

CANADIAN COUNCIL FOR REFUGEES



Refugee Integration: Key concerns and areas for further research

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Canadian Council for Refugees

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Canadian Council for Refugees

Refugee Integration: Key concerns and areas for further research

I. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In November and December 2011 the Canadian Council for Refugees consulted with settlement practitioners, private sponsors, academics and other stakeholders, on issues relating to the integration of refugees in Canada.

The objective was to identify current priority concerns regarding refugee integration and related areas for further research.

The project, supported by the UNHCR, builds on a report prepared by Jennifer Hyndman of existing research on the integration resettled refugees in Canada. By consulting with those directly involved in refugee settlement and integration, we sought to identify areas where research would be of particular relevance and of practical use for the refugee serving community.

The project addressed the integration of resettled refugees (government-assisted (GARs) and privately sponsored) as well as those recognized as refugees in Canada.

The consultation was conducted through a workshop held at the CCR fall 2011 Consultation in Montreal, and through a written survey seeking comments on the issues emerging from the workshop.

The workshop, entitled *Refugee Integration: Identifying key areas for further research*, attracted at least 80 participants, including many service-providers at settlement agencies. There were presentations of Dr Hyndman's paper, of Citizenship and Immigration Canada data and goals relating to measurement of the integration of refugees in Canada, and of a recently completed research project on housing for refugees. Following the presentations, participants discussed two central questions:

- What are the priority areas of concern regarding the integration of refugees in Canada?
- What are the most important information gaps and areas requiring research with regards to the integration of refugees in Canada?

Following the workshop, the CCR sought out feedback from additional respondents on the priorities identified at the workshop through the use of a survey, in order to complement, validate and receive further nuance on the issues identified.

From the input received, the following **top priority concerns** emerged:

- Access to employment
- Health issues
- Language training

- Family reunification
- Access to housing
- Credential recognition

The following **further concerns** were identified:

- Management of settlement services
- Coordination of various services within regions
- Refugees from protracted situations
- Need for networking programs to assist social and economic integration
- Single-parent families, particularly single mothers

Through the workshop and the subsequent small survey, the following priority information gaps and areas for further research were identified:

Top priority

- Access to employment
- Mental health and trauma related issues

Middle level priority

- Settlement Program Coordination
- Stereotypes against refugees
- Integration differences between inland refugees, GARs and PSRs
- Housing issues
- Family separation
- Existing language training programs
- Remittance obligations
- Education level

Also of priority

- Transportation loans
- Refugees' "sense of belonging"
- Differences in access to settlement services outside of urban centres or where services are centralized
- Differences in integration experiences between first and second generation refugee families, and between refugee children and children of other immigration categories
- Alternative methods of measuring employment success
- Physical health, including HIV/AIDS

II. INTRODUCTION

This report aims to contribute to understanding of the particular settlement and integration experiences of refugees in Canada, by identifying some current priority concerns regarding refugee integration as well as areas for further research. The findings in the report are based on consultation in November and December 2011 with settlement practitioners, academics and other stakeholders.

This study builds on the research summary by Jennifer Hyndman on resettled refugee integration in Canada¹, which also makes recommendations for future research topics. The objective here is to consult with those who are directly involved in refugee settlement and integration processes as front-line workers and staff at settlement organizations, ethno-cultural organizations and other service providing agencies, in order to determine research areas for which the findings would be of particular relevance and practical use for the refugee serving community, and which would inform and improve settlement outcomes in Canada. For the purposes of this study, those described as refugees include both government-assisted (GARs) and privately sponsored refugees (those chosen from abroad to come to Canada permanently), *and* those recognized as refugees in Canada (persons who have made a refugee claim in Canada and been determined to be protected persons).

The Canadian Council for Refugees is a non-profit umbrella organization committed to the rights and protection of refugees in Canada and around the world and to the settlement of refugees and immigrants in Canada. As such, the integration of refugees in Canada is an issue of primary concern. Our membership is well aware of the importance of research on issues of settlement and integration in order to inform policy discussions and programming to meet the needs of refugees and facilitate their transition to full participation in Canadian society.

The CCR views integration as a two-way street – a process that must involve both the newcomer and the receiving society. The goal is the full participation and inclusion of the newcomer in Canadian society. With its breadth of members across the regions of Canada, engaged with different categories of refugees and providing a range of programming, support and representation for refugees, the CCR is well-placed to consult and give input on priority concerns and areas for further research on refugee integration in Canada.

¹UN High Commissioner for Refugees, *Research Summary on Resettled Refugee Integration in Canada*, 2 May 2011, available at: <http://www.unhcr.org/refworld/docid/4e4b77842.html>.

III. SUMMARY OF PROCESS

A workshop entitled *Refugee Integration: Identifying key areas for further research* was held at the CCR's fall 2011 Consultation in Montreal. The workshop was designed to create a space for dialogue between researchers and settlement practitioners on priority concerns and gaps in the research regarding the integration of refugees in Canada. After panel presentations on some of the existing research, the participants divided into small groups of about ten to discuss two central questions:

- What are the priority areas of concern regarding the integration of refugees in Canada?
- What are the most important information gaps and areas requiring research with regards to the integration of refugees in Canada?

The conclusions of each group's discussion were reported and compiled by the moderator.

