

Annual Report

2019-2020

Canadian Council for Refugees
Conseil canadien pour les réfugiés



Message from our President

DOROTA BLUMCZYNSKA

Wherever you are, I hope you and your loved ones are well. I wish you continued strength, both of the mind and the body. This is especially important as winter is upon us, the cold and darkness may dampen our spirits but we cannot let them touch our resolve. But even as I say this, I know all too well that hope is frail. It is elusive, born of suffering, and ever so delicate.

Still, in the lives of the thousands of refugees I've had the honour of serving, both in the Canadian Council for Refugees and at home at IRCOM, the Immigrant and Refugee Community Organization of Manitoba, I've seen that hope is also a light that cannot be extinguished. So I choose to believe that it will find its way into each of you, so that you may face all that is yet to come; that it will take up home in the lives of those who feel forgotten, those who are born into and die in war zones, who are displaced by greed and the failings of humanity.

In the past year, the world has crumbled before our eyes. There has been and continues to be profound suffering and loss of life. Racialized community members, those who are poor, refugees, migrant workers, trafficked, and non-status individuals – they are the last to receive well-resourced healthcare, good social supports, and adequate housing. As a result, they are the first to face this disease and are overrepresented in COVID infections and deaths. The most vulnerable in our communities bear the brunt of the pandemic; they bear the brunt of our collective indifference.



Vulnerability is something we inflict on each other. It is not a global health crisis that threatens humanity; if we faced it together, it would be eradicated. It is a human made pandemic we are fighting; racism, systemic and societal. We've designed a life, which, generation after generation, perpetuates hate. And even if there were moments we disagreed with, moments in which we should have risen, we remained silent. In our silence we were complicit. This has allowed the unthinkable to transpire.

The borders many of us believed could never close, just did. Global resettlement ground to a halt. The backlog of refugee claims, people already in Canada, grew. Tens of thousands of decisions were left undecided, lives suspended indefinitely. Migrant Workers were sent into the fields, some to fall ill and some to die. Even as they fed us, we denied them legal status and belonging. We finalized the construction of immigration detention centres; now children are within them. COVID has cast a spotlight on these injustices and our many failings; not in another place, in Canada.

continued on the next page

Message from our President

continued from the previous page

This reckoning was long overdue. No one should wish to return to the world before the pandemic; it was not a just place, it did not respect the human rights of all, it did not give every person a life to be enjoyed. That old world could not be dismantled, it required leveling. Now that we are in the rubble, all that remains to be done is to build anew.

The CCR's Past President, Loly Rico, once said, "fundamentally, the work of the Canadian Council for Refugees is about saving lives". Imagine if we made every decision going forward with that ideal in the depths of our hearts – to do whatever it takes to save lives. It is possible, because of you.

Each of you, in your work and advocacy has chosen to pick up a pebble along this unforgiving road. You've chosen to carry its weight, endure its sharp edges. In this, please know you were not alone. Thousands of you are walking along this path, together yet separate; thousands have lifted pebbles, renewed their commitment to change and moved this mountain.

This year has taught us, as we meet remotely and are not able to hold each other, not able to shake hands, smile across the room, or laugh over coffee, that we have to find the courage to cast our voices into the abyss. We have to believe that on the other side, although we cannot see them, someone is listening, someone is mobilizing, someone is taking action, and someone is fighting for us and with us.

The CCR community, in the hardest moment in our lived history, must hold onto a vision, a vision of a just world, in which we are all born equal and free. Even as we cannot and have never set eyes on such a place, even though we cannot look to other nations as beacons of hope, because our failings are of a global scale, we must endure. We must prevail.

Today, we are not writing history, we are authoring the present, and it is for us to say, unequivocally, never again, never again in this life; today justice must rise.

- DOROTA BLUMCZYNSKA

Table of Contents

01

Who we are

02

How we work

03

Our team

04

Activities

Who we are

We're an independent non-governmental organization committed to the rights and protection of refugees and other vulnerable migrants in Canada and around the world, and to the settlement of refugees and immigrants in Canada.

We are an umbrella organization that brings together the refugee, newcomer and immigrant serving organizations from coast to coast. These organizations are our members.

CCR members are settlement organizations, churches, lawyers' associations, private sponsors, unions, and other organizations that work to protect human rights and welcome newcomers. We serve the networking, information-exchange and advocacy needs of our members.

Over 40 years of existence and more than 210 member organizations.



How we work

Our members bring an issue forward

Members can bring issues forward in various ways. An issue can be anything that challenges our members' work and thus newcomers' rights on the ground, including anything from the impact of racism on newcomers to immigration detention.

