

# Government should strengthen Syrian refugee supports

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## NEWS RELEASE

The Standing Senate Committee on Human Rights

July 4, 2016

**Ottawa** - Syrian refugees have urgent financial, mental health and educational needs that the federal government must address.

In February 2016, the government reached its initial goal of resettling 25,000 Syrian refugees. This, however, is only the beginning of a lengthy integration process.

Members of the Senate Committee on Human Rights have been studying the integration of newly-arrived refugees, as well as the challenges faced by various levels of government, by private sponsors and by non-government organizations that provide services to refugees.

The committee will table a full report with recommendations in the fall. However — in light of witnesses' testimony and the urgency of the situation that senators observed firsthand on fact-finding missions in Toronto and Montreal — the committee has made six preliminary observations that demand attention and action.

Witnesses told the committee that the federal government could speed up the integration of Syrian refugees into Canadian society by acting on these observations:

1. Canada Revenue Agency, Employment and Social Development Canada and other government departments could accelerate processing times for the disbursement of child tax benefits to refugees so they do not face undue financial hardship upon their arrival in Canada.
2. Immigration loans for transportation and other expenses could be replaced with grants as they are an economic burden and a source of acute anxiety. Alternatively, Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada (IRCC) could introduce a debt-forgiveness mechanism or interest-free loans.
3. IRCC could increase funding for language-training programs that would be made available to refugees upon their arrival. Childcare could also be provided so parents can attend classes.
4. IRCC could work with other departments as well as provincial and territorial governments to draft a comprehensive plan to address the mental health needs of refugees.
5. IRCC could ensure more equitable treatment of refugees by eliminating different treatment for different categories of refugees with respect to processing times for applications, services provided and loan repayment obligations. This would lead to equal treatment for Syrian refugees who have arrived at different times, for government-assisted and privately-sponsored refugees, and for Syrian and non-Syrian refugees.
6. IRCC could work with provincial and territorial governments and with settlement organizations to ensure adequate programming is available to youth, who face unique challenges in the integration process.

The committee is confident the resettlement program will prove to be a success. However, members of the committee believe the government must act swiftly to offer the tools Syrian refugees need to thrive in Canada.

### Quick Facts

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- Since Nov. 4, 2015, 28,449 Syrian refugees have arrived in Canada, including 15,768 government-assisted refugees, 10,073 privately-sponsored refugees and 2,608 blended visa-office referred refugees.
- Over 300 communities across Canada have welcomed Syrian refugees.
- Senators conducted site visits to the operation of settlement organizations in Toronto and Montreal in addition to holding meetings in Ottawa. They met dozens of witnesses including a number of refugees, government officials and service providers.

### Quotes

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“Canada has welcomed thousands of Syrian refugees with fine words and open arms. These alone are not sufficient to address the very real and very urgent problems that lie ahead. We have listened to refugees still reeling from life in a country riven by war and terror, people who must now make new lives in a new country. Parliament has a responsibility to help these people make Canada home.”

**- Senator Jim Munson, Chair of the committee.**

“The government’s commitment to Syrian refugees cannot end when they arrive in Canada. They come here with so little — they need our help if they are to successfully integrate. The government has the means to put programming in place that will make an already difficult task less onerous. We hope they will act swiftly to ensure the resettlement program is a success.”

**- Senator Salma Ataullahjan, Deputy Chair of the committee.**

### **Associated Links**

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Click to [read about the committee’s fact-finding mission](#) and watch a short video.

### **For more information, please contact:**

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