

Refugee Integration

Recommendation for Case-by-Case Basis for Refugee Integration

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Introduction

The Taskforce Team decided to examine and research the impacts of the Syrian Refugee Crisis in the Fredericton community. As of early 2017, Canada has taken in roughly 40,000 Syrian refugees, and without a clear end to the conflict in sight efforts have been made to settle and integrate the Syrian newcomers into Canadian communities. However, as many refugees are approaching the one year anniversary of arriving in Canada, the Taskforce Team chose to investigate the barriers to integration that refugees face. Throughout the course of the project the Taskforce Team met with services providers, newcomers, and read existing literature on integration in Canada. The following report will provide a background to the issue, provide findings, and give recommendations that would aid in dismantling the barriers to the integration process.

The Syrian Refugee Crisis

The Assad family has been in power since the late 1970's. It's referred to as a "brutal dictatorship." Since 2011, the majority of the population got tired of being 2nd class status, and of the country's corruption. This group started protesting and Assad sent troops to the protests, making protests violent and deadly.

By early 2012, protests were now a civil war. Assad wanted the rebel's to be gone and to divide the people by using religion, where religious minorities would be on his side and extremists on the rebels' side.

Now Syria is a country divided into 4 parties: the Government, the Rebel, ISIS and the Kurdish forces. Assad's government uses chemical weapons, bombs and in the other hand ISIS puts civilians under violent, inhumane conditions. Consequently, civilians are not only suffering but are also been forced to immigrate. As of today 250,000 people have been killed and 11 million Syrians have become displaced from their homes, where most end up in overcrowded and undersupplied refugee camps in neighboring countries.

Canada has taken 40,000 Syrian Refugees as of early 2017. This group of people is coming to a new country after a very rough couple of years where they saw their families and friends die and their homes turn into pieces. When they arrive they have to surpass challenges of integration: language barriers, cultural differences, credential and certification recognition, financial resources, and trauma.

Refugee Classifications and Barriers

In order to properly understand the context in which refugees live it is important to outline the barriers to their proper integration within their new communities:

- Language barriers

- Cultural differences
- Credential and certification recognition
- Financial resources
- Trauma

For this report, the main focus of our recommendations will be regarding refugees' financial resources. In the *Evaluation of the Resettlement Programs (GAR, PSR, BVOR and RAP)*, published in July 2016 by the evaluations division of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada the distinctions between Government Assisted Refugees (GARs) and Privately Sponsored Refugees (PSRs) are clearly defined (see annex 1) (in the context of this report we will not be considering BVORs). Within the evaluation many pertinent statistics are present that clearly identify the financial disparities between the two types of refugees.

For GARs:

- 53% of GARs refugees agreed that RAP income support covered their basic necessities
- 65% of GARs refugees reported using food banks
- 5 years after their arrival GAR cases of social assistance dropped to 41% (from 93%)

In comparison to PSRs

- 87% of PSRs felt that the income support plus in-kind support received from their sponsor covered their basic needs
- 29% of PSRs reported having used food banks
- 5 years after arrival proportion of PSR relying on social assistance increased to 28%. (from 6%)

A quick analysis of these numbers permits one to understand the greater economic challenges faced by GARs. It is important to note however that the refugees selected for the PSR program are candidates deemed economically favorable with fewer additional needs as per those selected for the GAR (annex 1). However, in despite of these additional needs, refugees under the GAR program only receive financial aide equivalent, or in some cases inferior, to that of social

assistance as seen in the table below.

Single Person	Social Assistance Rate (Total)	RAP Income Support (Total)
Vancouver, BC	\$610	\$610
Calgary, AB	\$627	\$627
Winnipeg, MB	\$655	\$555
Toronto, ON	\$656	\$626
Halifax, NS	\$555	\$555

Note: Sample cities were selected based on evaluation site visit locations. For more information on other cities across Canada, please see the Extended Evaluation Report.

Sources: Internal Documentation; British Columbia, Income Assistance Rate Table; AlbertaWorks (2015) Financial Benefits Summary; Manitoba (2015) Employment and Income Assistance for the General Assistance Category; Ontario (2015) Ontario Works Directives; Nova Scotia (2013) Basic Income Assistance Rates.

What is not indicated in this table is the estimated value of the additional integration services that are offered to the GARs by the designated third-party service providers for a community. None the less, it does not excuse the fact that newcomers to our country in need of protection receive the same amount of financial aid as those in difficulty who have potentially lived in Canada their entire lives. Additionally, the aide is often not enough for refugees to cover their basic needs as observed in this second table.

Table 11: RAP Income Support Rates and Average Housing Cost

City	RAP Monthly Budget 2014 Single Adult – housing and other basic allowances **	Average Rent- Bachelor*	Average One Bedroom Apartment*	Percentage of Income
Vancouver, BC	\$610	\$902	\$1,038	148%
Calgary, AB	\$627	\$906	\$1,134	144%
Winnipeg, MB	\$555	\$586	\$782	106%
Toronto, ON	\$626	\$896	\$1,067	143%
Halifax, NS	\$555	\$716	\$800	129%

*Source: CMHC Rental Market Reports 2014.

**Source: Internal Documentation.

Out of 5 of the major cities in Canada, the cost for a one bedroom apartment is larger than the financial aid received by the GARs. According to the Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation “no more than 32% of gross monthly income should be spent on housing”. The RAP monthly income budget is well beyond this recommendation for the refugees residing in big cities. This situation leads many refugee families to need to live together (more than one family per residence) in residences of sizes that are inadequate for the number individuals. In brief, these multiple examples clearly demonstrate that GAR refugees are, in most cases,

inadequately financially supported to properly establish themselves in their new communities.

