



19 MAY TO 26 JUNE 2020

SPRING VIRTUAL CONSULTATION



Canadian Council for Refugees
Conseil canadien pour les réfugiés

INTRODUCTION

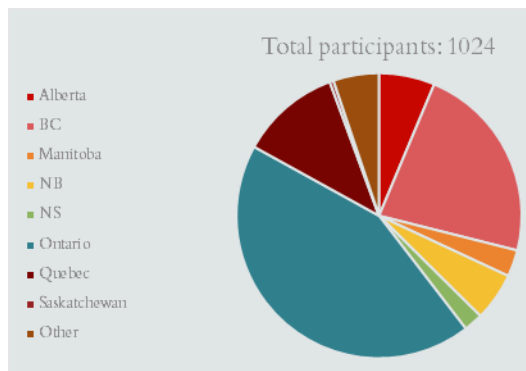
Due to the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, the CCR Spring Consultation took place on-line during six weeks from 19 May to 26 June 2020, on the theme of "Access and Inclusion: protection, resources, services". It was the first time that the CCR organized a Consultation in a virtual format. Despite the challenging circumstances, and the short timeline to plan and organize the event, we were able to hold a very successful event, attended by over a thousand participants.

Throughout 21 webinars, caucus sessions and online meetings, the Consultation provided an opportunity to learn, share, and address a wide range of topics and issues on the needs of newcomers, refugees and precarious migrants and on the additional challenges they face in the context of COVID-19.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The CCR gratefully acknowledges the support of many active volunteers across Canada. Thank you for stepping up as organizers, resource people, moderators, panelists and note takers. The on-line workshops, training sessions, caucuses and special events during the Consultation couldn't have happened without you!

CONSULTATION HIGHLIGHTS



There were 1024 attendees, coming from eight Canadian provinces (Ontario, British Columbia, Alberta, Quebec, Manitoba, New Brunswick, Nova Scotia, Saskatchewan), and elsewhere. Participants included refugees, immigrants, NGO representatives, human right defenders, government representatives, academics.



All the webinars were hosted on the on-line meeting platform GoToWebinar. On average, there were 150 attendees in each session and 735 participants attended multiple sessions. According to the evaluation responses, 98% of participants found GoToWebinar easy to use.



Simultaneous interpretation (English and French) was offered in most sessions during the Consultation through the application Interactio. Out of 557 people using the application, there were 536 participants who listened to the webinar content in English and 97 in French. On average, there were 35 participants who used Interactio in each session.

On June 20, 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. The program included live painting, storytelling through music, poetry, and spoken word on the theme of access and inclusion. The artists came from different parts of Canada. Former refugees, immigrants, and front-line workers also presented their lived experience and touching stories through the power of their words and voice.

CONSULTATION PROGRAM

There were 14 webinars, 2 caucus sessions and 4 Working Group meetings.

WEBINARS

- Dialogue with Corinne Prince, Director General, Settlement and Integration, IRCC
- Access to Resettlement: Formal and Informal Exclusions
- LGBT+ awareness in mainstream organizations
- Recovering from the Aftermath of COVID-19: Housing, Employment, International Students
- Housing, Healthcare and Income Support for Temporary and Non-Status Migrants
- Supporting Refugee Claimants in a Virtual World
- Public education: hope-based messaging (part 1)
- Work permit issues
- Supporting precarious migrants during the pandemic and beyond: a gender-based lens
- Forced Labour Happens in Canada (Press Conference and Public Education event)
- Youth Engagement Sustainability (YES): Organizational Change Towards Youth Empowerment
- Post-negative decision recourses for rejected refugee claimants
- Integration challenges for francophone newcomers in minority francophone communities
- Public education: hope-based messaging (part 2)

CAUCUS SESSIONS

- Private sponsors' Code of Ethics
- Unaccompanied and separated youth
- **Other sessions:**
- Come Celebrate World Refugee Day with Us: an on-line storytelling event featuring refugees, front-line workers or others working with refugees and vulnerable migrants.
- General Meeting

WORKING GROUPS

- Inland Protection Working Group meeting
- Immigration and Settlement Working Group meeting
- Overseas Protection and Resettlement Working Group meeting
- Joint Working Group meeting: Advocacy in pandemic and post-pandemic context

KEY ISSUES

The following were some key themes that emerged in the discussions.