The CCR takes this issue on

Depending on the subject, it is taken up in one of our three working groups (Immigration & Settlement, Inland Protection, or Overseas Protection & Resettlement) or in one of our other committees or networks (Anti-Trafficking Committee, the Youth Network, etc).

Understand and discuss the issue

Depending on the needs of the specific issue, it can be addressed in workshops during our bi-annual Consultations, webinars, virtual meetings or discussions between members.

Plan and act on the issue

Collectively, members decide how the CCR should act regarding this issue: pass a resolution, create practical or policy resources, bring attention to the issue in the media, launch a public opinion campaign, take legal action, or engage in a dialogue with government.

This leads to the impact of our work: changes in government policies and practices, changes in the practices of community actors, increased awareness of the issues, supporting CCR members to learn and grow, and bringing forward legal challenges.

Our team

This year, the CCR staff welcomed in its midst a new Member Services Coordinator, Alice Alvarez-Pereyre and a new Administrative and Logistics Officer, Chitra Ramsurn.

This year's focus for the staff team was on improving workflows and collaborative processes. In October, the staff team gathered at a one-day retreat outside of Montreal to work on a shared vision and goal around collaborative work.

Executive

President: Dorota Blumczynska, Winnipeg
Vice-president: Aleks Dughman-Manzur, Toronto
Treasurer: Ricki Justice, Edmonton
Secretary: Jill Hanley, Montreal
Councillors: Saleem Spindari, Vancouver; Akram Ben Salah, Moncton; Adam El-Koussa, Vancouver; Sabrina Dumitra, Burnaby; Catherine Bruce, Toronto; Magaly Guzman de Diaz, Winnipeg; Armin Boroumand, Montreal; Françoise Magunira, Ottawa

Office team

Janet Dench, Executive Director
 Deborah Traoré, Associate Executive Director
 Claudia Cojal, Office Manager
 Sandra Gasana, Settlement Policy Director
 Van Thao Dam Thi, Project Manager & Fundraising Coordinator
 Elvira Truglia, Anti-Trafficking Coordinator
 Juliana Cortes Lugo, Youth Network National Coordinator
 Alice Alvarez-Pereyre, Member Services Coordinator
 Chitra Ramsurn, Administrative & Logistics Officer

>>> The upcoming year will focus on creating spaces for innovation and creativity, so that the staff can better support the CCR work in the context of the pandemic.

Working Group Co-Presidents

Immigration and Settlement:
 Amy Casipullai,
Inland Protection:
 Anne Woolger & Mariana Martinez Vieyra
Overseas Protection and Resettlement:
 Fikre Tsehai & Michelle Ball



Activities

Membership

This year, we reviewed membership services by conducting a wide-ranging survey in collaboration with undergrads from the University of Ottawa.

Working with the membership committee, we've started building tools to facilitate member participation and engagement so that we can better serve their needs and interests.

Francophone committee

We had the pleasure of holding an in-person meeting for members of the Francophone Committee during our Ottawa Consultation in the fall of 2019.

By reviewing the terms of reference one year after their implementation, we were able to clarify governance positions. The Committee also produced recommendations on how to promote bilingualism within the organization and network.

Moving forward

With the information gathered this year, we will continue to develop new tools and methodologies.

In the upcoming year, we will:

- Create tutorial videos for the CCR structure and for its website
- Launch a series of virtual meetings entitled "Conversations about leadership: what it means to be a leader of the CCR"
- Develop a more targeted recruitment strategy

Next year, we will organize a forum for Canadian organisations offering services in French in order to identify key concerns and establish appropriate solutions. A major part of the committee's mandate is to reflect on best practices that amplify bilingualism.

We will also hold elections for the steering committee, and focus on recruiting more francophone members.

Activities

Immigration and Settlement

An already vulnerable group, migrant workers were faced with additional obstacles when the pandemic hit. The CCR wrote to Prime Minister Justin Trudeau, in May, with a call to ensure adequate support for precarious status migrants.

I&S also created a reference group to better tackle issues pertaining to international students.

Special focus was attributed to housing issues as well, with the CCR becoming a member of the National Right to Housing Network, along 75 other organizations and prominent experts and advocates across Canada, to share CCR members housing priorities and finding common strategies.



Moving forward

Continuing the group's efforts to advocate for the settlement and integration of all immigrants, I&S plans to further collaborate with Youth Network on mental health, housing, and family reunification.

The Housing subgroup will move to include members from other Working Groups as its focus is transversal.