From a more anecdotal perspective of refugee youth integration within Fredericton, it is difficult for newcomers to make friend. Mellissa Morin is a teacher at École Sainte-Anne whose role is to facilitate newcomers' integration in the school environment by teaching them French, trying to form social groups with whom the students can spend time during lunch, or any other form of help that they might need. Many other after school activities are also put together for them such as this year's futsal league. However, Mme Morin points out that the social groups put together, albeit effective at first, often become forgotten by the students involved leaving many new kids stranded. From Matthew Joyce's personal experience, in his opinion a great integration tool for new comers are organized sports (or any extracurricular activity) within the community (hence not uniquely organized for newcomers). As a very involved soccer player with Fredericton's local competitive soccer club, the FDSA, Matthew has observed a few dozens of new Syrians participate in the clubs' winter and summer programs over the past two years, giving them a chance to make new friends and have fun through sport. One of his teammates who arrived from Syria two years ago has even made New Brunswick's Canada Games team. These opportunities provided to individuals participating in sports or other extra-curricular activities strongly demonstrate their effectiveness at socially integrating young new comers into their communities.

Recommendations

Through exploring the Syrian Refugee Crisis the taskforce team recognized the need for increasing the time period for state sponsored refugees. As it currently exists, Syrian families have 365 days to learn a new language, settle their families, navigate a completely new society, cope with past trauma, and become financially self-sufficient, or be transferred to provincial social assistance programs. The team recognizes that for some Syrian refugees one year is ample time to adapt to their new lives, and this is evident through the success stories of some Syrian families who have opened new businesses.

However, while the one year sponsorship meets the needs for some, it doesn't for many others. Therefore, our recommendation is to extend the one year sponsorship period on a case by case basis. Syrians with high levels of education, small families, and easily transferable workplace skills will only need one year. While bigger families, that have no English skills, and have little to no formal education will need to be GARs for a longer period of time or will ultimately transfer into provincial social assistance. The Taskforce has identified 4 factors as to why the recommendations are important and will lessen the barriers to the integration process.

1. We believe that Canada as a developed country and a world leader in peacekeeping and human rights has a humanitarian responsibility to support Syrian refugees. These individuals have lost their homes, their livelihood, and their loved ones. The trauma that these individuals have been forced to endure for years is horrific and unimaginable, and as such it

is our duty as a Country of means to support and provide an environment where the healing process can begin. By extending the period of refugee assistance will allow for the more extreme cases to have time to settle and process the war that they have survived.

2. While it may seem that it would not make a difference if a refugee family were transferred to social assistance, there are in fact important differences in classifications and funding. GARs are funded through the federal government, whereas social welfare is a provincial program. Through keeping the assistance as a federal responsibility it would elevate stress from provinces that are struggling. Furthermore there are services that newcomers there a variety of services and benefits that the newcomers can only access as long as they are classified as refugees and not permanent residents.
3. The Syrian Refugee Crisis has also changed the face of immigration in many parts of Canada. Immigration in the 20th century consisted of highly educated, and professional immigrants moving to urban areas. For example, immigrants mostly only lived in Fredericton, Moncton, and Saint John working in the universities and hospitals. However, now as a result of the high influx of refugees there are newcomers being placed in rural areas there have never been a high amount of newcomers. This means, that while communities are rallying support, there is a current gap in service provision. For example, a teen trying to navigate mental health services to receive help for trauma, but facing a language barrier and no access to an Arabic translator. Increasing the time period for some refugees would allow time for services providers to improve existing infrastructure surrounding integration.
4. Finally, increasing the length of time newcomers can access refugee assistance would also benefit local economies. Studies have shown that newcomers add to the economy, diversify existing markets, and are active in their communities. If we as a society are able to facilitate a successful integration process, then newcomers are more likely to settle and not out-migrate into bigger urban areas. A fully integrated newcomer is a newcomer that contributes to the economy and is instrumental in reversing the population crisis that is affecting many Canadian communities. Extending the length of assistance funding on a case-by-case basis recognizes the many benefits to come from the upfront investment.

Conclusion

Many refugees in Canada are now facing month 13, and are contemplating the challenge of what happens after the government funding ends. With no resolution in sight to the Syrian conflict, Canada has demonstrated leadership by accepting thousands of refugees fleeing war and terrorism. However, the next step Canada faces is ensuring that the refugees' integration needs are met, and that they are given the opportunity to be fully functional members of society. Extending the GAR period beyond one year on a case-by-case basis would allow service providers to work towards closing existing gaps, and would provide time for some families to

settle, begin to heal, and learn skills necessary to succeed. No two refugees are the same and the integration experience should be viewed as such.

Annex 1

Government-Assisted Refugees (GAR) are usually referred by the United Nations Refugee Agency (UNHCR) or other designated referral agencies and supported by the Government of Canada who then provides initial resettlement services and income support for up to one year.⁴ The introduction of the Immigration and Refugee Protection Act (IRPA) in 2002 placed a greater emphasis on selecting GARs based on their protection needs rather than on ability to establish in Canada. As a result, GARs often carry higher needs⁵ than other refugee groups. GARs are also eligible to receive resettlement services (i.e., reception at port of entry, temporary accommodation, assistance in finding permanent accommodation, basic orientation, links to settlement programming and federal and provincial programs) provided through a service provider organization that signed a contribution agreement to deliver these services under IRCC's Resettlement Assistance Program (RAP).

Privately Sponsored Refugees (PSR) are sponsored by permanent residents or Canadian citizens via one of three streams: through a Sponsorship Agreement Holder (SAH) that is an incorporated organization that has signed a sponsorship agreement with IRCC for the purpose of submitting sponsorship cases on a regular basis⁶; through a Group of Five (G5) that consists of a temporary group of five or more Canadian citizens or permanent residents that will sponsor one or a few cases and will act as guarantors; or