



Canadian Council for Refugees Fall 2012 Consultation
“Our Vision: A fair and honourable future for refugee and immigrant families”
29 November – 1 December 2012, Toronto
Conference Report

I. INTRODUCTION

The Canadian Council for Refugees’ 2012 Fall Consultation was held November 29 – December 1 at the Hyatt Regency hotel in Toronto. Approximately 400 participants from across Canada attended the Consultation. Several CCR member organizations and volunteers from across the Greater Toronto Area formed a local organizing committee to host the event, ensuring that logistics were looked after, and that a welcoming team of volunteers was ready to respond to the needs of participants. With coordination by the FCJ Refugee Centre youth group, the Toronto branch of the CCR Youth Network organized the delightful Friday night social event for Consultation participants in partnership with a local community centre.

The 2012 Fall Consultation provided a space for learning, experience-sharing and networking among people involved in refugee protection, the immigrant and refugee serving sector, and refugee resettlement across Canada. The Consultation devoted a considerable amount of time for presentations, discussions and strategy sessions on recent policy changes such as Bill C-31 and the cuts to health care for some refugees. These changes (Bill C-31 comes into effect December 2012, and the cuts to refugee health came into force in the summer) will have an enormous effect on refugees and their advocates, as well as settlement workers and sponsors, so it was considered important to dedicate considerable time to these issues.

Thirty-three sessions were offered during the three days of the consultation, consisting of two plenary sessions, three orientations, three working group meetings, nineteen workshops, five caucus sessions, and the Annual General Meeting of members. The program included three or four concurrent workshops in any given time period, apart from the times when participants met in plenary. Workshop streams focused on (a) immigrant and refugee settlement and integration, (b) refugee resettlement and overseas protection and (c) inland refugee protection.

The Working Group meetings held during the Consultation gave participants the opportunity to discuss emerging issues and share information, best practices and initiatives with others from across Canada. They also offered an opportunity to prepare resolutions to be presented at the General Meeting, and to develop strategies for action to address issues emerging from the discussion. A special plenary was also held to allow members to strategize and give input regarding the future of the CCR.

Participants' oral and written evaluations were overall positive. Participants especially appreciated the learning opportunity provided by the workshop content, the quality of presentations, and the opportunity to discuss and debate, as well as the networking opportunities offered by the Consultation, which permitted attendees to connect with others doing similar work in other parts of the country. Several remarked that the quality of workshops and presentations was extremely high.

The success of the Consultation was made possible thanks to the time, dedication, and hard work of the local organizing committee (LOC), made up of staff and volunteers from organizations including the Canadian Centre for Victims of Torture, FCJ Refugee Centre, OCASI, Thorncliffe Neighbourhood Office, COSTI Immigrant Services, Sojourn House, Amnesty International, World Education Services and others, as well as many individuals. The LOC coordinated a team of dynamic and helpful volunteers, who contributed to the very friendly atmosphere and the smooth running of the event. The social event organized by the Youth Network with live music and a play by youth was enjoyed by all who attended, as was the Thursday evening reception in honour of long-time refugee rights advocate Fred Franklin.

At this Consultation, the CCR benefited from the in-kind contributions of the Canadian Centre for Victims of Torture, FCJ Refugee Centre, Thorncliffe Neighbourhood Office, COSTI Immigrant Services, Ontario Council of Agencies Serving Immigrants (OCASI), and the Canadian Auto Workers.

The CCR gratefully acknowledges financial support for the consultation from the Ontario Ministry of Citizenship and Immigration, the Ontario Provincial Advocate for Children and Youth, COSTI Immigrant Services, Seneca College, the Centre for Refugee Studies at York University, and World Education Services.

II. EMERGING NEEDS AND NEW DIRECTIONS

Through workshops, caucus sessions, plenaries and the written feedback we received on the Consultation, a number of emerging needs and priorities in the newcomer settlement sector have been identified.

Refugee Health

In the wake of the June implementation of cuts to the Interim Federal Health Program, refugee health was a prominent topic of discussion at the Consultation. Participants shared information about the impacts of the cuts and proposed strategies for working together with the provinces and affected communities in order to ensure that people in Canada are not left without access to basic healthcare services.

New directions in resettlement

As CIC advances on its initiative to restructure the refugee selection and resettlement programs, the CCR has concerns that the changes will narrow access to resettlement for specific groups of refugees and those living outside designated regions of the world. This Consultation provided a forum for policy makers, service providers, refugee sponsors and academics to share perspectives on the implications of proposed changes. The CCR will be looking for opportunities to pursue the discussion.

CCR members and information sharing

In the context of a rapidly changing immigration and refugee determination environment, it has become increasingly clear that information sharing between CCR members across sectors and across the country is very important to help us keep abreast of impacts and issues. Members are encouraged to let the CCR know about resources or relevant on-the-ground experiences, especially with regards to cuts to refugee healthcare, Bill C-31, and conditional permanent residence.

Youth issues

Newcomer youth are affected adversely by some policies, including certain recent new policies for immigrants and refugees. Issues identified include access to immigration status for youth in care, unaccompanied minors claiming asylum, children and youth in detention, impacts of changes to the refugee determination system and the cuts to IFHP.