The attendance at the workshop was very good, with at least 80 participants. Many of the participants were service-providers at settlement agencies or other organizations that provide front-line services to newcomers in Canada. Also present were representatives of other NGOs, academics, and representatives of different levels of government. Different regions of Canada were represented, and there was participation of both Francophones and Anglophones. Those present had experience working with various categories of refugees: government-assisted, privately sponsored, and those recognized in Canada. Many concerns were raised and many areas for further research were explored and expanded on.

Following the workshop, the CCR invited feedback through a survey on the priorities identified at the workshop, in order to complement, validate and receive further nuance on the issues identified. Respondents were sought out with a view to ensuring representation of different geographical regions, larger and smaller centres, academics and service providers, and experience with the different categories of refugees. Despite the short timeline, fifteen people responded with feedback on the questions asked, indicating a high level of interest in the topic. Respondents included persons involved in refugee settlement in different areas of Canada, academics, and others with relevant expertise.

While we were able to obtain additional and in-depth feedback from the survey respondents, the small sample prevents us from drawing too many conclusions based on the trends among these respondents.

IV. SUMMARY REVIEW OF EXISTING RESEARCH FINDINGS PRESENTED AT CCR WORKSHOP

Michael Casasola of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) in Canada summarized key points from the paper produced by Jennifer Hyndman entitled “Research Summary on Resettled Refugee Integration in Canada”, and gave background to this research.

Background to Research on Resettled Refugee Integration in Canada

He explained that there is a general sense that refugees are integrating into Canadian society, particularly given Canada’s lengthy experience in this area. Nevertheless, from a fact-based perspective there is not a lot of specific information outlining their integration experience and outcomes. This line of inquiry is not limited to Canada as UNHCR has been trying to engage all resettlement countries on the outcomes that they are seeking to achieve through their resettlement programs. For example, the UNHCR Regional Office in Washington DC is undertaking a project with the University of Texas, examining integration benchmarks.

In light of this information gap and as a starting point, the UNHCR recruited Dr. Jennifer Hyndman of the Centre for Refugee Studies at York University as a consultant to develop a research paper to summarize what is known about the integration of resettled refugees in Canada.

Research Summary on Resettled Refugee Integration in Canada, by Dr. Jennifer Hyndman

Dr. Hyndman’s paper represents a meta-analysis and overview of existing research. Four points of reference were requested by the UNHCR:

- Summarize key existing research findings on the integration of resettled refugees;
- Identify gaps in research relating to refugee integration;
- Highlight information or gaps as they relate to age, gender and diversity;
- Propose areas of possible inquiry appropriate for UNHCR to pursue in the future.

Within the research requirements, key elements for the UNHCR also included a focus on findings that are national in scope, and on findings relating to the integration of resettled refugees since the introduction of the Immigration and Refugee Protection Act (IRPA). The latter was requested in response to input received by service providers, who indicated the profile of refugees coming to Canada had changed since the introduction of IRPA, which eliminated the bar on resettlement of refugees with high medical demands and reduced the emphasis in selection on ability to successfully establish. At the same time that the Canadian law was changing, the UNHCR was promoting, through its global program, the resettlement of a greater diversity of refugees.

The following salient findings from Dr. Hyndman’s research were outlined:

- Post-IRPA Government Assisted Refugees (GARs) arriving in Canada are younger, on average, than GARs from the 1990s, with about 60% (compared to 50%) under the age of 24.

- Post-IRPA GARs have less education than those who arrived in the 1990s.
- There are no major shifts in the economic outcomes for pre- vs. post-IRPA refugees. Median income levels of Privately Sponsored Refugees (PSRs) are lower. A decline in earnings corresponds to declines in educational attainment and lower ages at time of landing.
- GARs have the highest overall uptake of settlement services (87% in 2008) of all refugee groups, followed by PSRs (69%) and refugees landed in Canada (LCRs) and their dependants (37.5%). Separate research shows that LCRs are more likely than GARs and PSRs to access social assistance, although this varies by province. This raises the question of whether the uptake of settlement services is inversely correlated with rates of social assistance utilization, and what impacts the increased service usage.
- The vast majority of refugees stay in the province to which they were originally 'destined'.
- Ability to learn an official language has shaped the earnings of every immigrant except for refugees.
- Single parents have the least favourable income situation.
- Older statistics indicate that the newcomer naturalization rate is 85%. The UNHCR is particularly interested in knowing at what point people become citizens and stop being refugees. There is a belief that citizenship uptake among refugees is very high, however specific rates are being sought, as is information pertaining to the incentives to acquire Canadian citizenship.

Areas for Further Research

The following areas were identified by Dr. Hyndman for further research:

- Economic outcomes for PSRs based on longitudinal immigrant database in comparison to GARs.
- Initial income levels of PSRs. Careful and comprehensive research into the initial income levels of PSRs and their more rapid transition to employment than GARs should be probed as soon as possible.
- The relationship between uptake levels of settlement services among refugees and their access to social assistance.
- Health needs and impacts of refugees from protracted situations, who make up a significant portion of resettled refugees to Canada.
- Mixed methods that combine quantitative and qualitative research are best suited for the purpose of explaining why there are disparate outcomes or improvements over time among different groups of refugees. These methods should be considered in any future research.

