

Salvadorians in Canada: Contexts of Departure and Arrival
Prepared by Wei Wei Da for the Latin American Research Group
2002

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I. Context of Departure

a. Numbers of Incoming Population, Time Periods, Peak Flows

Table 1. Refugee Claimants from El Salvador by sex, 1989-2002

Year	Male	Female
1989	736	400
1990	1290	802
1991	883	481
1992	529	282
1993	257	156
1994	264	121
1995	252	140
1996	197	94
1997	245	106
1998	201	94
1999	189	102
2000	172	98
2001	294	242
2002	99	94

Source: Elmagraby, 2002

Table 2. Refugee Claimants from El Salvador by age group, 1989-2002

Year	0-14	15-19	20-24	25-29	30-34	35-39	40-44	45-49	50-54	55-59	60-65
1989	8	54	60	57	231	250	153	132	87	39	24
1990	33	107	109	177	460	452	290	166	110	74	47
1991	39	72	53	112	337	268	182	125	71	36	22
1992	19	28	45	114	170	152	103	71	38	23	18
1993	12	18	25	62	96	81	46	33	9	13	7
1994	14	8	13	78	77	87	49	24	9	10	4
1995	13	12	16	75	81	91	39	27	14	12	5
1996	9	13	19	59	65	52	30	23	10	4	1
1997	12	13	42	99	73	56	26	19	4	2	3
1998	24	26	32	62	44	46	29	18	6	5	1
1999	29	11	41	72	47	41	21	14	9	0	3
2000	26	13	46	58	45	30	23	14	5	1	3
2001	112	34	67	58	70	73	31	26	20	16	10
2002	40	17	24	27	18	23	15	10	9	3	3

Source: Elmagraby, 2002

Table 3. Refugee Claimants from El Salvador by marital status, 1989-2002

Year	Single	Married	Widowed	Divorced	Separated
1989	595	477	16	23	16
1990	1164	797	35	37	40
1991	754	524	25	23	17
1992	434	322	11	12	17
1993	244	138	10	9	8
1994	200	150	10	8	8
1995	191	169	5	6	7
1996	141	120	0	7	10
1997	186	134	3	9	5
1998	144	107	0	11	11
1999	136	106	3	7	11
2000	140	86	5	5	11
2001	277	176	13	14	10
2002	115	62	3	7	4
Total					

Source: Elmagraby, 2002

The First Wave : 1982 - 1983

A large cohort of migrants from Salvador arrived in Canada during 1982 to 1983. Canada accepted 2,933 Salvadorans in 1983 alone (Magocsi, 1999: 1110). The numbers of Salvadorans to Canada decreased in the late of 1980s due to changes in immigration policy, which tended to be stricter in response to tough measures against illegal entries on the part of the US.

Second Wave: 1990-1991

There was a significant increase in the numbers of Salvadorans migrating to Canada in 1990 and the number peaked in 1991 with 7,000 arrivals. This flow was also associated with policy changes (Magocsi, 1999: 1111).

A total of 33,860 Salvadorans arrived in Canada between 1974 and 1991, and an additional 8,783 arrived by 1994. The 1996 census showed that there were 46,221 Salvadorans living in Canada (Garay, 2000; Magocsi, 1999).

Social profile of Salvadorans

According to 1991 census, 67% of Salvadorans who arrived in Canada were between the ages of 15 and 44; 8% were older than 45, and the rest were under 15. The number of male Salvadorans exceeded that of female Salvadorans by 2.7%. This suggested that more men than women arrived in Canada as pioneers.

b. State policies that Contribute to Displacement

El Salvador was freed from Spanish rule and declared its independence in 1821, and joined the United Provinces of Central America with Guatemala, Honduras, Nicaragua and Costa Rica in 1823 and broke up with them to form its own government in 1836. The Republic of El Salvador was established in 1839. Like other Caribbean Basin countries, El Salvador experienced ceaseless internal political turmoil between the conservatives and Liberal parties, and relations with neighbouring countries through the history. Various factors are contributing to displacement of Salvadorans presently.

Military dictatorship

El Salvador has been characterized by military dictatorships. In 1932, a military coup overthrew the country's only democratically elected president, during which more than 15,000 peasants were murdered. The country began the first of a succession of military dictatorships.

