

Supporting School Integration for Syrian Refugee Students

PRESENTED BY:

**SASKATCHEWAN SWIS COORDINATION (SSC)
PROGRAM**



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Life pre-war

Syria is a country in the Middle East, along the eastern shore of the Mediterranean Sea.

Full of ancient mosques, and castles built during the Crusades. Civilization in Syria goes back thousands of years, but the country as it exists today is very young. Its borders were drawn by European colonial powers in the 1920s.

According to the UN, more than 200,000 Syrians have lost their lives in four-and-a-half years of armed conflict. Every day refugees stream across the borders of Syria into the neighbouring nations of Jordan, Lebanon, Turkey and Iraq trying to find their way to safety.

Syria Geographic Map



Demographic

Population : Syria is very diverse, both ethnically and religiously.

18 million as of 2014, in addition to 4 million refugees

Racial groups:

- Arabs
- Armenians
- Assyrians
- Circassians (from Caucasus)
- Greeks
- Kurds
- Turkmen

Religions

Islam(87%), Christianity(10%), Druzizm(3%)

- Sunni(Arabs/Kurds/Circassians)
- Shia
- Christian
- Alawite
- Ismaili
- Druze

Culture

- In Syrian culture children are highly valued and are seen as a blessing from God. The more children one has, the more fortunate one is considered. The bond between mother and son (especially the oldest son) is often particularly strong.
- The family is the heart of Syrian social life. Frequent visits and exchanges of invitations for meals among family members are integral to daily living.

Culture

Syrians use Ramadan as a time to become spiritually renewed and to practice self-control by spending extra time in prayer. In Ramadan each day's fast is broken with an evening meal called *iftar*.

This meal begins in silence and is consumed rapidly. *Eid al-Fitr*, the final breaking of the Ramadan fast, entails the consumption of large quantities of food, sweets in particular. Food is also a central element at weddings, parties, and other festivities.

Education system in Syria

Education is compulsory through grades

Languages of instruction: Arabic(English/ French subject)

Control is centralized with the Ministry of Education that determines the curriculum

School Divisions:

Primary education:6 years

Middle education:3 years

Secondary education:3 years

Leaving homeland, asylum

Every day refugees stream across the borders of Syria into the neighbouring nations of Jordan, Lebanon, Turkey and Iraq trying to find their way to safety.

More than **3.2 million** registered Syrian refugees are living in neighboring countries.

Some **10.8 million** people inside Syria are in need of humanitarian aid.

(Source: UNHCR, OCHA)

<http://www.irusa.org/emergencies/syrian-humanitarianrelief/>

Leaving homeland cont,

According to the UN, more than 200,000 Syrians have lost their lives in four-and-a-half years of armed conflict.

The journey that brings individual Syrian families to safety may differ greatly, but can often be traumatic. It can take a tremendous effort just to survive, and family members may get separated or go missing. Some may have died along the way. Those who eventually make it to safety are survivors who tend to have strong coping skills. They have mainly come from refugee camps in neighbouring countries of asylum such as Lebanon, Jordan and Turkey.

Experience from the war

Violence (as witnesses, victims, and/or perpetrators)

Lack of food, water, and shelter

Physical injuries, infections, and diseases

Torture

Forced labor

Sexual assault

Lack of medical care

Loss of loved ones

Disruption in or lack of access to schooling

School age children

6.5 million children have been affected by the crisis—more than half of Syrian children are no longer attending school.

School-age children coming from Syria have usually had many years of lost or interrupted schooling.

Those Syrian children (especially girls) who have gone to school in asylum countries may have been targets for bullying, violence and extreme prejudice.

Meanwhile, children who were born in the camps may have health issues and difficulties caused by inadequate prenatal care, poor nutrition and environmental factors.

Children and impact of war

Syrian children have lost loved ones, suffered injuries, and witnessed violence and brutality.

They are at risk of becoming ill, malnourished, abused or exploited.

Furthermore, as many as 14,000 Syrian schools have been damaged, destroyed, or occupied since 2011.

According to UNICEF, the decline in education for Syrian children is the sharpest in the history of the region. Syrian children also face daily challenges, as their caregivers deal with the consequences of war and displacement and are unable to be as supportive as they once were.

These ongoing stresses can have lasting effects on children's well-being and on their developing brains.

Re-settlement

The UN reports that more than 10 million people have fled Syria since the start of the conflict, most of them women and children. This represents one of the largest refugee movements in recent history.

Coming to a new country has a huge effect on every family member.

Some parents already had strong coping skills and excellent family bonds before the war.

Others were more vulnerable or fragile even before the war caused increased stress and mental health challenges.

