

CANADA'S SPECIAL REFUGEE PROGRAM

FOR

INDOCHINESE SMALL-BOAT ESCAPEES

Canada Employment and
Immigration Canada

July, 1978

BACKGROUND

In the year after the fall of Vietnam, many thousands of Vietnamese began to flee their country in small boats with the aim of seeking asylum in neighbouring countries. The mortality rate for these small-boat escapees has been high: it is estimated that some 40 per cent of those who set out do not survive the voyage. In general, the reception for those who have managed to reach neighbouring countries has been poor. The boat people have often been forced to turn back to sea and the situation of those allowed to land on a temporary basis is at best precarious.

Canada's initial response to the development of this crisis was to reserve the remaining quota places in the Vietnamese/Cambodian Special Program for small-boat escapees. This resulted in the admission of approximately 600 boat people to Canada.

In late 1977, it became apparent that the plight of Small-Boat Escapees called for longer-term resettlement efforts than the United Nations High Commission for Refugees and countries of the permanent resettlement had initially recognized. As a result, the Minister of Employment and Immigration initiated a program starting in January, 1978, for the admission of up to 50 families of Vietnamese small-boat escapees per month.

Assistance to be Provided by the Canada Employment and Immigration Commission

The Small-Boat Escapees will be assisted after their arrival by the Canada Employment Centre in their city of destination. They will be eligible for various services including adjustment assistance in the form of funds to cover the cost of accommodation, food and, if required, additional winter clothing until the head of the family has been placed in continuing employment.

In addition, based on their level of need and the availability of resources, Small-Boat Escapees may also be eligible for:

- (1) Basic furniture (beds, tables, chairs and the most common household effects) for persons with dependants;
- (2) Loans for the purchase of tools and/or payment of examination fees which would assist in obtaining employment;

- (3) Assistance from counsellors at the Canada Employment Centre in finding employment for the working members of the family;
- (4) Appropriate language training or skills training courses, if these are available and considered by the Employment Centre to be necessary.

How Canadian Residents Can Assist

The services provided by the Commission are oriented towards the material needs of the Vietnamese Small-Boat Escapees. On their arrival these people will also be in need of community welcome and support. Individuals and groups in Canada can play an extremely important role in this regard. Such involvement could include meeting Vietnamese families when they arrive, assisting them in finding accommodation, helping them to adjust in the community, showing them what local services are available and in general, cushioning the initial impact of culture shock and making them feel welcome in their new country. This type of assistance on a personal level would help ease the adaptation of the Vietnamese to the Canadian way of life.

Those interested in assisting the Vietnamese Small-Boat Escapees can contact their nearest Canada Immigration Centre or Canada Employment Centre. The Canada Immigration Centre will be able to advise the Immigration office in Singapore that there are people in the community willing to offer assistance and the Singapore office will then arrange for one or more families to be destined to that community.