Settlement service gaps for newcomers with special needs and sensitivity to intersecting identities

Everyone has intersecting identities – sometimes newcomers’ needs fall through the cracks in service provision, because of lack of sensitivity to multiple identities. We hope to continue the discussion on identities such as disabilities, LGBTQ, and youth, which intersect with individuals’ identities as newcomers, and are sometimes not addressed by settlement services.

Bridges between the CCR and indigenous peoples

At this Consultation participants returned to the question of how the CCR should approach the issues of indigenous peoples in Canada, where all non-natives (newcomers and Canadian-born) can be seen as “settlers”. Through a [resolution](#), the CCR reaffirmed its commitment to sensitizing its members to Canada’s colonial history and current issues facing indigenous peoples, as well as to encourage members to build relationships with indigenous communities.

Corporate activity and displacement

The CCR has continued to have discussions on the links between corporate activity and displacement of people around the world, and at this Consultation the CCR [resolved](#) to oppose corporate activities that contribute, directly or indirectly, to forced displacement.

III. SUMMARY OF THE PLENARIES

Opening plenary

The Honourable Michael Chan welcomed participants to Ontario for the consultation. Loly Rico presented an update on CCR activities in the past six months. Alex Neve gave the key note speech, challenging participants to work for a fair and honourable future for refugees. He spoke of realities in South Sudan, Colombia and Côte d'Ivoire, and compared the responses in those regions with the policies and discourse prevailing in Canada. He saw the greatest hope for a fair and honourable future in the courage, determination and compassion of refugees and refugee advocates.

Speakers:

The Honourable Michael Chan, Minister of Citizenship and Immigration of Ontario
Loly Rico, Interim President, Canadian Council for Refugees
Alex Neve, Secretary General, Amnesty International Canada

Moderators: Gloria Nafziger and Gilbert Iyamuremye

Plenary: the CCR's Future

CCR members had an opportunity to learn about the CCR's strategic planning process and hear the results of members' input so far. Participants added their comments about what they wished to see in and from the CCR in the future. The Executive Committee will be taking the input and developing possible options for future directions.

Moderators: Jean McRae and Rivka Augenfeld

Annual General Meeting

The Consultation concluded with the CCR Annual General Meeting. Elections were held for Executive members (Loly Rico was elected as President, Rivka Augenfeld as Vice-President). Two resolutions were adopted. The resolutions can be found at ccrweb.ca/en/resolutions-dec2012. Highlights from the Working Groups and the Youth Network were also presented.

IV. SYNTHESIS OF WORKSHOPS

Note: a number of presentations from the workshops are available to CCR members online at ccrweb.ca/en/fall-2012-presentations.

Facing the challenges posed by Bill C-31 (Changes to the refugee determination system)

Part I

In the first of this two-part workshop, representatives from Canada Border Services Agency, Citizenship and Immigration Canada and the Immigration and Refugee Board discussed updates concerning the implementation of Bill C-31. Some of the points covered included the new timelines for making a refugee claim at the port of entry or inland, expected changes to the Immigration and Refugee Board's procedures, and comments on the Assisted Voluntary Return Program.

Resource persons:

Simon Coakeley, Executive Director, Immigration and Refugee Board

Greg Zawadski, Canada Border Services Agency

Caitlin Imrie/Teny Dikranian, Citizenship and Immigration Canada

Moderators: Heberto Reyes and Heather Neufeld

Part II

In the second part of this workshop, participants heard and discussed practical information and best practices in the context of the upcoming changes to the refugee determination system. Aviva Basman presented advice on filling out the Basis of Claim form. Peter Showler then presented briefly on the work of the University of Ottawa Refugee Assistance Project (UORAP), which is in the process of preparing materials for community workers who will be assisting unrepresented claimants to prepare for their hearings. Participants then broke into groups to discuss tools that would be useful to them in preparing to meet the challenge of the new law, and each group reported back to the rest of the participants.

Several groups noted that the tools recently added to the CCR website regarding the changes are very useful. Several suggestions for additional tools and resources emerged from the discussion:

- A PowerPoint with the recently posted information
- Training on filling out the basis of Claim form, destined for community workers (note: it appears the UORAP will be working on this)
- Specialized information resources for community workers, dealing with particular types of claimants, such as persons suffering from psychological trauma, claimants in detention, claimants in small centres and illiterate claimants (e.g. form letter to attest that claimant requires a psychological assessment)
- Information sheets on frequently encountered profiles of cases (e.g. domestic violence, sexual orientation)
- Information and training for community workers on how to assess whether a claimant is vulnerable
- Information sheets destined for claimants who have difficulty establishing trust
- Information sheets for medical professionals on preparing reports for the IRB