A 12-year and civil war

In the 1970s, guerrilla group called Farabundo Marti National Liberation Front (FMLN) emerged against the government. About 10,000 guerrillas fought for land reform and social justice. They gained control of 20% of the territory. The FMLN won considerable support from the peasantry. A civil war sparked in 1979. Conflicts intensified in 1984 in part due to massive increases in US aid to the army. Within five years during the 1980s, 52,000 people have been killed, the majority civilians. The guerrilla of the FMLN established "control zones", they helped civilians, especially women and children into exile. During the 1980s, one quarter of its five million people were uprooted. More than half of them sought refuge outside the country. The civil war ended in 1992 when the government and guerrilla force reached an agreement for military and political reform. The civil war claimed for 75,000 lives (Magocsi, 1999).

Economic crisis

By 1980, 58% of the urban population and 75% of rural inhabitants were unable to meet their basic needs. 48% of the population lived under the poverty line in 1999. The unemployment rate was 10% in 2001.

The country is one of the major international aid recipients. A figure in 1999 showed that it received aid up to \$252 billions from the international community, of which \$57 billion came from the US. Its external debt was 4.9 billion in 2001.

Natural disaster

An earthquake struck the centre of the capital city of San Salvador in 1986 that killed one thousand, and left 200,000 homeless. This also led many Salvadorans to leave the country (Country Profile, AMNI, 1998).

Child labour and violence against women

These are also prevailing social problems in El Salvador. Human rights abuse is worse (Magocsi, 1999).

Environmental issues

El Salvador also faces serious environmental problems which derives from deforestation, soil erosion; water pollution; contamination of soils from disposal of toxic waste (Magocsi, 1999).

Illicit drug trade

El Salvador is also a transit country for cocaine and its domestic drug use is also on the rise (Magocsi, 1999).

Current State Policies

Although an agreement was signed between the government and FMLN that called for the integration of the guerrilla army and government army into civilian life and committed the government to implement reforms, the durability of peace in El Salvador has been uncertain (Magocsi, 1999). After 1992, there were still an average of two to three hundred refugee claimants from El Salvador in Canada.

Home country organizations to advocate human right issues and build links with international communities include:

- Mennonite Central Committee in El Salvador ran programs to help build bridges between people. The organization has led a Youth Discovery Team on a nine-month experience in Colombia (Chute, 2002).
- The Agencia Periodistica Independiente (API) was created in 1978 by a group of journalists in El Salvador. They specialized in denouncing human rights violations. They published a newsletter and a weekly international magazine. API also organized a committee called “Committee of Salvadorean Political Prisoners” to push for improvements in the living conditions in the country, and to lobby government to implement reform. API also organized national and international campaigns to denounce injustices (Cuadra, 1983).

II. Context of Arrival

a. Canadian State Policies

Major federal policy shifts affecting the management of entry

The revision of the 1976 Act, which regularized the permission of refugees, has the direct impact on the wave of Salvadorans to Canada.

In March 1981, special measures were created for Salvadorans, which was expended in 1982 to admit Salvadoreans in the US to come to Canada.

In 1987, Bill C-55 revised the refugee determination criteria, and also proposed a two-stage process. Refugee claimants who came from a third safe country were excluded.

The Immigration and Refugee Board was created this year. The immigration and refugee policy was tightened. There was a significant reduction in the numbers of Salvadorans coming to Canada, which was assumed to be as the result of changes in policy.

In 1992, Bill C-86 was issued which made the determination system stricter. Valid passport and visa documents were required. Migrants from El Salvador decreased significantly after 1992, which might also be as a consequence of the policy.

Acceptance rate.

Year	Acceptance Rate
1999	18%
2000	16%
2001	16%
2002	22%

El Salvador does not have Canadian visa office. Canadian visa office located in Guatemala city, Guatemala will provide full services for immigrants, workers, visitors and students, and processes applications from El Salvador.

b. Civil Society Reception

Ethno-specific resources

- Residential concentration

Table 4. Four provinces with the largest population of Salvadorans, 1991

Province	Number	Percentage of Total in Canada
Ontario	11,910	42.1
Quebec	8,030	28.4
Alberta	3,665	13.0
British Columbia	2,575	9.1

Table 5. Salvadorans by citizenship population and community council areas in GTA, 1996 census

By Community Council Areas	Population
Scarborough	1,310
Toronto	1,405
East York	70
North York	3,005
York	1,280
Etobicoke	855
Total	7,925

Source: Social Development and Management Services Division. 1998. Toronto - Census 1996: Summary report #3. Toronto Community and Neighbourhood Services Department. Table 5.