Need for a radical transformation

The consultation sessions highlighted the particular and disproportionate impact of COVID-19 on newcomers, and especially those with precarious or no status in Canada. Participants noted that the pandemic forces us to open our eyes more clearly to systemic injustices and to make bold changes to address the needs. The current context is challenging but also an opportunity for radical transformation.

The CCR adopted a statement reflecting these themes: <https://ccrweb.ca/en/time-change>.

Anti-Black racism

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.

At the General Meeting, Fabiola Mizero Ngirabatware, an external Organizational Development Consultant with expertise on issues related to social justice, was invited to give a presentation on the Black Lives Matter movement. A letter signed by the CCR staff team was also published on our website and sent to Consultation participants: <https://ccrweb.ca/en/we-will-remember-the-silences>

Hope-based communication

Participants heard about the importance of using “hope-based communication” in our efforts to change public opinion. This means finding common values with the people we are addressing and connecting with them through those values. We need to remember that we reach people through the heart.

KEY ISSUES

Advocacy priorities

Each Working Group identified three key priorities for advocacy, reflecting key issues emerging through the consultation discussions:

OVERSEAS PROTECTION AND RESETTLEMENT

- Expedite the resettlement of most vulnerable cases
- Reduced processing times / Reduce the PSR Backlog of cases
- Maintain commitment to resettlement levels (or roll over to 2021)

IMMIGRATION AND SETTLEMENT

- Regularization of status for everyone with precarious immigration status
- Address anti-Black racism and racism
- Flexibility of service delivery

INLAND PROTECTION

- Refugee claimant regularization
- Rescind new ineligibility provision
- Increase immigration levels for accepted refugees and family members

OUTCOMES

Action requests from Working Groups

The Working Groups encouraged members to follow up from the meetings in the following ways:

IMMIGRATION AND SETTLEMENT

- Advocate for regularization of status for all
- Share positive stories
- Share-crowdfund COVID multilingual resources

INLAND PROTECTION

- Advocate for regularization for claimants.
- Advocate for re-opening of the border.
- Advocate to address systemic racism.

Resources shared and recommended

Many presentations delivered at workshops are available to CCR members and consultation participants at:

<https://ccrweb.ca/en/virtual-spring-consultation-2020-resources>



EVALUATION

Positive points

Forty-eight consultation participants completed an evaluation survey.

Overall, the variety of speakers coming from different areas of expertise, a wide range of topics and issues that were addressed, the opportunity to tackle COVID related issues are the main positive points that participants highlighted about the Consultation.

As the Consultation sessions were held one at a time, and spread out over six weeks, participants appreciated the opportunity to access different workshops instead of having to make choices about which ones to attend. In addition, the virtual meeting made participation more accessible, as there was no travel or accommodation costs required. At the same time, some people found it difficult to commit to more than a month of daily sessions. Many participants shared their suggestions of having the future consultation organized in a hybrid format combining both virtual and in-person meetings over a shorter period, in order to allow people with less financial capacity to attend it virtually.

"I learned something new at each webinar I attended. I appreciate each. I also liked that same time for most of webinars was beneficial, kept day consistent during COVID."

Areas of improvement

The virtual format made networking, connecting and exchanging among participants more challenging. On this point, there were suggestions to have breakout rooms with guided questions so that participants can connect with one another and advance dialogue appropriate to their context.

EVALUATION RESULTS

The following are the results from an online evaluation:

"Framing the story in my conversations with others was very useful, and the World Refugee Day event was powerful. I also love participating in conversations with people who have been doing this for much longer than I have - learning from them and catching their perspective. It is very useful in my role encouraging others to get involved for the first time."

86%	of participants rated the event as good or very good.
98%	of participants found GoToWebinars easy to use.
50%	of participants appreciated the translation, 33% didn't need the translation.
92%	of participants agreed that the Consultation was well organized.
86%	of participants agreed that the participants and panelists were diverse.
79%	of participants agreed that the Consultation was sufficiently bilingual.
77%	of participants agreed that the overall program was strong, including the scheduling, and the mix of workshops, plenaries and caucuses.
81%	of participants agreed that the Consultation helped them to acquire knowledge, understanding, and contacts that will be useful in their work.
63%	of participants agreed that the Consultation provided good opportunities to participate and contribute to the dialogue.
90%	of participants would attend the Consultation again and would recommend it to others.