Re-settlement challenges

- Cultural shock
- Language barrier
- New education system
- Traumatic stress
- Acculturation stress
- Resettlement stress
- Isolation

Trauma experiences from the war

- The war in Syria has caused over 200,000 documented deaths. Many more have suffered torture, disappeared or been raped, and ISIS has claimed the mass murder of religious minorities.
- Witnessing and being a victim of violence puts a great strain on a person's mental health, and the unusually high level of stress and trauma suffered by Syrian refugees is likely to have long-term consequences.
- People with Post Traumatic Stress Disorder may feel overwhelmed and could have nightmares and difficulty sleeping and eating as they relive past traumas. Many of Syrian families may also be mourning the deaths of loved ones and may continue to feel disoriented, depressed, non-responsive and anxious.

Trauma experiences from the war

- Separation from family
- Loss of community
- Uncertainty about the future
- Harassment by local authorities
- Traveling long distances on foot
- Detention

The journey that brings individual Syrian families to safety may differ greatly, but can often be traumatic. It can take a tremendous effort just to survive, and family members may get separated or go missing

Trauma experiences cont,

School should be sensitive to behavior often exhibited by children who have experienced trauma such as;

- Difficulty concentrating
- Tiredness from lack of sleep
- Avoidance of certain situations
- Irritability, Hyper- alertness, Exaggerated startle responses
- Preoccupation with violence through drawing, in conversation
- Exaggerated worry about harm coming to themselves or others
- Excessive distress about separating from parent

Be aware of:

Things can trigger fear or painful memories among refugee children such as;

- Police officers in schools
- Fire drills, lockdown drills, bells
- Dark hallways
- Unfamiliar celebrations such as Halloween with masks, or firecrackers

How to support refugee students?

- Provide information/orientation about school system for students and their families.
- Explain dismissal bells go off every day.
- Make sure the refugee student knows about upcoming school events.
- Provide information about bus routes and transportation.
- Encourage group work and peer connections.
- Establish comfortable and predictable routine that is posted.
- provide a tour of the school and grounds, possibly supported by a visual aid, such as a map.

How to support refugee students?

- Establish comfortable and predictable routine about school activities
- Take bullying (including shunning) seriously.
- Deal with any discrimination immediately even if it is not intentional.
- Use group activities to educate/influence children toward classroom inclusion and emotional safety.
- Keep students informed about events at school so they feel included.
- Use consistent messaging about appropriate behaviour.
- Use activities for restoring safety, belonging and competency.

How to support refugee students?

- Use inclusive language (families, parents/carers). All families are diverse and not all children live with a Mum and Dad. Children need the people who look after and care for them to be acknowledged so they can be proud of them and feel like they're welcome in the school. Many children and young people of refugee backgrounds may live with an aunt/uncle, grandparent or another carer.
- Keep in mind that many refugee children were learning the language of their camp host country and now they are trying to learn yet another language here in Canada, so many children will be experiencing language confusion.
- If you have a scheduled guest coming into your sessions, prepare the parent and student ahead of time. Let them know what they can expect and be sensitive to the child's experiences. For example, avoid visits from someone in uniform as they might trigger painful memories.

How to support refugee students?

- Model inclusive practice (displaying books, resources, pamphlets and information in your sessions or classrooms that are relevant to the refugee and migrant communities at the school).
- As settlement worker in school, teacher, or an outside community agency you can offer another perspective, you can advocate for children and families 'at risk', you can offer information about rights and responsibilities, Canadian education system, etc.
- Educate Canadian students about the importance of diversity.
- Involve parents/guardians as much as possible.
- Building competence.

Open hearts and welcoming communities: it's the Canadian way



Welcome Refugees

Resettling refugees is a proud and important part of Canada's humanitarian tradition. It reflects our commitment to Canadians and demonstrates to the world that we have a shared responsibility to help people who are displaced and persecuted.



Welcome Refugees

Syrian refugees will be transported to communities across Canada, where they will begin to build a new life for themselves and their family. They will be provided with immediate, essential services and long-term settlement support to ensure their successful settlement and integration into Canadian society.



Resources;

1- www.apa.org/ethics/code/index.aspx

2- <http://www.cic.gc.ca/english/refugees/outside/resettle-gov.asp>

3- http://knowledgex.camh.net/amhspecialists/specialized_treatment/trauma_treatment/Pages/treat_simple_PTSD.aspx

4- <http://www.trauma-pages.org/>

5- <http://s3.amazonaws.com/inee-assets/resources>

6- Supporting Refugee Children: Strategies for educators (J. Stewart)

7- http://knowledgex.camh.net/amhspecialists/specialized_treatment/trauma_treatment/Pages/treat_simple_PTSD.aspx

8- <http://www.trauma-pages.org/>

9- http://knowledgex.camh.net/amhspecialists/specialized_treatment/trauma_treatment/Pages/treat_simple_PTSD.aspx

10- <http://www.trauma-pages.org/>

11- <http://www.cic.gc.ca/english/refugees/welcome/latest.asp>