Catherine Simard, Manager of Performance Measurement and Funding at Citizenship and Immigration Canada (CIC) presented the research and measurements conducted by CIC regarding the integration of refugees in Canada, and shared data derived from an analysis of the performance of the Settlement Program in the different provinces and territories. She also discussed CIC responses to the results of research findings.

Relevant economic, social and cultural performance indicators were measured to gather the data, and in line with CIC's vision to provide support to newcomers in Canada and to allow them to contribute to making Canada prosperous and dynamic, the analysis revealed that resettled refugees participate economically, socially and culturally in Canadian society.

Some data gathered and outcomes included:

- Statistical information showed a disparity between refugees' revenues and the revenues of other immigrant groups, which prompted CIC to set a goal of reducing the gap by 1%.
- Resettled refugees' participation in the Canadian labour market five to ten years after arrival was used as an economic indicator. Further to the findings, CIC wishes to increase the participation rate by 2012.
- Economic success of permanent residents chosen for economic reasons as opposed to that of Canadian-born residents was also measured and showed that the success of permanent residents was equal to the Canadian-born population five to seven years following their arrival.
- Cultural indicators measured the donor and volunteer rates among the immigrant community. CIC is seeking to maintain or increase current levels of 80% giving and 20% volunteerism by immigrants.
- From a social stand-point, CIC wishes to maintain or increase current rate of 85% of permanent residents becoming citizens as well as an increase in feelings of belonging for recent arrivals as compared to Canadian-born people.

The Resettlement Assistance Program (RAP) provides immediate and essential services to government-assisted refugees during the first six weeks following their arrival in Canada.

CIC has implemented the Performance Measurement Strategy in order to measure the impact of services for all clients, including refugees.

- It was found that in the provinces and territories where CIC manages the settlement services (ie. outside of Quebec, Manitoba and British Columbia), the number of new immigrants remained stable from 2005 until 2010, but the percentage of settlement service use has increased by 53.4%.
- In 2010-11, 192,806 clients used at least one settlement service, 21.9% of whom were refugees.

- For the same period, 131,232 clients used an information and orientation service, refugees representing 23.8% and 63,520 clients registered for language training, of whom 23% were refugees.

In order to complete the analysis, CIC plans to develop information sheets which will include the nature of the analysis, the currently available data, an analysis of the results and recommendations to modify the program in order to obtain the desired results. The information sheets will be developed with the collaboration of experts; they will be accessible to the public and will be approved by senior management. These information sheets will be accessible as reference tools and produced regularly. They will be updated on a regular basis to include appropriate facts useful for policy development and for program modifications.

Damaris Rose, an academic affiliated with INRS - Centre Urbanisation Culture et Société and the Centre Metropolis du Québec, presented research on the housing situation of the clients of immigrant settlement organizations, comparing refugee claimants and resettled refugees with non-refugee immigrants.

The objectives of the study were to add to the knowledge base on newcomer housing experiences through parallel studies in Canada's three main immigrant gateway cities (Montreal, Toronto and Vancouver), with a common research protocol, and to identify courses of action to improve housing conditions and reduce the risk of extremely precarious housing situations. Housing is important because it represents an anchor point for a new start. Over time, it is also a key aspect in determining social inclusion or exclusion and it represents the largest budget item for low/modest income households. It was expected that the study would show that refugees are more likely to face precarious housing situations than economic or family class immigrants, due to more limited economic resources and trauma. Refugees have greater needs for information, orientation and material aid supplied by settlement organizations than non-refugee immigrants.

Previous research on housing showed that immigrants in the refugee admission categories face higher levels of housing stress in the early months than non-refugee immigrants. It has also been shown that government-assisted refugees have much greater access to settlement assistance services, including housing help, than refugee claimants awaiting determination and that social networks and family support play a key role for newcomers in finding housing. Consequently, housing vulnerability may be highest among a sub-group of refugees: refugee claimants who arrive alone and are socially isolated.

Methodology: Five different methods were used to gather the information:

- participants were recruited from among the clientele of settlement agencies and organizations accredited to deliver government-subsidized settlement assistance to refugees and refugee claimants;
- focus groups were carried out with key informants of settlement agencies;
- a survey was distributed to 200 agency clients in each city;
- there were follow-up focus groups with refugee claimants and GARs;

- regular meetings with a local advisory committee of community partners.

The findings of the study led to the identification of four clear housing vulnerabilities:

- Resettled refugees with large families. More research needs to be conducted in connection with this particular vulnerability.
- Shelter cost to income ratios. The study found that there was no difference between GARs and claimants in the proportion spending over 50% of their income on rent (64-68%). 51% of the economic immigrants in the sample also had very serious affordability problems.
- Unsanitary housing conditions. 37 % of refugees have experienced a problem of unsanitary housing (35% of GARs/PSRs and 16% of non-refugee immigrants).
- Refugee claimants awaiting determination. Policy issue: settlement organizations receive, at best, funds to help claimants find their first housing, not to help them fight poor conditions.

Very low incomes and dependency on welfare exacerbate these housing vulnerabilities. For both GARs and claimants who have not found employment, housing consumes well over 50% of income support payments. 59% of GARs in the Montreal survey reported experiencing problems in access to housing due to discrimination, with income source (social assistance), as the most frequent source of discrimination. Employment is therefore key to improving housing situations, except for a small minority who eventually get social housing.

