. For example, sponsors

may help the refugee or refugees find work or offer them extended financial assistance.¹⁷

According to a previous study, privately sponsored refugees were selected differently than government-assisted refugees, and some of them were referred to their sponsor by Syrians who were already established in Canada.¹⁸ In contrast, government assistance was based on a set of predefined vulnerability criteria. Consequently, it is expected that privately sponsored refugees will have a different profile than government-assisted refugees.

More than 25,000 Syrian refugees were admitted to Canada in 2015 and 2016

According to Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada (IRCC), 25,555 Syrian refugees landed in Canada between December 1, 2015, and the end of February 2016. Most were admitted in 2016, and the majority were government assisted.¹⁹

The 2016 Census data are not entirely comparable to the administrative data collected by IRCC. The IRCC

data provide the exact date of admission (day, month and year) for immigrants and refugees, while the census only asks about the year of admission.²⁰ In addition, the IRCC data focus on immigrants and refugees at the time of their admission. The census, however, shows how many immigrants and refugees still lived in the country on Census Day.

Contrary to administrative data, Census data can provide information on the socioeconomic characteristics of various population groups (such as knowledge of both official languages, level of education, and the employment rate). Since the census collects information from all Canadians, it is particularly useful for comparing population subgroups.²¹

The number of Syrian refugees provided by both sources for the same admission period—January 1, 2015, to May 10, 2016—are shown in Table 1. At first glance, this table shows that the census numbers are lower than those from the administrative records. The absolute difference between the two sources is 4,090 refugees, or 15%. This variance is due to the fact

Table 1
Syrian refugees resettled in Canada between January 1, 2015, and May 10, 2016, based on IRCC administrative records and 2016 Census data

Data source	Year of admission	Syrian refugees resettled in Canada			Total
		Government-assisted refugees	Privately sponsored refugees	Blended visa office-referred refugees	
Administrative records (IRCC)	2015	2,790	4,815	485	8,095
	2016	12,870	6,240	1,915	21,030
	Total	15,665	11,055	2,405	29,125
2016 Census	2015	2,310	4,305	565	7,180
	2016	10,915	5,200	1,745	17,850
	Total	13,225	9,505	2,305	25,035

Source: Statistics Canada, Census of Population, 2016; Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada (IRCC), permanent resident files.

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that, among other things, the census primarily focuses on the population living only in private households,

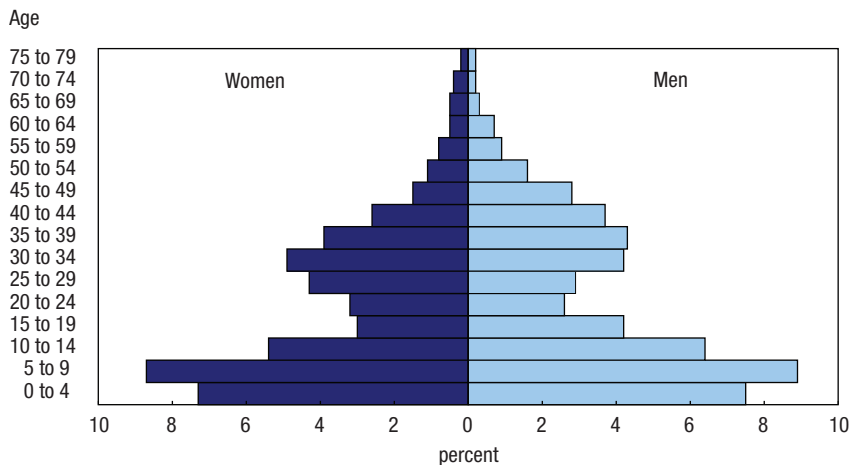
which excludes populations living in collective dwellings—where refugees sometimes reside

temporarily after their arrival in the country—and individuals who died or left Canada before May 10, 2016.

However, the data from the IRCC administrative records and the 2016 Census are fairly consistent with regard to the distribution of Syrian refugees by year of admission and refugee category. As such, 72% of Syrian refugees who were admitted during the period were admitted in 2016 according to the administrative records, compared with 71% according to the census data. The administrative records show that 54% of Syrian refugees were government assisted, which is comparable to the census data (53%).

Chart 1a

Age pyramid (age at the time of admission) of Syrian refugees who resettled in Canada between January 1, 2015, and May 10, 2016



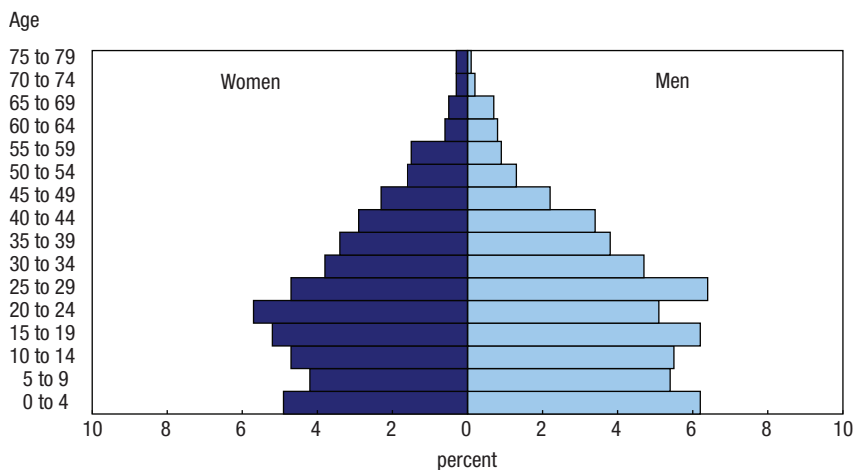
Source: Statistics Canada, Census of Population, 2016.

Syrian refugees are young, and many are part of families consisting of a couple with children

The selection of Syrian refugees abroad was meant to prioritize families and children, which suggests that Syrian refugees are younger than other groups of refugees. One way to examine this issue is to compare the age structure of resettled Syrian refugees, presented in Chart 1a, with that of the resettled refugees from other countries admitted in Canada during the same period, presented in Chart 1b. Both age pyramids are based on the age at admission rather than the age at the time of the census.

Chart 1b

Age pyramid (age at the time of admission) of refugees from other countries who resettled in Canada between January 1, 2015, and May 10, 2016



Source: Statistics Canada, Census of Population, 2016.

The age pyramid of Syrian refugees was characterized by a high percentage of children aged 0 to 14 and by a relatively small proportion of people aged 15 to 29. Among refugees from other countries, by contrast, all age groups between the ages of 0 and 29 were relatively similar in size. Over the age of 30, the age distribution of both groups

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of refugees looked similar, with older age groups having smaller percentages. The concentration of Syrian refugees in younger age groups translated into a lower median age at admission for Syrian refugees (18 years) relative to refugees from other countries (23 years).

