

The Indochinese Refugee Movement and the Private Sponsorship Program 1975-80: Glossary

Boat People: A term probably first coined by Tove Bording, manager of the Canadian Visa Office in Singapore, to distinguish refugees arriving in asylum countries by boat from the “land people” who crossed into Thailand over the land border. The official Canadian government term was Small Boat Escapee and the letters SBE were used to identify the visas of the Boat People to distinguish them from the Thailand Overland Refugee (TOR).

Canadian Employment and Immigration Commission (CEIC or E&I): The government of Canada department which, from the mid-1970s to the 1990s, was home to the Immigration Department. One of the great strengths that facilitated the resettlement of 60,000 refugees in 1979 and 1980 was the fact that the visa offices responsible for refugee processing in Thailand, Malaysia, Singapore, Indonesia, Brunei, Philippines, Hong Kong and Macau, the Canada Immigration Centres which processed sponsorship applications, and the Canada Employment Centres responsible for settling government assisted refugees were all unaccountable to the authority of the same Minister and Deputy Minister.

Designated Classes: While the UN Convention Refugee Definition was the cornerstone of Canada’s refugee resettlement system, section 6(2) of the 1976 Immigration Act authorized the government to formulate alternative definitions for classes of persons “whose admission would be in accordance with Canada’s traditional concern for the displaced and the persecuted.” An Indochinese Designated Class, designed to simplify and speed up the process of selecting Indochinese refugees by exempting them from the requirement to demonstrate a “well-founded fear of persecution”, came into effect in December 1978.

Master Agreement: A contractual agreement between the Immigration Department (CEIC) and an organization, such as the governing body of a church, which permitted that organization to “license” its constituent bodies such as local affiliates, chapters, parishes or congregations to sponsor refugees with minimal formality in return for a guarantee that the Master Agreement Holder would step in if one of its local affiliates ran into difficulties in meeting its obligations to its refugee(s).

Groups of Five: The sponsorship rules permitted groups of five or more friends, workmates or neighbors to sponsor refugees provided they were able to demonstrate to their local immigration office (CIC) that they had the resources and knowhow to assist the refugees become established in Canada.



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Staging Area: Military terminology for reception centres at military bases in Edmonton, (Greisbach Barracks) and Montreal (Longue Pointe, QC). Refugees typically spent 3-5 days at Staging Areas where they had a chance to rest and recuperate from their long flight from South East Asia. While at the Staging Areas the refugees were formally admitted to Canada as permanent residents (landed). They were given a quick medical check, clothing appropriate to the season and counselling and orientation before being sent on to their sponsors and destinations. Refugees destined for western Canadian communities went to Griesbach while those headed to communities in eastern Canada were welcomed at Longue Pointe.

DMR (Destination Matching Request): A detailed manifest of passengers on a particular charter flight from South East Asia sent by a visa office ten days before a flight to the Matching Centre, the Staging Areas and Employment and Immigration Offices across Canada. The arrival of a DMR initiated the process of matching incoming refugees with sponsors.

NAT (Notification of Arrival Telex): The passenger manifest of a charter flight sent 48 hours before takeoff by a visa office to the Matching Centre, the Staging Areas and every Employment and Immigration office in Canada. It triggered preparations for the imminent arrival of a new group of refugees.

Matching Centre: A unit established by the Immigration Department in May 1979 to centralize the process of matching refugees with sponsors and to assign destinations to government assisted refugees. The Matching Centre maintained a computerized record of all sponsorships and received detailed passenger manifests of all incoming refugee charter flights.

Matching and Matching: The term “matching” had two distinct meanings in the context of Canada’s Indochinese Refugee program. The first meaning referred to the process whereby the staff of the Matching Centre (above) in coordination with “matchers” in each of CEIC’s regional offices referred the names of incoming refugees listed on Notification of Arrival Telexes (NATs) to groups that had offered to sponsor refugees. The second meaning derived from the Conservative government’s offer to Canadians in July 1979, that every Indochinese refugee sponsored by a private sponsoring group would be matched by a refugee to be resettled by the government. This was usually referred to as the “Matching formula.”



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