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Syrian refugee Mohammad Kurdi, third from right, smiles while walking with his sister Tima Kurdi, centre, who lives in the Vancouver area, his wife Ghousun Kurdi, holding their five-month-old son Sherwan Kurdi, right, and sons Shergo, 14, left, and Rezan, 8, centre left, after arriving at Vancouver International Airport in Richmond, B.C., on Dec. 28. Canada is expecting to take in 25,000 Syrian refugees.
 PHOTO: DARRYL DYCK/THE CANADIAN PRESS

Syrians will become population, economic drivers



ECONOMICS UNRAVELLED
CONSTANTINE PASSARIS

New Brunswick has always had a soft spot for refugees. In fact, our Province was founded by refugees. In 1783, more than 14,000 Loyalists sought safe haven on our shores from the American Revolution. New Brunswick's motto, Spem Reduxit, which is Latin for "hope restored" was born out of this first refugee movement.
 The Loyalists went on to make significant contributions to our economy, shipbuilding, society and academic

institutions. Indeed, the University of New Brunswick and its predecessor the Academy of Liberal Arts and Sciences was founded by the Loyalists. Furthermore, the Loyalist refugee movement also laid the foundations for a thriving city that we now call Saint John.
 The Loyalists were the first of a long list of refugee movements that were offered a safe haven and in turn empowered our Province. Since the Second World War, New Brunswick has welcomed refugees from Hungary, Czechoslovakia, Uganda, Chile and Vietnam. The Syrian refugees are the most recent to arrive to a welcoming New Brunswick.
 The Syrian conflict has triggered the world's largest humanitarian crisis since the Second World War. More than four million refugees have fled Syria since the conflict began. In 2015, more than one million Syrian refugees crossed over to Europe. Canada has committed to accepting 25,000 Syrian refugees over the next few months. Of these 1,500 will be settled in New Brunswick.
 On a week-long working visit to

Greece last month, I had a chance encounter with two busloads of Syrian refugees. This gave me the opportunity to speak to some of them and observe them from close quarters.
 The first thing that I noticed was that they were not your typical refugees. In fact the Syrian refugees that I met in Greece were mostly young families who were well nourished and healthy. They were elegantly dressed, articulate and had money to spend. They doted on their children, buying them sweets, chocolate bars and pop drinks. Clearly, they were a segment of the Syrian middle class who were fleeing their war torn country in search of political stability and economic opportunity.
 The arrival of the first wave of Syrian refugees to our province in the last few weeks is not simply an act of collective compassion. It is also a tool for correcting our population deficit, an economic asset and a means for kick starting our provincial economy.
 New Brunswick has been hit hard by a triple demographic whammy. First, the shrinking of our population due to declining birthrates. Second,

the migration of our young people in search of economic opportunities out west. Third, the sharp increase in the aging of our provincial population.
 In this regard, the arrival of 1,500 Syrian refugees to New Brunswick is a step in the right direction. This is especially the case since the stranglehold of accepting no more than 650 new immigrants per year through the federal provincial nominee program is a debilitating constraint on our economic prospects. I believe that increasing our population is a road map for sustainable economic prosperity.
 The rhetoric that refugees are a security risk, a drain on the public treasury and a burden on our health care system is just a myth. Canada screens diligently and carefully for security and health risks. The Syrian refugees coming to Canada will be largely young families that pose no health or security risks. In fact coming to Canada as a refugee is twice as difficult as being admitted as an economic migrant. The reason being that to be admitted as a refugee in Canada you need to have proof issued by the United Nations that you qualify

as a refugee. Furthermore, you need to possess the human capital and work skills that will lead to a refugee's successful integration in our society and economy.
 Shortly after they arrive in New Brunswick, I expect the Syrian refugees to empower us with their entrepreneurial talents, to start new businesses, to invest in our economy, to spend on buying homes and cars, to increase consumption expenditures, to join our workforce and enrol in our schools. Undoubtedly, all of this will grow our provincial economy. In short, the Syrian refugee movement will become a driver of population growth and economic activity.
 At the end of the day, I am confident that the private and public sponsorship of Syrian refugees in New Brunswick will be a humanitarian triumph and an economic liftoff.
Dr. Constantine Passaris is a professor of economics at the University of New Brunswick and the founding president of the New Brunswick Multicultural Council.