V. REFUGEE INTEGRATION: PRIORITY CONCERNS

From the input received through the workshop and the survey responses, the following top priority concerns emerged:

- Access to employment
- Health issues
- Language training
- Family reunification
- Access to housing
- Credential recognition

The following further concerns were identified:

- Management of settlement services
- Coordination of various services within regions
- Refugees from protracted situations
- Need for networking programs to assist social and economic integration
- Single-parent families, particularly single mothers

The order in which the above concerns are presented attempts to reflect the weighting they were given by participants. It should be used only as an indication.

DETAILED COMMENTS ON PRIORITY CONCERNS

The following comments are drawn from the workshop notes and the responses received after the workshop.

ACCESS TO EMPLOYMENT

Thirteen of the fifteen respondents to the survey agreed with workshop participants that access to employment was a top priority concern for refugee integration in Canada. It was observed that if people have stable, secure, and reasonably well paid employment, other issues such as those related to access to housing will diminish. One respondent pointed out that the issue could be expanded to “access to *appropriate* employment”, because of the prevalence of de-skilling and the importance of access to employment that is appropriate to the work experience of the individual.

Although credential recognition is listed as a separate item, it is inextricably linked to access to employment since the lack of credential recognition leads to barriers to employment, and especially to appropriate employment.

Additional factors to consider within the issue of access to employment:

- Lack of access to employability programs for Refugees Landed in Canada who are waiting for their permanent residence applications to finalize, increases barriers to integration.
- Additional challenges for single mothers.
- Challenges for refugees with family members abroad to whom they have financial responsibilities.
- GAR young adults falling through cracks because of lack of access to employability programs. Meanwhile they often need to work and study. This can trap them in a cycle of low-paid labour, which also results in not developing language skills.
- The way funding and grants are provided to settlement agencies can sometimes impede newcomers' integration and settlement. For example, if the agency is funded for a certain course or program and needs people to enrol, newcomers who are ready and eager to work are instead sometimes directed towards these programs instead of being given assistance to get into the workforce.

Some suggestions of ways to address this issue of concern included:

- Programs to help refugees use their education and skills in Canada
- Job-based language skills development
- Access to employment via training programs, as some refugees don't come with a lot of transferable skills
- Offer a "living allowance" so that young refugees can attend school for two or three years before entering the work force
- Offer skills and trades training for young adult refugees
- Job training and help seeking employment

HEALTH ISSUES

Eleven out of the fifteen survey respondents echoed workshop participants in feeling that health issues were a top priority concern for the integration of refugees in Canada. It was noted that without medical care people cannot integrate, and that health care services should be culturally sensitive to the particular needs of those who have fled persecution, rather than having chosen to immigrate to Canada voluntarily. Several issues were raised as gaps that make it difficult for refugees to access appropriate health services.

- Lack of paid interpreters and lack of access to language services at health institutions and hospitals
- Lack of access to family health care services
- Health needs of older adults: respondent said peculiarities of older adult refugees who are more likely to have health issues are often overlooked. It was pointed out that older adults often have a more complex settlement process than younger adults
- Saskatchewan: difficulties getting Provincial Health Coverage – due to changes in requirements, refugees are having trouble proving residency

Mental Health deserves particular attention. The issue may be more uptake than the availability of services. Among some refugees, the concept of depression and poor mental health is not something they are comfortable talking about, and in some cases the term “depression” is not understood. When depression was identified, the habit was to talk about it in the family and not to strangers (such as counsellors or other professionals). Depression was often expressed in general terms of suffering and “body pain”; others understood the word “stress” and discussed it in this way. Many of these refugees displayed symptoms of depression and could have been helped, so the respondent suggested that work needs to be done to destigmatize mental health issues among some refugee populations.

LANGUAGE TRAINING

Nine of the fifteen survey respondents highlighted language training as a top priority concern for refugee integration, noting that in some provinces, newcomers who don’t learn quickly to function in an official language are isolated and marginalized.

It was pointed out that refugees have some of the most dramatic levels of improvement in English and French of all categories of immigrants. The interconnectedness of language training with other priorities such as access to employment and access to health and other social services was also noted.

Some of the challenges cited regarding language training included:

- Lack of adaptation of language training for people who are illiterate or have low levels of education
- Lack of job-specific language training
- GARs: long waiting times to access language training programs.

Some solutions to address barriers to language training included:

- Emphasis on development of intercultural communication skills
- Job-based language skills development as means to integrate in job market
- Language training in schools for young refugees
- More part-time study opportunities (especially for older people)
- GARs should be able to work at least part-time and/or have a mentor during wait period for language course

- Weekend language and life skills classes
- Facilitation of language learning through networking programs
- Alternative teaching approaches, including:
 - experiential learning and teaching techniques
 - mentorship programs for persons for whom classroom learning is not ideal
 - industry or profession-specific language training (i.e. Enhanced Language Training, ELT in Ontario)

Some comments focused on the language training barriers and needs of particular refugee populations.

Women: it is important to improve access to language training for women, who often miss out on language training opportunities due to gendered divisions of labour in the family. Developing an innovative approach to providing language skills may help overcome these barriers.

Youth: refugee youth can fall through the cracks as their education needs are unique. There is a lack of funding, of qualified teachers and of good educational material to catch them up before they reach the age where they can no longer attend high school.