Among all refugees who resettled in Canada between January 1, 2015 and May 10, 2016, less than 40% were not of Syrian origin. After Syria, the source country associated with the largest number of refugees was Iraq, with 3,075 refugees. Three other source countries provided at least 1,000 refugees: Afghanistan, Eritrea and the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

Several characteristics of refugees are shown in Table 2 by source country. Syrians, who represented the largest group, stood out by

having the highest proportion of refugees admitted in 2016 (71%, compared with an average of 27% for refugees from other countries). The percentage of Syrian refugees who were government assisted (53%) was comparable to the average for refugees from other countries (56%), although the proportion of government-assisted refugees varied considerably across countries (from 15% of refugees from Afghanistan, to 79% of refugees from the Democratic Republic of the Congo).²²

As mentioned earlier, the Syrian refugee population is young: 44% of its population was under the age of 15 in 2016, more than any other major source country (the average for all refugees from other countries was 31%). However, the percentage of the Syrian population aged 15 to 29 at the time of admission (20%) was

below the average for refugees from other countries (33%). Refugees from the Democratic Republic of the Congo had the highest percentage of individuals aged 15 to 29 (49%).

While there were more men (51%) than women in the total Syrian refugee population, women outnumbered men among those aged 15 to 29 (52% versus 48%). By contrast, among refugees from other countries, there were more men than women in this age group (the proportion of men among those aged 15 to 29 varied from 50% among refugees from Afghanistan to 58% among refugees from Iraq).

The demographic characteristics of Syrian refugees are related to their unique family structure (Table 3). The percentage of families consisting of a couple with children among all Syrian families was 85%, which is

Table 2
Migratory and demographic characteristics of refugees who resettled in Canada between January 1, 2015, and May 10, 2016, by source country, 2016

Source country	Syria	Iraq	Afghanistan	Eritrea	Democratic Republic of the Congo	Other countries	Total, excluding Syria	Total
Number of refugees	25,035	3,075	1,695	2,030	1,130	7,650	15,580	40,615
Median age	18	26	22	27	21	21	23	21
Government-assisted refugees	52.8	62.0	14.5	26.4	78.8	67.3	55.9	54.0
Refugees admitted in 2016	71.3	19.7	28.6	34.2	27.0	26.8	26.6	54.1
Distribution across age groups at the time of admission								
0 to 14	44.2	29.3	26.0	28.1	23.9	34.6	31.0	39.1
15 to 29	20.2	27.0	37.5	33.0	49.1	32.7	33.3	25.2
30 to 59	32.3	36.9	31.0	38.2	23.0	30.0	32.0	32.2
60 and over	3.3	6.8	5.3	1.2	4.4	2.7	3.7	3.4
Distribution by sex, total population								
Women	48.6	44.9	52.2	43.2	50.9	46.8	46.9	47.9
Men	51.4	55.1	48.1	56.5	48.7	53.1	53.1	52.1
Distribution by sex, population aged 15 to 29								
Women	52.2	43.0	50.4	46.3	49.5	47.4	46.9	49.6
Men	47.7	57.6	49.6	53.7	51.4	52.6	53.1	50.4

Source: Statistics Canada, Census of Population, 2016.

Table 3
Household and family characteristics of refugees who resettled in Canada between January 1, 2015, and May 10, 2016, by source country, 2016

Source country	Household		Census family		
	Average number of people per household	Proportion of households with only one person	Average number of children aged 0 to 14 among couples with children	Proportion of couples with children in the family	Proportion of persons living outside a census family
	number	percent	number		percent
Syria	4.8	3.6	2.8	85.4	4.2
Iraq	4.0	13.4	2.0	74.1	9.6
Afghanistan	5.4	3.0	2.4	71.8	3.5
Eritrea	3.5	9.8	2.2	62.0	25.3
Democratic Republic of the Congo	4.4	14.3	3.0	46.5	25.7
Other countries	3.7	13.4	2.2	58.4	21.6
Total, excluding Syria	4.0	12.0	2.2	63.2	18.0
Total	4.4	7.1	2.6	77.2	9.5

Source: Statistics Canada, Census of Population, 2016.

20 percentage points more than the average for refugees from other countries (63%). Syrian couples with children had an average of 2.8 children aged 0 to 14, compared with an average of 2.2 children among refugees from other countries. There were also significant variations between source countries in this regard. More than 70% of refugees from Iraq and Afghanistan were couples with children, and Congolese couples with children had an average of 3.0 children, a number even higher than the Syrian average. Syrian refugees, however, had both a large proportion of couples with children, and a relatively high number of children in these families.

As the Syrian refugee population consisted primarily of couples with children, relatively few of them were living outside a census family (4%). The proportion of households consisting of one individual was also relatively low (4%), at least relative to the average for refugees from other countries (12%).

Such demographic and family indicators reflect the selection process of Syrian refugees. Families

with children were prioritized, at the expense of young adults who were less likely, given their age, to be in a couple or to have children.

The majority of Syrian refugees did not know English or French at the time of the 2016 Census

In addition to demographic and family criteria, Syrian refugee selection prioritized the most vulnerable refugees. These refugees often had lower levels of educational attainment and were less likely to speak at least one official language. These two human capital characteristics are associated with immigrants' economic well-being and can thus serve as indicators of socioeconomic vulnerability. Knowledge of official languages is an asset for entering the labour force upon landing, while level of education becomes an asset only after having lived in the country for a few years.²³ Even though most newcomers' credentials are not immediately transferable to the labour market because of the time needed to obtain recognition of foreign academic credentials and

work experience,²⁴ they remain a key element for entering the labour force and are strongly associated with income in the long run.

Chart 2 compares the level of education of Syrian refugees aged 20 to 59 with that of refugees from other countries.²⁵ In general, the educational profile of Syrian refugees was similar to that of refugees from other countries; in both cases, approximately one-half did not have a certificate, diploma or degree. Slightly more Syrian women (15%) than women from other countries (9%) had a university degree. One-half of the women from other countries did not have a certificate, diploma or degree, compared with 47% of Syrian women. In contrast, a greater proportion of Syrian men (52%) did not have a certificate, diploma or degree compared to men from other countries (40%).

There were more differences between the two groups of refugees in their knowledge of official languages: the majority of Syrians (55%) did not know English or French, compared with 28% of refugees from other countries

(Chart 3). To a certain extent, such differences were expected. Many refugees from other countries landed in Canada before Syrian refugees, which means that they had more time to learn English or French. In addition, unlike Syrian refugees, many refugees from other countries had English or French as a mother tongue or were from countries where one of these languages is the official or national language. This was the case for those from the Democratic Republic of the Congo (French) and Eritrea (English).

