

You asked for it...

Your CTF has received countless emails, and inquiries regarding refugee allowances, and how they compare with pensioner benefits. The question being asked is: Does a refugee collect more in benefits and allowances than a pensioner, and if so, what is the reasoning behind it?



Refugees in Canada

by Adam Taylor

Like reports of children finding razor blades in their apples on Halloween, or Sasquatch sightings in Manitoba, chalk this one up to urban legend. An examination of this question reveals that misinterpretation of facts has propagated a tall tale.

The fiction begins with a story published by the *Toronto Star* in March 2004, about plans to encourage immigrants to settle in

smaller Canadian cities, rather than the “magnet” cities of Vancouver, Toronto, and Montreal. An immigration official was quoted as saying, “We hope by relocating them all together and resettling them as a whole to the same community, we can create a positive environment to help them integrate into the Canadian society successfully.”

The story went on to say that single refugees are eligible for \$1,890 from the federal government as a “start-up” allowance, coupled with a \$580 monthly social assistance cheque.

Readers of this story added \$1,890 to \$580, and immediately assumed that refugees

You asked for it...

“Readers of this story added \$1,890 to \$580, and immediately assumed that refugees could receive \$2,470 per month, much higher than the \$1,012 maximum available to pensioners through Old Age Assistance and the Guaranteed Income Supplement.”

could receive \$2,470 per month, much higher than the \$1,012 maximum available to pensioners through Old Age Assistance and the Guaranteed Income Supplement.

Toronto Star Ombudsman Don Sellar stated in a column November 27, 2004, “In painful hindsight, those details could have been clearer.” In actuality, the \$1,890 start-up allowance was a one-time payment for basic household needs, such as furnishings, pots and pans, linens, etc. The \$580 monthly allowance is payable only until stable employment has been found.

While this is not likely the first time a news story has been misinterpreted, what followed propelled this story into full-blown urban legend. A reader e-mailed the erroneous information to countless individuals, outraged that a refugee could collect \$2,470 monthly—more than the maximum paid out to pensioners. Next, a letter to the *Toronto Star* editor was published that re-stated the figures and suggested that pensioners should apply as refugees.

Sellar goes on to say that while fact checking of letters to the editor is done, “the occasional doozer gets through [and], that was definitely the case here.” Unfortunately, the misinformation was taken as fact and has grown into

a fiction in fact’s clothing. Sellar concludes by hoping that his column might “dispel a damaging misperception about refugees and pensioners. Please tell your friends.”

Spread the word! The Earth is round, Elvis is dead, and refugees do NOT collect more than pensioners in Canada.■

REFUGEE CLASS IN 2003

Country of last permanent residence	Number of refugees	% of total # of refugees
1. Pakistan	2,868	8.8
2. Colombia	2,818	8.6
3. China	2,536	7.8
4. Afghanistan	2,239	6.9
5. Sri Lanka	2,077	6.4
6. Sudan	1,379	4.2
7. Zimbabwe	1,333	4.1
8. India	1,180	3.6
9. Democratic Republic of Congo	1,119	3.4
10. Somalia	1,084	3.3
Total - Top Ten	18,633	57.0
Total - All Others	14,050	43.0
Total	32,683	100.0

Source: Citizenship and Immigration Canada

Government Assistance for Refugees

Refugee assistance is handled by Citizenship and Immigration Canada which has an annual budget of \$950-million, and over 5,000 full time employees. **Basic Monthly allowance is \$580 per refugee and unless otherwise stated, the following allowances are one time payments only.**

Start-Up Costs

- A start-up cheque includes one month living allowance, food, incidentals, rent and transportation. The maximum one-time start-up allowance is \$1,890.

Clothing

A one-time basic clothing allowance is provided at the rate of:

- \$225 per adult
 - \$150 for each additional family member.
- In winter, outerwear is provided at the rate of:
- \$150 per adult
 - \$100 per family member

Basic Household Needs Allowance

Suggested items include: beds, table and chairs, bed linens, basic window coverings and common household products such as kitchen utensils, pots, pans, brooms, etc.

- Per single without family members \$950
- Per single plus one family member \$1,500
- Per single plus two family members \$2,075
- Per couple without accompanying family members \$1,625
- Per couple plus accompanying family members, \$1,915
- For each additional family member \$350

Staple Allowance

This one-time allowance offsets the purchase of basic food and cleaning supplies to start up a household and it includes items such as flour, sugar, rice, spice and condiments, detergent, cleansers, etc. The rates are as follow:

- \$100 for the first person in each household
- \$75 for each additional family member (maximum of \$400)

Telephone Installation

- A one-time allowance established in accordance with provincial social assistance rates to connect one telephone per family unit.

Children Under 6 Years

- \$50 per month for refugees with children under the age of 6 years

Maternity Allowance

- A one-time \$150 clothing allowance, plus \$50 per month (for a maximum of six months)

Newborn Allowance

- \$500 to purchase clothing, furniture, etc.

School Start-Up Allowance

- \$150 for children between 4-18 years of age. (Issued on a one-time basis)

Special Diet Allowance

- \$100 per month (with a note from a physician)■



Source: Citizenship and Immigration Canada