Older adults: Long waiting times for GARs to enter language instruction courses can result in some GARs becoming used to being inactive and receiving a government assistance cheque. Especially among mature men it was noted that the drop-out rate once in the language course is high. It was thus suggested that GARs should be able to work at least part-time, possibly with a mentor during this waiting period, and that part-time instruction be an option to discourage dropping out. Older adult refugees may also face learning difficulties and educational gaps, which can become challenges when trying to learn Canada's official languages. Experiential learning and teaching techniques may be beneficial to older age groups of refugees.

FAMILY REUNIFICATION

Six of the survey respondents indicated that family reunification is a priority concern for refugee integration in Canada. The impacts of separation include mental health issues. Economic responsibilities to family members abroad were also cited as a barrier to integration, especially during the period before obtaining permanent residence, when refugees recognized in Canada don't have access to social housing or employability programs.

One respondent stated: "For accepted refugees who did inland claims and who are between two worlds (refugee claimant and permanent resident), whose PR applications take approximately one year to finalize, integration challenges are even more difficult. [This is especially the case] for individuals with family members abroad who are subjected to long family reunification periods, and often challenging socio-economic status."

ACCESS TO HOUSING

Affordable and appropriate housing is a prerequisite to taking advantage of social and settlement services, which makes it a prerequisite to integration. It was felt that this is a top priority because there are acute shortages of suitable affordable units in major Canadian urban centres.

One respondent pointed out the emphasis and consideration needed regarding the particular situation of those who enter Canada as refugee claimants. They referred to research conducted in the 1990s showing that difficulties experienced during the long waiting period have longer-term repercussions on refugee's integration. They face additional labour market and housing barriers due to a social and political climate that stigmatizes them on account of their precarious immigration status. Discrimination is thus an important concern regarding refugee access to housing.

CREDENTIAL RECOGNITION

Some of the concerns identified relating to this issue were:

- ability to apply skills in Canada
- access to programs
- funding problems

There is sometimes a psychological barrier to “starting again” that has prevented some refugees from getting their credentials recognized.

One respondent who works primarily with GARs pointed out that credential recognition is identified as a smaller priority in some GAR situations, in part because these refugees often have lower levels of formal education, or are sometimes illiterate.

MANAGEMENT OF SETTLEMENT SERVICES AND COORDINATION OF VARIOUS SERVICES WITHIN REGIONS

Many of the participants at the workshop on refugee integration were settlement practitioners and front-line service providers who highlighted the importance of better management of settlement services and coordination of social services within regions to enhance refugee integration. While the sample of survey respondents included only six settlement practitioners, five of them cited management of settlement services and coordination of various services within regions as top priorities for refugee integration.

Settlement Services

Lack of access to settlement services for refugee claimants (as opposed to resettled refugees) was highlighted. Since 45% of claimants are ultimately accepted, this exclusion from state-funded settlement assistance slows down their social and economic integration. It was pointed out that access varies across the country as a result of varying provincial jurisdictions.

Suggestions were made for improving management of settlement services:

- develop a framework for evaluation that addresses outcomes, is agreed upon by service providers and funders and does not require the reallocation of resources from programs
- evaluate pilot programs and experiments to see if outcomes are better
- settlement programs should be harmonized nationally
- competition should be discouraged (competition for funding often drives agencies, their services and the allocation of their services, said one respondent)
- services shouldn't be centralized in one core location

Coordination of services within regions

One commentator noted that coordination needs to be improved, because as it is, different service providers are constantly in competition and “looking out for their own best interests” rather than those of refugees. It was suggested that there need to be coordination efforts and supplementary communication among existing services within regions to address overlaps. LIPs (Local Immigration Partnerships) was named as a good model of coordination between various stakeholders.

One respondent spoke of the church community in particular as the one that embraces refugees who are new to a community “until the government and NGOs get funding to respond to their needs”. They stated that there was no foresight, planning or capacity building prior to arrival, and that a better prepared welcoming community would be able to get refugees on the path toward independence and integration faster and more efficiently.

REFUGEES FROM PROTRACTED SITUATIONS

Some respondents felt that refugees from protracted refugee situations are a priority concern because they have particular learning needs. It was noted that they are often grouped together in classrooms with immigrants from affluent and educated backgrounds, a setting in which they may not thrive. It was pointed out that many GARs have literacy issues and are in greater need of life skills classes in addition to language classes. It was suggested that refugees from protracted situations may require a special program that addresses their learning needs as these relate to language and professional training, and that something like a Protracted Refugee Benchmark could be developed to address this.

NETWORKING PROGRAMS

The importance of networking programs and a “third space” in communities was highlighted by a few of the survey respondents after being brought up in the workshop. The “third space” is outside the home and the work-place, and can be used to gather and socialize. According to one respondent, most of these spaces cannot be accessed free of charge and therefore can exclude low-income refugees. Another respondent focused on networking as a means to assist social and economic integration, and felt that networking programs are needed because refugees struggle to learn the language and retrain, which results in a slow settlement process.