- Business “enclaves”

Information not found yet.

- Co-national presence, co-linguistic and other construction of co-ethnic

Information not found yet.

- Ethno-specific education

Information not found yet.

- Religious institution

Majority of Salvadorans practices their faith in Roman Catholic in Canada. Catholic and Protestant churches in major cities provide services for Salvadorans. There are also a number of Salvadorans who are members of Christians. They usually meet informally for worship in private homes.

- Other indicators of institutional completeness

There are many Salvadoran organizations formed in the 1980s and played various roles in linking the Salvadoran community with the home country. Some had been declined in the 1990s, and some are still active and summarize below.

- New Experience for Refugee Women (NEW) in Toronto was established in 1983 to provide services from Latin American Women. Many Salvadoran women have been its clients. NEW provides various services, such as ESL, life skills, employment training and so on.
- Salvador del Mundo (Saviour of the World) is a multi-ethnic cooperative in Toronto which opened in 1993 with subsidy from Ontario Ministry of Housing has meant to adjust rent to members’ economic status.
- The Centre for cooperation with El Salvador was set up in Montreal in 1988 aimed to provide support to projects improving health and agricultural and artisanal income in El Salvador. The Centre also holds various events to inform the community of what have been happening in their home country. Similar groups were also formed in Vancouver and Ottawa.
- La Farabundo Radio Working Group was formed in Toronto in 1984 intended to raise material to assist a community radio station in the home country. The group obtained legal license in 1993 and became non-partisan medium that tried to serve the needs of entire society.
- The Association of Salvadoran Women (ADEMUSA), named after a group in the homeland was found in Toronto in 1990; and it now has branches in Montreal,

Vancouver, Hamilton and Ottawa. The main tasks of the association are to raise awareness and material support for its projects.

- The Institute for Central American Studies (IECA) has branches in North America, Europe and Australia. The IECA has its branch in Toronto in 1993. The major role of IECA is to bring a link between Salvador and the outside the world.
- Akatun Cultural Movement; Salvadoran refugee women created an umbrella organization in 1983. Its main aim is to familiarize Canadians with Salvadoran culture including theatre, poetry and dance. The Akatun musical group raises money for ADEMUSA, and also closely work with other Latin American groups in Canada.
- In the 1980s throughout Canada, members of FMLN formed branches in major cities of Canada, including Vancouver, Edmonton, Toronto, Ottawa, Kingston, and Montreal. These groups have gradually established relations with Canadian unions, student groups, churches and academics. These organizations tried to bring changes in Canadian policy towards Salvador.

Source: Magocsi, 1999: 1109-1115.

Romero House <www.romerohouse.org>

Romero House was established in 1992, named after Archbishop Oscar Romero of El Salvador, the church leader martyred for his outspoken defense of the poor in his country. The fundamental practice of Romero House is the community-based vision of accompaniment - living together as good neighbours. This vision is inspired by the practice Archbishop Romero introduced in Central America known as *acompanamiento*, meaning, "stand by the people". The link to the Salvadoran population in Toronto is not clear, or direct.

Mainstream society or non-ethno specific groups ...

- SalvAide is a charitable organization that is working in El Salvador to build social and economic justice, democracy and dignity with the people of El Salvador. SalvAide is part of the Canadian International Development Agency's partnership program. It is the only Canadian NGO with an exclusive focus on, and expertise with respect to El Salvador.

SalvAide's sister organizations in El Salvador:

- CORDES, (Foundation for Cooperation and Community Development of El Salvador)
- CRIPDES, (Association of Rural Communities for Development of El Salvador).

Projects ran by the SalvAide and CORDES and CRIPDES:

- Child-Care Project and the painting of a school, both interior and exterior.
- The Rural Youth Leadership Workshop is part of an ongoing project.

- Strengthening youth: a lasting educational project, 2001-2003. This project aims to establish a systematic educational program to improve youth leadership in the rural communities.
- The women's literacy project is aimed at the beginner, intermediate and advanced levels and covered letter and number recognition, word recognition, sentence recognition, spelling and reading and writing for various purposes.

Source: <http://www.salvaide.ca>

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Source: <http://www.salvaide.ca>

http://www.refugees.org/world/countryindex/el_salvador.htm