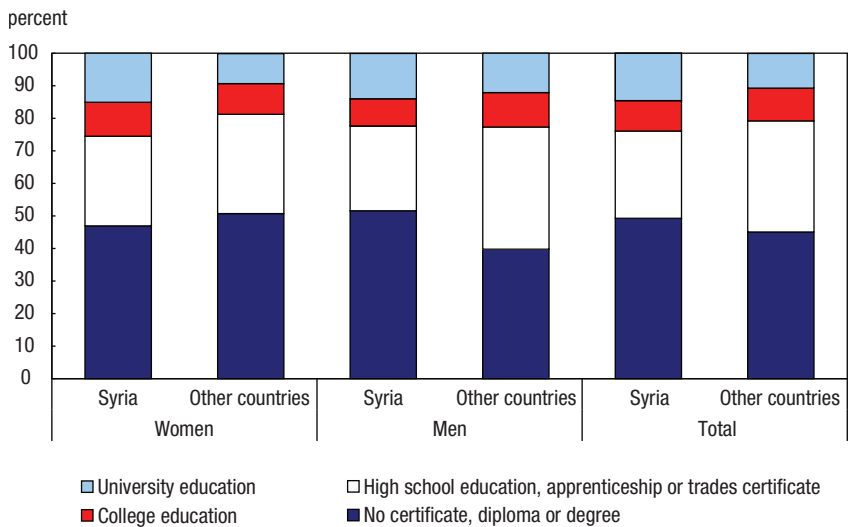
Government-assisted refugees do not have the same profile as privately sponsored refugees

Within the Syrian refugee population, there were significant differences between the characteristics of government-assisted refugees and those who were privately sponsored. On average, government-assisted refugees were younger than those who were sponsored privately, with a median age of 13 for the former and 26 for the latter (Table 4). This is due to the fact that the government-assisted refugee population consisted mainly of couples with children (94%); these couples had, on average, 3.2 children aged 0 to 14, compared with 2.2 children among privately sponsored families.

Government-assisted Syrian refugees aged 15 to 29 were characterized by a larger female population (56% women), while the privately sponsored refugee population was more evenly distributed between men (51%) and women (49%).

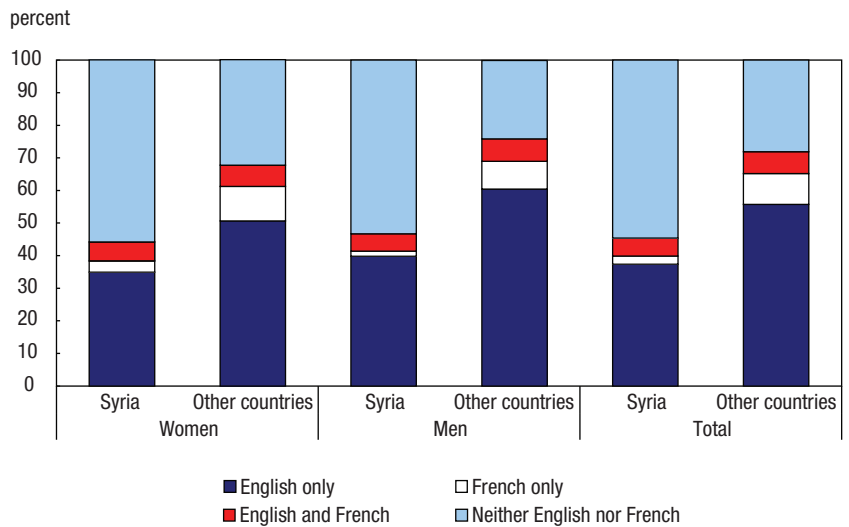
Both populations also differed in terms of socioeconomic characteristics. Government-assisted refugees had a lower level of education (i.e., a lower proportion

Chart 2
Level of education of refugees who resettled in Canada between January 1, 2015, and May 10, 2016, by sex and source country, population aged 20 to 59 in 2016



Source: Statistics Canada, Census of Population, 2016.

Chart 3
Knowledge of official languages of refugees who resettled in Canada between January 1, 2015, and May 10, 2016, by sex and source country, population aged 20 to 59 in 2016



Source: Statistics Canada, Census of Population, 2016.

Table 4
Sociodemographic characteristics of refugees who resettled in Canada between January 1, 2015, and May 10, 2016, by source country and refugee category, 2016

	Syria			Other countries		
	Government-assisted refugees	Privately sponsored refugees	All refugees	Government-assisted refugees	Privately sponsored refugees	All refugees
Age and family characteristics						
age						
Median age at the time of admission	13	26	18	21	25	23
percent						
Admitted between the ages of 0 and 14	53.8	33.4	44.2	33.3	28.2	31.0
Women among those aged 15 to 29	56.0	48.5	52.2	45.9	48.4	46.9
Couples with children	94.0	77.8	85.4	59.0	69.0	63.2
Persons not living in a family	0.9	7.8	4.2	15.9	20.8	18.0
average number						
Average number of children aged 0 to 14 per family with children	3.2	2.2	2.8	2.3	2.1	2.2
Education and knowledge of official languages, women¹						
percent						
Does not have a high school diploma	71.5	26.7	47.0	56.1	44.4	50.8
Has a university degree	2.2	25.6	15.0	7.5	11.3	9.2
Knows at least one official language	16.7	66.5	44.0	67.1	68.2	67.6
Education and knowledge of official languages, men¹						
Does not have a high school diploma	70.6	36.2	51.6	47.9	31.5	39.8
Has a university degree	2.3	23.5	14.0	10.8	13.2	11.9
Knows at least one official language	21.2	67.2	46.6	69.1	83.2	76.0

1. Among the population aged 20 to 59.

Source: Statistics Canada, Census of Population, 2016.

with a university degree and a higher proportion of individuals without a high school diploma) than privately sponsored refugees. Less than 3% of government-assisted Syrian refugees held a university degree, compared with approximately 25% of those who were privately sponsored. In addition, about 20% of government-assisted Syrian refugees knew English or French, compared with 67% of privately sponsored refugees.

Several aspects of the privately sponsored Syrian refugees' profile—such as age and sex composition, the percentage of women in the 15 to 29 cohort, and the number of children per couple with children—more closely resembled those of refugees from other countries. On other aspects (such as education), privately sponsored Syrian refugees differed not only from government-assisted Syrian refugees, but also from other refugees. Privately sponsored Syrian

refugees, in particular, were more likely to have a university degree than refugees from other countries, even those who were privately sponsored.

By contrast, the profile of government-assisted Syrian refugees (larger families, lower levels of education and lower levels of proficiency in English or French) differed considerably from that of privately sponsored Syrian refugees and refugees from other countries, including those who were government assisted. These results are consistent with the fact that government-assisted refugees were admitted based on pre-established vulnerability selection criteria, as mentioned earlier.