Regularization of all status is one of the priorities for the I&S working group. The Migrant Workers subcommittee is working on a public education piece for CCR members.

Increased worldwide attention to anti-Black racism was reflected in many consultation sessions, with participants challenging themselves and our organizations to rise to the challenge of becoming anti-racist. In the upcoming year, we will actively seek out ways to confront and eradicate anti-Black racism and anti-Indigenous racism particularly.

Activities

Inland Protection

The Inland Protection group continued its campaign for speedy access to permanent residence and family reunification. In September 2019, the IRCC launched a pilot project for Excluded Family Members and in December, launched another one to expedite refugee family reunification—both issues that the CCR had been advocating on for many years!

In November 2017, the Canadian government introduced instructions meant to severely limit the detention of children. Two years later, there continue to be children in immigration detention in Canada or separated from a parent because of immigration detention. This occurs on a regular basis, and not only in “extremely limited circumstances”. In November 2019, the CCR released a report to highlight the issue and call for immediate action.

In March, the group adjusted its course to focus on information-sharing and advocacy on issues regarding refugee claimants in the pandemic context.

Moving forward

In the future, we will engage with the Canada Border Services Agency (CBSA) and the Immigration and Refugee Board (IRB) on gender-based violence issues.

With the persisting backlog of refugee claimants in Canada, we will continue to advocate for access to permanent residence for claimants.



Activities

Overseas Protection and Resettlement

To ensure the safe and successful private sponsorship of refugees, the CCR published an update of its Code of ethics for private sponsors.

In the same vein, the unmet needs of the Group of Five (G5) sponsors were explored via survey to identify areas for improvement and potential resolutions. G5 sponsors are five or more Canadian citizens or permanent residents that have arranged to sponsor a refugee living abroad to come to Canada.

Like the IP group, the OPR also adapted to a new reality in the latter half of the year in order to focus on issues relating to resettlement.

Moving forward

Thanks to the survey answers and resulting analysis, the OPR group will work to support Group of Five Sponsors in the next year.

Advocacy for equity and sensitivity in visa office processing (specifically for LGBTQ issues and anti-Black racism) will remain a priority.



Activities

Meetings

The Fall Consultation took place in Ottawa, on the theme Sharing responsibility: Nationally, regionally and globally.

377 participants learned about issues affecting refugee protection and newcomer settlement within a regional and global context. The keynote speaker, Alejandra Macías Delgadillo, Executive Director of Asylum Access Mexico, discussed the current issues surrounding the asylum system in Mexico.

The COVID-19 pandemic forced us to quickly adapt our Spring Consultation and Working Group meetings into a new online format. Despite the challenging circumstances, the CCR's first virtual consultation was a success.

Over 1,000 people attended the Spring Virtual Consultation on the theme of Access and Inclusion: protection, resources, services.

For this consultation's social event on June 20, 2020, more than 100 people came together to celebrate World Refugee Day through a special on-line artistic event featuring refugees and people working with refugees and vulnerable migrants.

Moving forward

Next year, we will prioritize encouraging people with hearing impairment and other disabilities to participate in our events (whether online or in-person), as well as offering bilingual experiences in all sessions.

We aim to be more innovative for our in-person consultations by:

- Introducing a mobile app where attendees can view their agenda, take notes and consult their registration information.
- Creating a short video in the province where the consultation will be held, thus enhancing our promotional efforts and boosting attendance.
- Including more activities for our in-person consultations, like morning exercise, yoga and outdoor scavenger hunts.

Activities

Legal Affairs

In July 2017, the Canadian Council for Refugees (CCR), Amnesty International (AI) and the Canadian Council of Churches joined an individual litigant and her children in a legal challenge of the Safe Third Country Agreement in the Federal Court.

There was a hearing in November 2019, and in July 2020 the court announced its decision: it found that sending refugee claimants back to the U.S. violates their Charter right to liberty and security of the person.

International engagement

Canada was chair of the Annual Tripartite Consultations on Resettlement (ATCR), from July 2019 to June 2020, with the CCR as the NGO Focal Point.

The ATCR process brings together the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and the governments and NGOs of resettlement countries, providing an opportunity for information-sharing and strategizing in support of resettlement. The CCR and the Government of Canada hosted the Working Groups on Resettlement and Complementary Pathways in February in Ottawa, and from April to June the first virtual ATCR, through 9 online sessions.

Moving forward

In August, 2020, the government appealed the STCA decision before the Federal Court of Appeal.

The CCR will continue to push for the end of the Safe Third Country Agreement.