Conversely, another respondent familiar mostly with PSRs and Refugees Landed in Canada found refugees to be very good at informal networking and was unsure that formalizing networking would produce better results. However, it was recognized that refugees don't engage as much with those outside their own community, and that a community cohesion initiative to bring together those of different nationalities and cultures could have a positive effect. Such an initiative would show that different migrant and refugee groups go through similar experiences, and would enable them to learn from each other and broaden their community. It was also suggested that the wider Canadian population could be viewed as a source of support and information, and that it would be beneficial to have an initiative wherein refugees could have social access to them.

SINGLE-PARENT FAMILIES (Particularly single mothers)

Single refugee mothers whose inland claims were accepted and whose permanent resident applications are in process face particular integration challenges, as they don't have access to social housing programs or employability programs during this limbo period.

One respondent suggested that the challenges of being a single mother and a refugee would be resolved if the above priority concerns were successfully addressed (i.e. access to housing, health care, language and job training, and employment).

OTHER PRIORITIES

There were some suggestions of actions to be taken to address some of the priority concerns regarding refugee integration in Canada.

- comprehensive pre-arrival orientation (for GARs and PSRs) delivered in the language of the refugee
- need to educate locally elected government representatives on the needs of the refugee population in their jurisdictions
- public awareness campaign stressing the legitimacy and legality of claimants awaiting status determination

VI. INFORMATION GAPS AND AREAS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

Through the workshop and the subsequent survey, the following priority information gaps and areas for further research were identified:

Top priority

- Access to employment
- Mental health and trauma related issues

Middle level priority

- Settlement Program Coordination
- Stereotypes against refugees
- Integration differences between inland refugees, GARs and PSRs
- Housing issues
- Family separation
- Existing language training programs
- Remittance obligations
- Education level

Also of priority

- Transportation loans
- Refugees' "sense of belonging"
- Differences in access to settlement services outside of urban centres or where services are centralized
- Differences in integration experiences between first and second generation refugee families, and between refugee children and children of other immigration categories
- Alternative methods of measuring employment success
- Physical health, including HIV/AIDS

Again the weighting of the various issues should be used as a guide only.

DETAILED COMMENTS ON INFORMATION GAPS AND AREAS FOR RESEARCH

The following comments are drawn from the workshop notes and the responses received after the workshop.

A. TOP PRIORITY

ACCESS TO EMPLOYMENT

Several challenges regarding access to employment for refugees, which echoed those mentioned in the previous section, were cited as grounds for more research into the issue. One respondent pointed to the failure of settlement agencies in the area of employment in the smaller city the respondent works in. While there are employment resources for newcomers with a certain level of English, nothing is available for those who fall below the mark.

Many felt that increased research into access to employment challenges could increase successful service delivery and improved integration outcomes.

Within this topic, specific gaps where respondents would like to see research carried out included:

- How immigration status on arrival interacts with other factors to influence access to employment over time: longitudinal study following first 5 years after arrival
- Impact of access to provincial employability programs on arrival in Canada
- How language, discrimination, education and other factors influence access to employment upon arrival and over time
- Innovative ways for refugees with work experience in their home countries to use their skills. Many refugees have transferable skills, but are not able to get these skills recognized
- Research on access to employment for older adults, as integration in the labour market is often more difficult for older refugee adults than for younger people, due to limited use of English/French, or fragile health.

MENTAL HEALTH AND TRAUMA-RELATED ISSUES

Many respondents are concerned that refugees, especially those who have been through trauma, do not have access to appropriate mental health services. There is interest in exploring affordable alternative ways of maintaining mental health: social groups, physical activity, nutrition, etc. One respondent pointed out that it would be useful to research the uptake of mental health services, as opposed to their availability, because of issues around common concepts of mental health, as well as stigmatization of mental health issues.

B. MIDDLE LEVEL PRIORITY

ALTERNATIVE MODELS OF SETTLEMENT PROGRAM COORDINATION

Although no details were given on what specifically to look at within this topic, it was a research priority for many both in the workshop, and among the survey respondents.

STEREOTYPES AGAINST REFUGEES AND THE CONTRIBUTIONS AND SUCCESS OF REFUGEES IN CANADA

This topic was popular as a way to research and tell the positive stories of refugee integration in Canada and debunk myths and stereotypes. One respondent said that research of this sort is “essential for the fight... against anti-refugee rhetoric - [it is] important to show Canadians the real story about what refugees have gone through, what they are able to contribute, etc.” It was felt that such research could ultimately be used in efforts to educate the public.

INTEGRATION DIFFERENCES BETWEEN INLAND REFUGEES, GARs AND PSRs

This may be more of a methodology for doing research on the integration of refugees in Canada, rather than a topic in itself. Some respondents felt that any analysis of refugee issues needs to take the category of refugees into account in order to assess the situation accurately, since the different categories often have access to different services, as well as having distinct experiences. It was noted that such research will help identify the diverse experiences of refugees and their different needs for services. Some suggestions were to examine a certain issue while dividing the three categories of refugees; others were for examining outcomes of one of the three groups.

A few suggestions made for possible research topics were:

- Differences in a) eligibility for, b) availability of, and c) uptake of settlement assistance services among GARs, PSRs, Refugees Landed in Canada, and non-refugee immigrants, across the provinces.
- Focus on the situations of inland refugee claimants at different points in the determination process
- Research focusing on PSRs and their settlement experiences.