Charts 4a and 4b, which show the age structure for the government-assisted and privately sponsored Syrian refugees, illustrate the

differences between both populations. It also shows that the distinct dual pyramid shape of charts 1a and 1b was largely driven by the particular age profile of the government-assisted Syrian refugee population.

Syrian refugees are distributed across Canada

At the time of the 2016 Census, one-third of Syrian refugees (8,300) were living in the Montréal and Toronto CMAs (Table 5), compared with 29% of refugees from other countries. At the provincial level, Ontario had the largest number of Syrian refugees (10,210), followed by Quebec (5,295). In some regions, Syrian refugees represented a larger share of the refugee population. For example, 78% of refugees who landed during the period and were living in the Atlantic provinces at the

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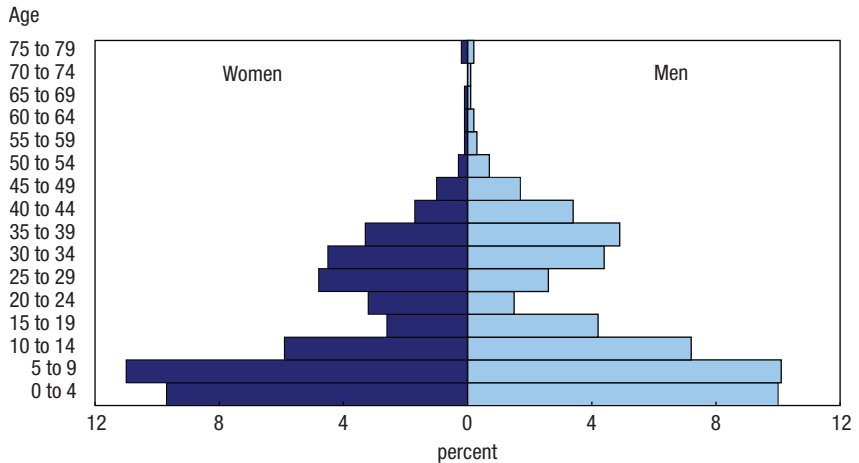
time of the census were of Syrian origin, a proportion almost identical to the Syrian refugee population in the Montréal CMA. In the rest of Quebec, Syrians represented 34% of refugees admitted between January 1, 2015, and May 10, 2016. Elsewhere, the percentage of Syrian refugees ranged from 54% to 68%.

The year of admission and admission category of Syrian refugees also varied greatly from one region to another. In the Atlantic provinces, the majority of Syrian refugees were government assisted (86%) and were admitted in 2016 (93%). By contrast, in the CMA of Montréal, just over 5% of Syrian refugees were government assisted and nearly one-half (47%) were admitted in 2015. In the rest of Quebec, the profile was similar to the Atlantic provinces: 77% of Syrian refugees were assisted by the government and close to 95% were admitted in 2016. In other regions, the results by year of arrival were closer to the Canadian average.

CMAs other than Montréal and Toronto also received Syrian refugees.²⁶ The five main CMAs after Montréal and Toronto were Ottawa–Gatineau (1,705 Syrian refugees), Vancouver (1,680), Calgary (1,220), Edmonton (1,200) and Hamilton (1,150). In most CMAs, except Montréal, Toronto and Calgary, most refugees were government assisted. All Syrian refugees in Fredericton and Moncton were government assisted, as were more than 90% of those in Regina, Saint John and Québec.

Chart 4a

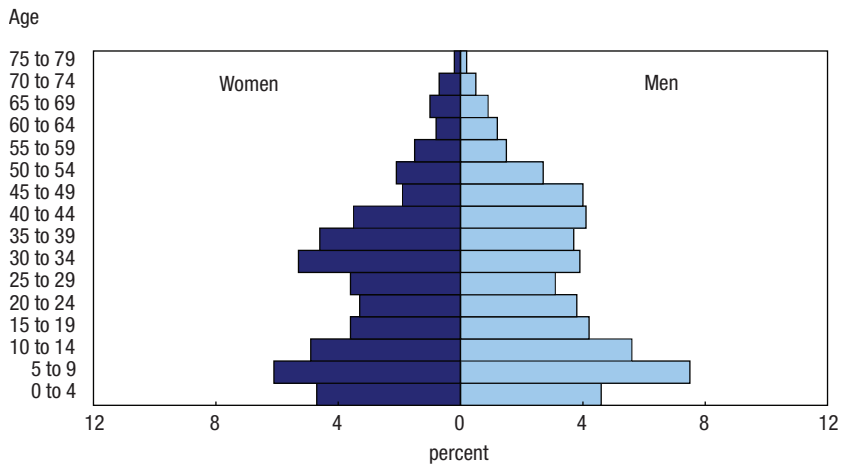
Age pyramid (age at the time of admission) of government-assisted Syrian refugees who resettled in Canada between January 1, 2015, and May 10, 2016



Source: Statistics Canada, Census of Population, 2016.

Chart 4b

Age pyramid (age at the time of admission) of privately sponsored Syrian refugees who resettled in Canada between January 1, 2015, and May 10, 2016



Source: Statistics Canada, Census of Population, 2016.

Table 5
Region of residence on May 10, 2016, of refugees resettled in Canada between January 1, 2015, and May 10, 2016

Region of residence	Number of Syrian refugees	Number of refugees from other countries	Distribution of Syrian refugees	Distribution of refugees from other countries	Proportion of Syrian refugees in the total refugee population	Proportion of Syrian refugees who were government-assisted refugees	Proportion of Syrian refugees admitted in 2015
	number				percent		
Atlantic provinces	2,670	765	10.7	4.9	77.7	85.8	6.6
Montréal census metropolitan area	4,265	1,195	17.0	7.7	78.1	5.4	46.5
Rest of Quebec	1,030	1,970	4.1	12.6	34.3	76.7	5.3
Toronto census metropolitan area	4,035	3,285	16.1	21.1	55.1	30.9	37.4
Rest of Ontario	6,175	2,910	24.6	18.7	68.0	65.3	27.5
Prairies	4,735	4,055	18.9	26.0	53.9	64.8	24.0
British Columbia	2,125	1,410	8.5	9.1	60.1	73.6	29.4
Canada	25,035	15,580	100.0	100.0	61.6	52.8	28.7

Source: Statistics Canada, Census of Population, 2016.

Syrian refugees had a lower employment rate than refugees from other countries admitted during the same period

Entering the labour force²⁷ is an important step for recent immigrants in general, and for refugees in particular, because they face significant challenges due to their specific socioeconomic characteristics²⁸ and often tragic events that led them to leave their country.²⁹

In 2016, Syrian refugees were less likely to be employed than refugees from other countries. In particular, 24% of Syrian men were employed at the time of the census, compared with 39% of refugees from other countries. This trend is also observed among women, with 8% of female Syrian refugees reporting being employed in 2016, compared with 17% of female refugees from other countries.