Activities

Public engagement

The federal election was a key media and political event during the year, therefore the CCR was intent to call on the leaders of federal parties to respect the dignity of newcomers.

In a letter sent to all federal parties in June 2019, the CCR, Amnesty International, the Canadian Association of Refugee Lawyers and The Canadian Council of Churches expressed their concern about how refugees and migrants in Canada may be characterized during the 2019 federal election campaign.

As part of the CCR's commitment to advocating for the rights of newcomers through public education (among other channels), a workshop dedicated to using hope-based communications was held at the Spring Virtual Consultation.

Moving forward

Considering the success of the hope-based communications workshop, additional resources will be developed to enable members to build effective public campaigns.



Activities

Youth Network

In light of the pandemic, the increased isolation and changes in services offered to newcomer youth as a result, the Youth Network reached out to its members and members of the CCR to learn more about the impacts and response strategies of newcomer and refugee youth communities. We hosted webinars for our members to share promising practices and adaptation methods to best serve youth throughout these difficult times.

The CCR Youth Network Core Team took the initiative of providing bursaries for newcomer youth to relieve some of the financial difficulties generated by COVID-19. The bursaries were created also to recognize applicants' educational achievements and community involvement.

The YN has also been in the last stages of the Youth Engagement Sustainability Project; a Community of Practice formed by leaders of 6 organizations. The members put together a toolkit aiming to explore challenges and provide best practices for implementing meaningful youth engagement.

Moving forward

In 2020-2021, the Youth Network is looking forward to solidifying its structures and finding ways to collaborate with the CCR Working Groups, ensuring that youth voices are heard at all levels of the CCR.

The YN also intends to disseminate our work on youth engagement and have conversations with young adults and organizations about how to implement youth-led practices at organizational levels.

We received 51 outstanding bursary applications and, thanks to the contributions of a donor, were able to award 6 bursaries.

Activities

Anti-trafficking

In the fourth year of the CCR Anti-Trafficking Initiative, the COVID-19 pandemic brought home the need to place human rights and social justice at the centre of policies and programs that currently make people vulnerable to exploitation and trafficking.

Key events took place this year to bring attention to how existing government programs and policies fail to protect those most likely to be in situations of labour trafficking:

- The CCR National Forum on Trafficking in Persons took place in Ottawa in November 2019. Organizing the event in Canada's capital provided an important opportunity for policymakers and the NGO sector to meet face-to-face and name how plans and policies actively work to protect or create vulnerabilities to human trafficking. This is part of our efforts to consult with government on the need for policy change.

- We also organized two webinars during the CCR Spring Virtual Consultation in June. One looked at supporting precarious migrants from a gender-based lens. The other was the public education event and press conference, Forced Labour Happens in Canada.

In addition to raising awareness through media coverage, in September 2020, the IRCC approved the request for Permanent Residence under the Humanitarian and Compassionate grounds of one of the people with lived experience who spoke at our event.

This year, we also published [the CCR Advocacy Strategy](#), a key resource for the CCR Anti-Trafficking network and allies.

Lastly, this was a record-breaking year in numbers:

590 people—anti-trafficking and migrant rights advocates, front-line service providers, legal practitioners, policy makers and people with lived experience participated in our National Forum on Human Trafficking.

The forum consisted of anti-trafficking workshops, webinars, trainings and networking sessions, and was held in Ottawa, Windsor, and on-line in November 2019.

Moving forward

The coming year will be a year of reflection as we document what we have accomplished so far and look ahead to the future of this work at the CCR.

Activities

Fundraising

Due to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, our revenue from donations has decreased by 30% compared to the previous year.

The CCR's office has been closed since March and we had to cancel our Spring mailing in April and postpone other fundraising activities.

Despite the difficult situation and the pandemic circumstance, we witnessed incredible generosity and solidarity on behalf of the CCR's supporters, donors, and volunteers who, with their support and trust in our work, have allowed us to concentrate on working to advance the rights of refugees and newcomers.

In 2019-2020:

Moving forward

Another success of 2019-2020 is the implementation of Keela—a new Donor Management System to organize, analyze, and build communication strategies with our supporters.

During these uncertain times, we will continue to focus on building strong relationships with the CCR's supporters and donors by sending regular communications and newsletters to inform them about transformational impacts they have on the our work.

We will also continue to be creative and flexible in how we reach our fundraising goals.



*Friends of the CCR represent a monthly donor community dedicated to sustaining the CCR's mission to protect and empower refugees and other vulnerable migrants. These monthly transactions represent 30% of all our donations.