HOUSING ISSUES

Respondents felt that it was important to continue researching housing issues to better understand refugee integration in Canada. There were suggestions of a few different topics for research, including:

- Analysis of the role of discrimination based on refugee status

- Housing experiences outside of major urban centres
- Impact of regionalization and of specific settlement areas on individuals and families
- Greater sensitivity to the impacts of place (big city, small community, type of neighbourhood)
- Cooperative models of housing

FAMILY SEPARATION

It was felt that it would be useful to compare the integration experiences of refugees arriving with their families and those arriving alone and awaiting reunification. Some respondents indicated that it would also be good to research the impact of the moratorium of applications for sponsorship of parents and grandparents.

EXISTING LANGUAGE TRAINING PROGRAMS

It was felt that existing language training programs need to be improved, and in order to further develop them it would be useful to see findings about access to and shortcomings of the existing programs.

REMITTANCE OBLIGATIONS

It was pointed out that the issue of remittances is often forgotten in research about refugees, but that the financial pressure on some refugees to remit to family members back home has an important impact on integration. This should be examined.

EDUCATION LEVEL OF DIFFERENT REFUGEE GROUPS

This was chosen as a priority for research because respondents felt that there was a need to find better ways to tailor training to different refugee groups and their levels of education in order to utilize existing skills and improve outcomes.

C. ADDITIONAL PRIORITIES

TRANSPORTATION LOANS

There was an interest among people working with refugees paying off transportation loans to examine the impact of this debt on the integration of refugees. What are the economic impacts? It was suggested that a focus on individual refugees and on families would be beneficial.

REFUGEES’ “SENSE OF BELONGING”

In order to help understand integration at a level that is not purely economic, some felt it would be worth looking into the integration experiences of refugees in Canada in terms of their own “sense of belonging” in their new society.

DIFFERENCES IN ACCESS TO SETTLEMENT SERVICES

Respondents felt that it would be useful to further explore:

- The impacts of different provincial jurisdictions on access to settlement services and mainstream social welfare services
- Comparison of experiences between smaller communities and larger cities, with an emphasis on service and resource limitations resulting from the centralizations of settlement agencies in core locations
- Information on whether centralization of settlement services in urban sectors forms a barrier to integration

DIFFERENCES IN INTEGRATION EXPERIENCES BETWEEN GROUPS

It was suggested that studies be carried out comparing the integration experiences of different groups such as:

- First and Second Generation Refugee Families
- Refugee Children and Children from other Categories of Immigrants

ALTERNATIVE METHODS OF MEASURING EMPLOYMENT SUCCESS

The question of *how* to measure integration remains salient. A suggestion was made to find alternative approaches to outcome measurement with regards to employment success. The same suggestion could also be explored for other integration factors.

PHYSICAL HEALTH

Respondents felt this was an area of research that could be beneficial to look into, for example in terms of refugees with health issues like HIV/AIDS. Refugees with disabilities may also merit research. Research could explore the impacts of health issues on social and economic integration.

OTHER COMMENTS

In addition to the above, the point was made that data collection should be disaggregated as appropriate not just between categories of refugees, but also according to race, ethnicity, gender, family size, income, and (dis-)ability, among other components.

It was also suggested that researchers should address the impacts of temporary status in the cases of many refugee claimants as well as those coming from protracted refugee situations, who have lived or are living in situations of temporariness.

VII. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This report has resulted from a dialogue between academics and practitioners in the field of refugee settlement, resettlement and integration. Such collaborations are important and should be promoted, as they allow for practical connections between those on the front-line of refugee settlement, and those whose research may help improve outcomes for refugees in Canada. It is clear that there is a need for further research on refugee integration in Canada, particularly in areas of priority concern. Such research could be extremely beneficial in terms of developing services and programs, and, in consequence, improving refugee integration outcomes.

Among the many issues that emerged as priorities through this project, access to employment and health issues were consistently identified as crucial. These are the most salient topics that deserve to be pursued, in order to develop a better understanding of refugee integration and to work towards the best possible outcomes for refugees.

Many of the issues highlighted by respondents are interconnected. Aspects such as credential recognition and language training were seen as important because of their role in facilitating access to employment (although language is also important for social integration). Challenges such as housing and transportation loans would be resolved to some extent if employment outcomes could be improved. Thus, several of the suggested areas for further research can be connected and examined together.

Health issues also stood out as both a top priority concern and area for further research for many respondents. This indicates that practitioners are confronting the impacts on refugees of health issues. They are highlighting the need for developing and improving approaches to issues like mental health. This could be an important and revealing new direction in research on refugee integration in Canada.

Several of the areas for further research highlighted a need for disaggregated data. Already the paucity of information on refugee integration in Canada seems to result in part from research on integration of newcomers to Canada that does not take account of the unique refugee experience. This report points not only to the need for research on the refugee experience, but also to distinguish between the different categories of refugees in order to understand how the differences between their categories impact their settlement and integration experiences.

It is worth noting that while this report focuses on challenges and shortcomings in terms of refugee integration, there are many success stories that could be told around the experiences of refugees settling in Canada. While we are focused here on identifying areas where improvements are needed, the positive outcomes already being achieved must also be recognized.