Employment rates varied considerably by year of admission. Among government-assisted Syrian refugees aged 20 to 59 who were admitted in 2016, the employment

rate³⁰ was 0.7% for women and 1.9% for men. These employment rates were lower than those of government-assisted refugees from other countries who were admitted in the same year. Among privately sponsored refugees admitted the same year, the employment rate gap between Syrian refugees and refugees from other countries was smaller (charts 5a and 5b).

The employment rate was higher for refugees admitted in 2015, which shows that the duration of residence has an impact on the labour force participation rate. This varied, however, depending on the refugee category. Among government-assisted Syrian refugees, employment rates were slightly higher for those admitted in 2015 than those admitted in 2016. In contrast, among privately sponsored refugees, those admitted in 2015 had significantly higher employment rates than those admitted in 2016.

As mentioned previously, Syrian refugees and refugees from other countries had different socioeconomic characteristics, particularly their duration of residence in Canada,³¹ which

may explain the differences in employment rates between them. To what extent can these differences explain the employment rate differences between the two populations?

In order to answer this question, a logistic regression model with employment as the dependent variable was estimated. Independent variables included the source country and other variables that can have an impact on employment, like the admission period,³² the refugee category, knowledge of official languages, and sociodemographic characteristics such as level of education, age, marital status and region of residence.

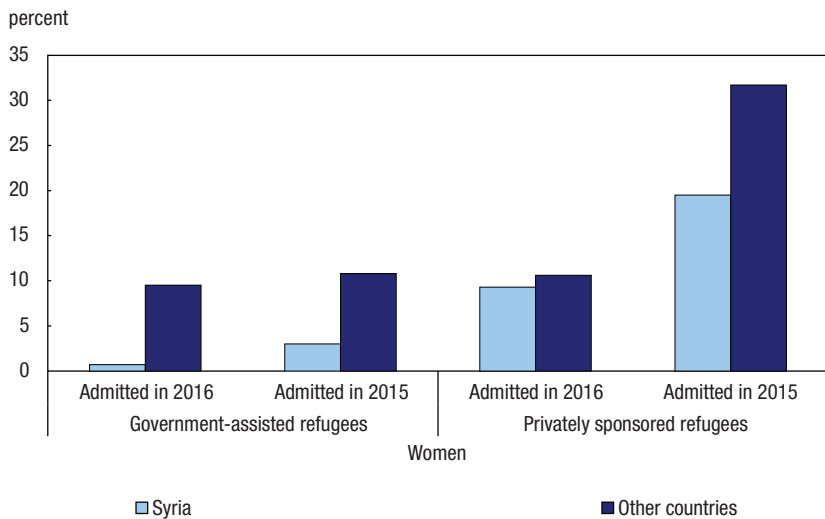
Several versions of the model were estimated. The first model (the reference model) includes only the source country as independent variable, in two categories: Syrian and other countries. The remaining models include other independent variables that can also affect the employment rate.³³ Results for all models are presented in Table 6 and are expressed as predicted probabilities.

Adding variables to the model reduced the gap between the employment rate of Syrian refugees and refugees from other countries, particularly for women. The inclusion of the admission period had the most effect on the employment rate (Model 2), as it reduced the employment rate difference from 9 to 3 percentage points for women, and from 15 to 5 percentage points for men. The predicted employment rate of Syrian women was not statistically different than that of refugees from other countries, which suggests that there is no difference in predicted employment rates when the admission period is taken into account. For men, the gap was smaller, but remained significant. These results reflect the fact that the Syrian refugees were admitted to Canada more recently than the refugees from other countries. At the time of the 2016 Census, Syrian refugees had been in the country for an average of four months, while refugees from other countries had been here for an average of eight months.

Controlling for knowledge of official languages also narrowed the employment rate gap between Syrian refugees and refugees from other countries, but to a lesser extent (Model 4). Controlling for the refugee category, however, widened this gap. This result is explained by the fact that there was a higher percentage of privately sponsored refugees aged 20 to 59 from Syria than from other countries (55% versus 47%).

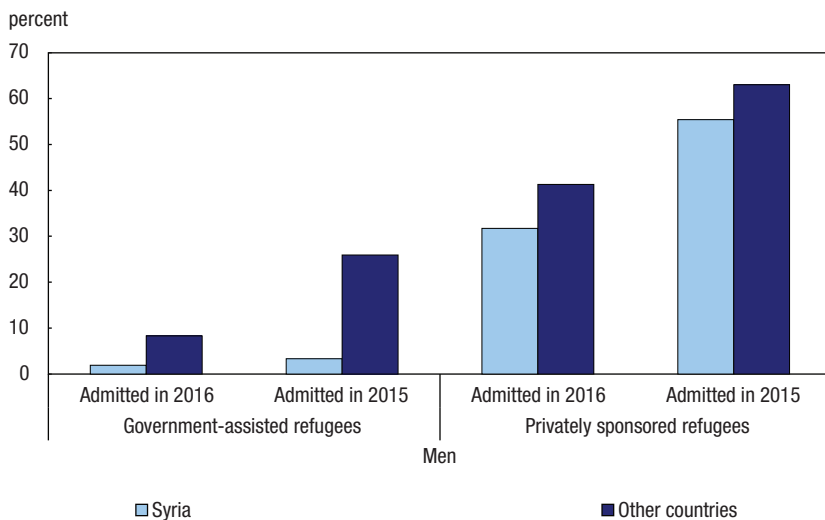
The other models show the results with additional explanatory variables. In each case, the employment rate gap was smaller than in the reference model. In the full model for women (Model 7), the employment gap

Chart 5a
Employment rate of female refugees who resettled in Canada between January 1, 2015, and May 10, 2016, by source country, year of admission and refugee category, population aged 20 to 59 in 2016



Source: Statistics Canada, Census of Population, 2016.

Chart 5b
Employment rate of male refugees who resettled in Canada between January 1, 2015, and May 10, 2016, by source country, year of admission and refugee category, population aged 20 to 59 in 2016



Source: Statistics Canada, Census of Population, 2016.

Table 6
Predicted probability of employment among female and male refugees who resettled in Canada between January 1, 2015, and May 10, 2016 (results from various model specifications), 2016

	Women		Men	
	Other countries	Syria	Other countries	Syria
Variables used in the model	predicted probabilities			
(1) Country of origin	16.9	8.0*	39.0	24.2*
(2) Country of origin and admission period	13.2	10.4	32.9	28.4*
(3) Country of origin and refugee category	18.0	7.8*	40.1	23.2*
(4) Country of origin and knowledge of official languages	14.9	9.6	33.9	26.5*
(5) Country of origin, admission period, refugee category and knowledge of official languages	14.7	10.1*	33.7	26.4*
(6) Country of origin, age, marital status, education and region of residence	16.1	10.1*	35.4	25.5*
(7) Full model	14.1	12.5	32.2	27.4*
(8) Full model without admission period	16.0	10.6	35.9	24.8*

* significantly different from the estimate for refugees from other countries ($p < 0.05$).

