

Refugees are not unique to the twentieth century, and refugee resettlement has been a part of Canada's history since its inception. Nonetheless, for geographically isolated North America, institutions and policies reflecting a formal role in the world refugee problem have been a recent development. While countries such as Britain and Denmark have had councils for refugees since the early 1950s, Canada had no such national body until the first meeting of the Standing Conference of Canadian Organizations Concerned for Refugees in 1977, and no long-term legislative recognition of the global refugee problem and her ability to assist through resettlement until the inclusion in 1976 of the sponsorship programme in the new Immigration Act.

As Canada's role as a country of resettlement grows and our policies and practices evolve, it is useful to understand other countries' experiences in refuge resettlement. Of the major resettlement countries around the world (see Statistical Survey, page 8), many differ widely from Canada - Switzerland in its resettlement of handicapped refugees, the Scandinavian countries in their large-scale fundraising, African countries in their dual role as countries of first asylum and of permanent resettlement, etc.

This article is the first in a series designed to give an overview of this variety of resettlement policies and experiences around the world.

FRANCE: A CENTRALIZED SYSTEM

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The number of refugees presently living in France is in the order of 195,000. This total includes around 75,000 Europeans, 6,000 South Americans, 95,000 nationals from the former colony of Indochina and 4,000 Africans. Most of the refugees of European origin (Russians, Poles, Armenians, Spaniards and others) have been settled in France for a long time, but more arrive each year. The influx of South Americans dates primarily from the 1973 coup in Chile; that of Indochinese from May 1975; and that of Africans has developed throughout more recent years.

The organization that currently works to settle refugees in France was set up at the time of the influx of Chileans and other South Americans. In 1975 this organization expanded to assist the Vietnamese, Cambodians and Lao who throughout that year were arriving in France at an average rate of around 1,000 per month.

The most notable advantage of the French system of refugee reception is good coordination between the actions of the government and of private

associations assisting refugees.

The most important of these organizations are CIMADE (The World Council of Churches), le Comité médical pour la santé des migrants, le Comité national d'entraide, the French Red Cross, France Terre d'Asile (FTDA), le Secours Catholique and le Service social d'aide aux émigrants (SSAE).¹ These associations constituted a special committee for the coordination of their efforts.²

Whatever the nationality of refugees, their initial reception and introduction to French life are organized as follows:

The government takes responsibility for the financial support necessary for basic living (accommodation, food, medical care, French language classes, orientation, vocational training, etc.) for a maximum of six months starting from entry into France. However, the government does not concern itself directly with the reception or integration of refugees. It is the private associations that take responsibility for it, with the financial assistance of the government. In general, each association concentrates its efforts in one area of settlement; for example, the French Red Cross handles medical matters, CIMADE language training, etc. Two associations play an especially important role in initial reception: SSAE and FTDA.

SSAE deals with those newcomers who, although still needing social assistance, opt for an "individual solution" and are able to move in with relatives,

¹ FTDA is the only one of these associations that specializes in the problems of refugees. The other associations cited do not concern themselves only with refugees; they carry out equally important functions in other domains. For example, they almost all intervene on behalf of migrant workers.

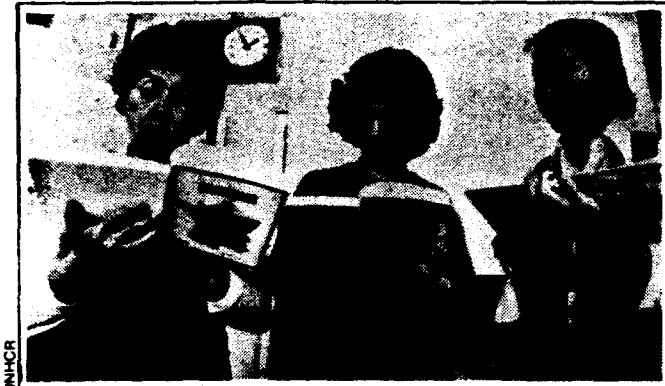
² In general, this organization only works for foreigners who have requested the status of political refugee. This rule involves some exceptions, however, in favour of the nationals from the former colony of Indochina.



4 Indochinese refugees in transit centre near Paris

AROUND THE WORLD

Refugee women learning French



friends, or "guarantors".³ SSAE is, among other things, charged with ensuring that this category of refugees receives the assistance provided by the government.

FTDA handles the reception of those newcomers who, for lack of connections and resources, must resort to the system of collective reception created by FTDA. These refugees are first lodged in "transit centres" outside Paris, run by FTDA.⁴ This stay in the transit centre allows time for compiling a registry of the individuals and their vocational skills, carrying out essential medical exams, distributing information, etc. This first stage lasts around two weeks.

The refugees who have not opted for an "individual solution" (around two-thirds) are then transported by FTDA to the "provisional lodging centres" (CPH) located throughout the provinces. Each centre has an average capacity of around 80 people.⁵ Unlike the transit centres, these CPH are not managed by FTDA but by local associations chosen by FTDA and which work together with it. These associations have the responsibility for finding, for each refugee, his first accommodation and first job. This must be done within the six-month period that marks the limit of the financial aid of the government.

When FTDA notices that an association managing a CPH is finding it increasingly difficult to find jobs or housing for the refugees, it relieves the association of this task and searches in another region for another association capable of running a new CPH. FTDA is thus obliged to modify the geographic distribution of the CPH in response to the realistic possibilities for employment and

³ However, all refugees who arrive in groups coming from the former Indochina, even if they have the possibility of an "individual solution", must remain two weeks in a transit centre for reasons of public health.

⁴ There are currently four transit centres of this kind. Their total capacity is 1,000 people.

⁵ There are currently 60 CPH, with a total capacity of 4,519 people.

housing. It must also reduce or increase the number of these centres and of transit centres according to the size of the influx.

Thanks to its decentralization and flexibility, this system of reception and integration of refugees has functioned, until now, with remarkable effectiveness, in spite of the unemployment which is rife in France. It is this unemployment - as well as the insufficiency of public housing - that poses the most serious obstacle to these efforts. Until the beginning of 1981 these obstacles were relatively well surmounted: the percentage of cases not settled within the six month waiting period remained in the order of 5%. Often this delay was due to illness or social handicaps.

But unfortunately, since January 1981, the percentage of these cases has begun to increase alarmingly; it has now reached 16%. Admittedly, in cases of this kind, the French government has never yet withheld its financial aid, in spite of the limits it itself fixed. But the maintenance of financial assistance does not solve the essential problem: the continuation of the steady influx of refugees is only conceivable if these refugees can create for themselves, without excessive delays, an independent existence in the country which receives them. The worsening of unemployment thus risks sharply reducing the possibilities of refugee resettlement in France at a time when the troubles, the conflicts and the persecutions from which a great many sectors of the Third World suffer would demand, in contrast, that these possibilities grow. □

INTERNATIONAL RESOURCE CENTRE

An International Refugee Integration Resource Centre (IRIRC) has been established in Geneva. Its purpose is to facilitate the sharing of information on refugee resettlement among governments, intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations by cataloguing materials, monitoring research, establishing a network of resource contacts and encouraging them to share data on their work, disseminating information and proposing workshops.

IRIRC is a joint project of the Intergovernmental Committee for Migration (ICM), the International Council of Voluntary Agencies (ICVA) and the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). It is managed by ICVA and housed in the ICVA Secretariat:

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