A gap that was not directly addressed under the terms of this project is the situation of refugee claimants who are awaiting determination of their claim. Their challenges are particularly acute because they are not eligible for many benefits and services available to recognized refugees. Given the current average time before a hearing at the Immigration and Refugee Board, many refugees will have spent years in this difficult limbo situation before they can acquire permanent residence. As some of the respondents commented, the hardships experienced in those initial

years in Canada are likely to have profound and long-lasting consequences for these refugees' integration. This is an issue that merits consideration in further research.

VIII. APPENDICES

- A. Profile of survey respondents
- B. Survey sent out to survey respondents
- C. Presentation by Michael Casasola, UNHCR
- D. Presentation by Catherine Simard, Citizenship and Immigration Canada
- E. Presentation by Damaris Rose, INRS - Centre Urbanisation Culture et Société

A. Profile of survey respondents

The fifteen survey respondents who gave input were:

- 6 settlement practitioners
- 3 academics
- 1 student
- 1 community worker
- 1 private sponsor of refugees
- 1 coordinator of a legal information clinic specialized in refugee and immigration law

Respondents were asked which category of refugees they had the most experience with. Some had overlapping experience:

- 5 said only refugees recognized in Canada (Refugees Landed in Canada)
- 3 said only government-assisted refugees (GARs)
- none said only privately sponsored refugees (PSRs)
- 2 said Refugees Landed in Canada and GARs
- 1 said PSRs and Refugees Landed in Canada
- 2 said GARs and PSRs
- 2 said all three categories

Respondents were also asked what their regional focus and experience with refugees in Canada was:

- 11 said a major city
- 2 said a smaller city
- None said a rural area
- 1 said a major and a smaller city

The survey respondents were asked to choose 3-4 top concerns from the list that was compiled after the workshop. They were asked which concerns on the list weren't top priority in their view, and which priority concerns they would add to the list. These respondents were able to give more detail and commentary than the respondents from the workshop's group discussions. However, since the sample of survey respondents is small, it is difficult to draw any conclusions or point to causality between type of respondent and priorities. Nonetheless, these responses echoed the concerns raised in the workshop, while also bringing to light some additional concerns.

B. Survey sent out to survey respondents

Refugee integration: Identifying key areas for further research

Priority Concerns and Research Needs

December 2011

A workshop at the CCR Fall 2011 Consultation offered a space for dialogue between researchers and settlement practitioners on gaps in research regarding the integration of refugees in Canada.

Out of the discussion among participants at the workshop, we have summarized the main points relating to:

- Priority Concerns Relating to Refugee Integration
- Information gaps and areas requiring research.

We are now seeking additional feedback on these points – Do you agree? Are we missing important things?

Please note that we are talking about the integration of refugees, **both** resettled refugees **and** those recognized in Canada.

The information gathered will be used for a report commissioned by the UNHCR. It follows up on the research paper (Research Summary on Resettled Refugee Integration) prepared by Jennifer Hyndman (<http://unhcr.org/4e4123d19.html>).

Priority Concerns Relating to the Integration of Refugees in Canada

1. Health issues (access to health services; mental health is a particular area of concern).
2. Language training (need for alternative teaching approaches).
3. Refugees from protracted situations – particular learning needs.
4. Credential recognition.
5. Access to employment (need for programs helping them to use their education and skills in Canada).
6. Access to housing.
7. Management of settlement services (need national harmonization, less competition, less centralization of settlement agencies in one core location)
8. Coordination of various services within regions.
9. Need for networking programs to assist social and economic integration.
10. Family reunification (separation causes hopelessness, lack of childcare).
11. Single-parent families, particularly single mothers.

QUESTIONS

- A. From the list above, which do you consider the top 3-4 concerns?
- B. Which of the concerns above are not really top priority, in your view?
- C. Are there other priority concerns that you would add? (You could also reframe existing priorities).

Information Gaps and Areas for Further Research

Research is desired on the impact of the following factors on refugees' integration:

- 1. Transportation loans**
- 2. Family separation**
- 3. Mental health and trauma related issues**
- 4. Physical health, including HIV/AIDS**
- 5. Remittance obligations**
- 6. Housing issues** (some research done, more needed)

Also research desired on:

- 7. Differences between inland refugees, GARs and PSRs** in integration.
8. Differences in access to settlement services **outside of urban centres or where services are centralized.**
9. **Education level** of different refugee groups (to inform and improve credential recognition programs and language training programs).
10. Existing **language training programs**
11. **Access to employment** (particularly for single mothers)
12. Refugees' "**sense of belonging**"
- 13. Refugees with disabilities**
14. Differences in integration experiences between **First and Second Generation refugee families**, and between refugee children and children of other immigration categories.
15. **Stereotypes against refugees** in host communities and the contributions and success of refugees in Canada (to counter negative stereotypes).
16. Alternative models of **settlement program coordination**
17. Alternative methods of **measuring employment success.**

QUESTIONS

- A. From the list above, which do you consider the top 5 priorities for research?
- B. Which of the areas above are not really top priority, in your view?
- C. Are there other important areas for research that you would add? (You could also reframe existing points).

ABOUT YOU:

I am:

Settlement practitioner

Academic

Other (please specify)

I am familiar mostly with:

Government-assisted refugees

Privately sponsored refugees

Refugees recognized in Canada

I am familiar mostly with refugee integration in:

A major city

A smaller city

A rural area

OTHER COMMENTS:

Thank you very much for your input!

Please send your responses to sgarcia@ccrweb.ca by Thursday December 15.