Source: Statistics Canada, Census of Population, 2016.

was not statistically significant; predicted probabilities were 13% for Syrian refugees and 14% for refugees from other countries. This result means that, for women, the employment rate gap between Syrian refugees and refugees from other countries is attributable to differences in their characteristics. For men, however, the gap persisted even after controlling for all factors, with the predicted employment rate of Syrian refugees (27%) remaining lower than the rate of refugees from other countries (32%).

Conclusion

In 2015, the Canadian government announced a plan to resettle 25,000 Syrian refugees in Canada. The goal of this paper was to provide a profile of the Syrian refugees who resettled in Canada in 2015 and the first few months of 2016.

In Canada, more than one-half of Syrian refugees were government assisted, while the others were privately sponsored. The government-assisted Syrian refugees were characterized by

lower levels of education and knowledge of official languages than the privately sponsored refugees and also government-assisted refugees from other countries, which can be explained by the fact that the government selection criteria prioritized families with children and more vulnerable refugees.

Government-assisted Syrian refugees had a relatively low employment rate compared with privately sponsored refugees and refugees from other countries, regardless of whether they were government assisted or privately sponsored.

However, the gap between the employment rate of Syrian refugees and refugees from other countries is due in great part to the admission period, for both women and men. Unlike refugees from other countries, most Syrian refugees were admitted in early 2016, meaning that many of them had been in the country for only a few weeks at the time of the census. Lower levels of education and knowledge of official languages are also significant underlying factors.

That said, there is still a gap between the male Syrian refugees' employment rate and that of male refugees from other countries. Consequently, other characteristics that were not part of the census may also be explanatory factors. It is possible, for example, that the Syrian refugees suffered severe trauma during the war, which could have hindered their initial entry into the Canadian labour force.

Over time, the differences between the Syrian refugees and the refugees from other countries could disappear, but the government-assisted Syrian refugees' specific conditions could continue to hinder their future economic integration. Follow-up work with this population is recommended, and will be possible over the next few years using the Canadian Longitudinal Immigration Database and the next census in Canada, in 2021.

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Data sources, methods and definitions

Data sources

Data from the 2016 Census of Population were used in this analysis. For additional information about the census, immigrant admission categories and refugee categories, see the [Guide to the Census of Population, 2016](#) (Statistics Canada Catalogue no. 98-304-X) and the [Dictionary, Census of Population, 2016](#) (Statistics Canada Catalogue no. 98-301-X). The refugee category definitions used in this study can be found in the Definitions section below. For specific information about the quality and comparability of census data on employment, see the [Labour Reference Guide, Census of Population, 2016](#) (Statistics Canada catalogue no. 98-500-X). Data from the 2016 Longitudinal Immigration Database (IMDB) are also used to examine the income situation in 2016 of refugees who were admitted to Canada in November and December 2015.

Definitions

Resettled refugee: This category includes immigrants who were selected abroad while outside their home country or country where they normally lived and who were granted permanent resident status on the basis of a well-founded fear of returning to that country. The United Nations Refugee Agency, another designated referral organization or a private sponsor referred them for resettlement in Canada. This category includes persons who had a well-founded fear of persecution for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership in particular social group or political opinion (Geneva Convention refugees),

as well as persons who have been seriously and personally affected by civil war or armed conflict, or have suffered a massive violation of human rights.

Government-assisted refugee: This category includes immigrants who were selected abroad while outside their home country or country where they normally lived, who were granted permanent resident status on the basis of a well-founded fear of returning to that country and who received resettlement assistance from the federal government.

Privately sponsored refugee: This category includes immigrants who were selected abroad while outside their home country or country where they normally lived, who were granted permanent resident status on the basis of a well-founded fear of returning to that country and who were privately sponsored by organizations, groups of Canadian citizens and/or permanent residents, or who had the funds to support themselves and any dependants after they arrived in Canada. Private sponsors in Canada referred them for resettlement in Canada.

Blended visa office-referred refugee: This category includes immigrants who were selected abroad while outside their home country or country where they normally lived, who were granted permanent resident status on the basis of a well-founded fear of returning to that country and who received resettlement assistance from both the federal government and private sponsors.

Factors associated with employment among refugees

This section presents the results of logistic regressions for four refugee groups: female Syrian refugees; female refugees from other countries; male Syrian refugees; and male refugees from other countries. The goal is to identify the characteristics most closely associated with the employment rate of Syrian refugees, and to see if these characteristics are similar to factors affecting the employment rate of other refugees.

The models include seven independent variables: admission period (three categories); refugee category, which specifies whether the refugee was government assisted or privately sponsored; age group at the time of the census (three categories); marital status (three categories); level of education (three categories); knowledge of official languages (yes or no); and area of residence (five categories). The results are presented in Table 7 and are expressed as predicted probabilities.

Three variables were strongly associated with the employment rate: the admission period, refugee category and knowledge of official languages. The results associated with the admission period were similar for all four refugee groups. At the time of the 2016 Census, the predicted employment rate of refugees who were admitted during the first four months of 2015 was two to three times that of refugees who were admitted during the same period in 2016, even after controlling for other factors. In all four models, the employment rate increases as the amount of time spent in the country increases.

Government-assisted refugees had a lower predicted employment rate than those who were privately sponsored. For Syrian men, the gap between the two refugee categories was particularly pronounced (37% for privately sponsored refugees versus 3% for government-assisted refugees).

Factors associated with employment among refugees

Table 7
Predicted probability of employment among female and male refugees who resettled in Canada between January 1, 2015, and May 10, 2016, by selected characteristics, 2016

	Women		Men	
	Syria	Other countries	Syria	Other countries
	predicted probabilities			
Admission period				
January 1 to May 10, 2016 (ref.)	6.1	10.9	18.4	23.7
May 11 to December 31, 2015	11.3*	16.3	28.3*	39.9*
January 1 to May 10, 2015	16.5*	30.3*	36.9*	46.0*
Refugee category				
Privately sponsored (ref.)	11.1*	28.7*	36.7*	53.0*
Government-assisted	2.5	11.4	2.7	23.6
Age at time of census				
20 to 34 (ref.)	10.3	20.3	25.7	39.9
35 to 44	4.9*	17.8	20.3	38.6
45 to 59	10.2	18.5	22.5	28.3*
Marital status				
Never married (ref.)	14.0	26.6	25.6	34.0
Married or in a relationship	6.7*	13.2*	23.1	40.0
Separated, divorced, widowed	5.6*	18.9	8.5	38.8
Education				
No diploma (ref.)	7.5	17.3	26.7	37.4
High school, apprenticeship	8.6	20.7	22.9	36.7
College or university	9.9	20.9	20.4*	38.8
Official languages				
No (ref.)	3.9	10.6	18.9	27.3
Yes	11.2*	21.8*	25.7*	41.3*
Region of residence				
Ontario (ref.)	12.4	18.0	27.2	36.7
Atlantic	11.9	18.0	7.2*	30.9
Quebec	5.3*	12.3	21.3*	19.9*
Prairies	9.0	23.8	19.6*	48.8*
British Columbia	9.5	26.0	26.1	42.9

*significantly different from the reference category (ref.) (p < 0.05).

Source: Statistics Canada, Census of Population, 2016.

While knowing an official language was associated with a higher employment rate for all four groups, there is little association between education and employment. Both of these results are consistent with the fact that knowing an official language is an asset for entering the labour force upon landing, while level of education becomes an asset only after having lived in the country for a few years.

The impact of some variables was different for men and women. Married women, in particular, were at least two times more likely to be employed than women who had never married, a result that held for both for Syrian women and those from other countries. Also, geographical differences seemed to have more of an effect on the employment rate of male refugees. Among Syrian men, for example, those living in Quebec or the Atlantic provinces had lower predicted employment rates than those living in Ontario.

2016 income of refugees admitted in November and December 2015

In an effort to provide additional information on the financial situation of the Syrian refugees who resettled in Canada, this study presents statistics on their total income using the Longitudinal Immigration Database (IMDB). The analysis focuses on refugees aged 20 to 59 who were admitted in November and December 2015 and had been living in Canada for 12 to 14 months as of December 31, 2016. For comparison purposes, the results are presented for both Syrian refugees and refugees from other countries who were admitted during the same period. Total income consists of earnings (wages and self-employment income), government transfers, and other sources (such as investment income).

Among government-assisted refugees, the average total income of Syrian refugees was slightly higher than that of refugees from other countries. In 2016, Syrian refugees reported an average total income of \$20,000, compared with \$17,700 for refugees from other countries (Table 8). The opposite was observed among privately sponsored refugees: those from other countries reported a slightly higher average total income (\$18,200) than Syrian refugees (\$15,600).

Among men, the differences in income between Syrian refugees and refugees from other countries were more pronounced. Government-assisted Syrian men reported an average total income of \$20,400, compared with \$16,400 for

their counterparts from other countries. Privately sponsored Syrian men reported an average income of \$17,000, compared with \$21,000 for their counterparts from other countries. Among women, however, the differences in income reported by refugees from Syria and those from other countries were less pronounced.

Government transfers represented the largest source of income of government-assisted refugees from both Syria and other countries. For example, 96% of the total income of government-assisted Syrian refugees came from government transfers, compared with 83% for government-assisted refugees from other countries. Reflecting their higher degree of labour market participation, the income of privately sponsored refugees primarily came from earnings—but a significant proportion of their income also came from government transfers (30% for Syrian refugees and 28% for refugees from other countries).

Over time, the employment and income situation of refugees could change rapidly as they will gradually improve their language proficiency and skills. The next releases of the IMDB will provide more insights into the situation of Syrian refugees.

Table 8

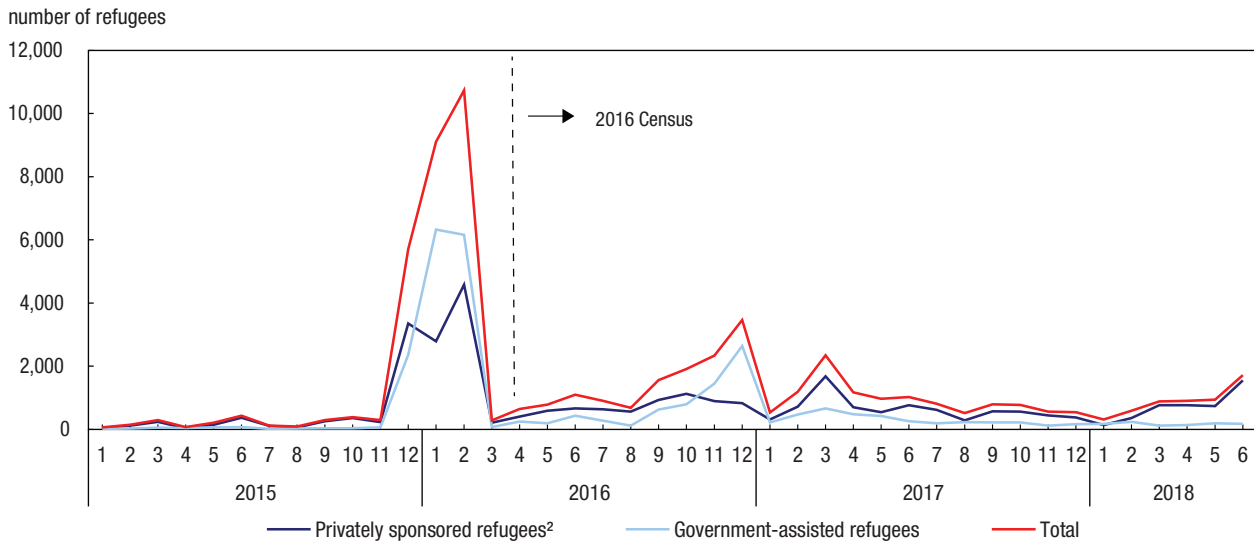
Total average 2016 income of resettled refugees admitted in November and December 2015, by source country, sex and admission category, population aged 20 to 59 as of December 31, 2016

	Syria		Other countries	
	Government-assisted refugees	Privately sponsored refugees	Government-assisted refugees	Privately sponsored refugees
	dollars			
All	20,000	15,600	17,700	18,200
Men	20,400	17,700	16,400	21,000
Women	19,500	13,200	19,100	14,600

Source: Statistics Canada, Immigration Longitudinal Database, 2016.

Supplementary information

Chart A1
Monthly number of Syrian refugees¹ who resettled in Canada between January 1, 2015, and June 30, 2018



1. In this chart, a Syrian refugee is defined as a person who was born in Syria or who has Syrian citizenship.
 2. The privately sponsored refugee category includes refugees who were admitted through the Blended Visa Office–Referred Program.
Source: Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada (IRCC), permanent resident records.

Table A1
Main census metropolitan areas or census agglomerations of residence on May 10, 2016, of Syrian refugees who resettled in Canada between January 1, 2015, and May 10, 2016

Census metropolitan area or census agglomeration of residence	Number of Syrian refugees	Number of refugees from other countries	Proportion of Syrian refugees who were government-assisted refugees	Distribution of Syrian refugees
				percent
Montréal	4,260	1,195	5.5	17.0
Toronto	4,035	3,285	30.9	16.1
Ottawa–Gatineau	1,705	855	65.7	6.8
Vancouver	1,680	1,260	81.5	6.7
Calgary	1,220	875	42.2	4.9
Edmonton	1,200	1,020	61.7	4.8
Hamilton	1,150	440	80.9	4.6
London	1,095	385	79.0	4.4
Kitchener–Cambridge–Waterloo	1,080	565	63.0	4.3
Halifax	805	220	89.4	3.2
Windsor	690	535	83.3	2.8
Saskatoon	560	275	89.3	2.2
Winnipeg	560	815	69.6	2.2
Regina	490	415	93.9	2.0
Fredericton	455	125	100.0	1.8
Saint John	410	50	98.8	1.6

Results from the 2016 Census: Syrian refugees who resettled in Canada in 2015 and 2016

Table A1

Main census metropolitan areas or census agglomerations of residence on May 10, 2016, of Syrian refugees who resettled in Canada between January 1, 2015, and May 10, 2016

	Number of Syrian refugees	Number refugees from other countries	Proportion of Syrian refugees who were government-assisted refugees	Distribution of Syrian refugees
		number		percent
St. John's	330	105	71.2	1.3
Moncton	285	165	100.0	1.1
Québec	255	535	98.0	1.0
Rest of the country	2,760	2,460	45.1	11.0
Canada	25,035	15,580	52.8	100.0

Source: Statistics Canada, Census of Population, 2016.

Notes

1. See Erdogan (2015), UNHCR (2016).
2. See UNHCR (2018). The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees includes internally displaced people in its definition of refugee.
3. According to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, at the end of 2017 there were 68.5 million forcibly displaced people worldwide (see UNHCR 2018).
4. See Statistics Canada (2017).
5. As of June 30, 2018, 58,160 Syrian refugees had landed in Canada since January 1, 2015, according to Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada (IRCC) information on permanent residents. For more information about this, see Chart A1 in the Supplementary information section.
6. See Lowrie (2017); The Canadian Press (2018).
7. See the [Data sources, methods and definitions](#) section for detailed definitions of refugee categories. There is another significant refugee category: protected people in Canada and their dependants abroad. They accounted for 1,200 (or 4.6%) of the Syrian refugees who landed in Canada in 2015 or 2016 and who lived in Canada at the time of the 2016 Census. This category includes “immigrants who applied for refugee protection status while in Canada and who were granted permanent status on the basis of a well-founded fear of returning to their country of origin as well as immigrants who were granted permanent resident status as their family members abroad.” See the [Statistics Canada 2016 Census Dictionary](#) for additional details.
8. The income situation in 2016 of Syrian refugees who were admitted in late 2015 is also briefly examined in the section [2016 income of refugees admitted in November and December 2015](#).
9. See Molnar (2017).
10. See Government of Canada (2015a). Before the plan was announced, Canada had already welcomed approximately 2,000 mainly privately sponsored Syrian refugees in 2015 (Statistics Canada 2017).
11. See Government of Canada (2015b).
12. See Government of Canada (2015b); IRCC (2016).
13. See Behrakis (2015).
14. The plan indicated that government-assisted refugees would be paired with communities throughout Canada.
15. See IRCC (2016); Agrawal and Zeitouny (2017).
16. Research has helped identify two factors that can explain the difference in employment integration between the two refugee categories. The first factor, of a more general nature, focuses on how sponsors help privately sponsored refugees. The second factor is specific to recently admitted Syrian refugees.
17. See Neuwirth and Clark (1981); Beiser (2003); Kaida and Hou (2018).
18. See Agrawal and Zeitouny (2017). The study focused specifically on Syrian refugees who settled in Alberta.
19. In this paper, Syrian refugees are defined as those who were born in Syria or who have Syrian citizenship. Adding the citizenship criterion makes it possible to identify many children who were born outside Syria but have Syrian citizenship. Among children aged 0 to 4, 1,300 with Syrian citizenship were born outside Syria, representing 35% of all Syrian children in that age group who were admitted during the study period. This suggests that most of them must have been born in a refugee camp: 60% of the 1,300 children were born in Jordan, 30% in Lebanon and nearly 7% in Turkey—the three main host countries for Syrian refugees since 2011. Other countries of origin examined in this paper were defined similarly.
20. The immigrant admission category was added to the census for the first time by linking the administrative immigration records kept by Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada for immigrants admitted since 1980.
21. There are some socioeconomic portraits of Syrian refugees, but they are generally based on data from Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada (IRCC, 2015; Friesen, 2016). A more detailed picture is possible with census data.
22. For the rest of the article, “privately sponsored refugees” includes those who were welcomed through the Blended Visa Office-Referred Program.
23. See Bonikowska et al. (2015).
24. According to a study by Houle and Yssaad (2010), a low proportion of refugees obtain recognition for their foreign academic credentials or work experience. Among the cohort of immigrants who landed in 2000/2001, four years after landing in Canada, 11% of refugees had their foreign credentials recognized and 14% had their foreign work experience recognized, compared with 28% and 39%, respectively, for immigrants overall.

25. Due to the small sample size of refugees from other countries aged 20 to 59, refugees from other countries are regrouped in the rest of the paper.
26. See [Table A1](#) in the Supplementary information section.
27. The income of refugees could not be examined with census data. In the Census, income data corresponds to the year 2015, prior to the arrival of many of the refugees. However, the employment data show whether individuals were employed during the census reference week.
28. See Statistics Canada (2003, 2005a); Yssaad (2012).
29. See Portes and Böröcz (1989). The data from the 2016 Census do not provide insight into the income of immigrants or refugees admitted in 2015 or 2016 since those populations may not have had a complete year of applicable income.
30. The employment rate is calculated by dividing the number of employed people by the total population among those aged 20 to 59.
31. Refugees admitted in 2015 had a higher employment rate than those admitted in 2016 (see charts 5a and 5b), which stems from the fact that individuals are more likely to be employed the longer they have been in the country, and that even a few months can make a difference (Statistics Canada 2005b). Note that 68% of Syrian refugees aged 20 to 59 were admitted in 2016, compared with 25% of refugees from other countries.
32. Since the duration of residence in Canada is strongly correlated with the employment rate, three admission periods were defined by combining the year of admission (2015 or 2016) and the place of residence on May 10, 2015—one year before the census—which was based on the mobility question in the census. This takes into account the fact that refugees from other countries have been in Canada longer than the Syrian refugees, who arrived mainly in December 2015 and in the first few months of 2016. Among the population aged 20 to 59, 6% of the resettled Syrian refugees were admitted between January 1, 2015, and May 10, 2015, compared with 34% of refugees from other countries.
33. For a detailed analysis of factors affecting the employment rate of refugees, see the section [Factors associated with employment](#).

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