- Examples of filled in forms or form letters to request extensions to file or amend Basis of Claim forms
- Dedicated list-serve or online forum to exchange advice and experience on the new process.
- 1-800 helpline to provide answers quickly on new procedures
- Glossary of key terms used in the Basis of Claim (e.g. state protection, internal flight alternative, etc.) with possible summary of case law and/or links to leading cases
- FAQ page on new process
- An “IRB Procedures for Dummies” guide
- Information on what to do when a Basis of Claim form cannot be fully or properly completed or when an interpreter is not fully competent
- Checklist of ID documents which are normally considered acceptable
- Master checklist of all forms and documents needed to submit a refugee claim
- Information on how to decide between making a refugee claim and filing a Humanitarian and Compassionate grounds applications
- Database of lawyers in each region available to take on cases at any given time, with information on willingness to accept legal aid
- Information on temporary housing for claimants who need to travel for their hearings

Resource person: Aviva Basman, Refugee Law Office

Moderator: Rick Goldman

Burma: Impact of recent developments on displacement

This workshop addressed the impact of recent political developments in Burma on displacement, and the impacts of any current changes that are occurring on internally displaced people and refugees in Thailand, Bangladesh, India, Malaysia and other countries, as well as the almost two million Burmese migrant workers in Thailand. It also broached the question of what kind of advocacy on behalf of these people is needed at this time, given the increasing interest in economic engagement in Burma by western governments and the corporate sector.

Kevin Malseed, Inter Pares, gave an overview of the current situation in Burma. The major cause of displacement of people is the human rights abuses being perpetrated by military actors. Current trends include increased fear of economic development-induced displacement and confiscation of land. Positive changes are occurring in urban areas, but not in the rural areas where the displacement is taking place.

Joe Swe Hantha spoke to the need for conditions of stability, safety and security before repatriation can be considered as a viable option. According to him, the current developments (lifting of sanctions, etc.) are benefitting the military regime more than anyone. There is a need for a political settlement, and for true reform there must be pressure from Canadian, US and ASEAN governments.

Pri Lahtaw spoke about the continued displacement (especially internally) in the Kachin territory and nearly all of government-controlled territory, as well as the lack of aid reaching displaced groups. She spoke to the reliance on local NGOs that have little international support, and

pointed to the need for mediation of conflict and increased cooperation between local NGOs and international aid.

Sebastian Köhn described the long history of persecution of the Rohingya, and how although the current violence began as intercommunal, it has increased to general persecution. The Burmese government/military did not intervene, and may have actively participated. More than 160,000 people have been displaced.

Michael Casasola spoke about the country from the perspective of UNHCR, for whom Burma is the number one country of refugee referrals, although Canada is accepting very few of them.

Resource persons:

Michael Casasola, Resettlement Officer, UNHCR Ottawa

Joe Swe Hantha, Chair, Karen Canadian Community

Sebastian Köhn, Program Officer for Equality and Citizenship, Open Society Foundations
Justice Initiative

Pri Lahtaw, President, Kachin Canadian Association

Kevin Malseed, Burma Program Officer, Inter Pares

Moderators: Anna Purkey and Gloria Nafziger

Access to education for refugees and non-status people

This workshop focused on the challenges faced by refugee and non-status populations in assessing secondary and post-secondary education in Canada. The dialogue drew from academic, policy and community perspectives, and attempted to create a holistic understanding of the experiences of precarious migrant populations in navigating Canadian education systems. The objective of the workshop was to provide an opportunity to share and discuss the legal, ethical and social challenges of this issue, as well as to delineate possible solutions.

Spanning secondary and post-secondary education (mainly in Ontario) the workshop covered the experiences of refugee and non-status people on their trajectory to higher education. Resource persons addressed both admissibility and experiential challenges these populations face when trying to access education, emphasizing the conflict of domestic and international requirements and financial needs.

The workshop was also able to highlight some of the impacts that the inability to access education has on refugee and non-status youth. Particular attention was paid to periods of “limbo”, when individuals are waiting for permanent residency, or to have their status regularized somehow. Although these individuals have been accepted in principle, they are unable to access domestic admissions/fees or student loan programs. These factors often act as a deterrent for youth to realize their full academic potential and plan on pursuing further education.

Some recommendations that came from the workshop were as follows:

- 1) Collect and consolidate information province by province to explore different policies, legislation and approaches to accessing education for non-status and refugee populations. A survey will be put together by the CCR Youth Network to gather information and put

together a report on how each province is responding to the issue. This will help inform further action.

- 2) Members and participants can start identifying potential allies to help influence change within post-secondary institutions – including promoting cultural sensitivity, and better recognition of foreign credentials/courses.
- 3) In Ontario a group is going to meet to have a round table to discuss the issues of domestic and international admissibility for migrant populations, as well as possibilities for financial relief, including access to loan programs as well as scholarships and bursaries. There is hope that effective strategies will result from this meeting that can be mirrored in other provinces in Canada.

Resource persons:

Dr. Soheila Pashang, Toronto

Navjeet Sidhu, Social Planning Toronto

Treisy Rivera-Flores, FCJ Refugee Centre Youth Network, Toronto

Moderators: Philip Ackerman and Monica Abdelkader

Trafficking in Persons: Dialogue with government and law enforcement

This workshop brought together NGOs and service providers with government and law enforcement representatives in order to engage in meaningful dialogue regarding emerging needs and priorities in the protection of trafficked persons in Canada. Drawing on the discussion at the CCR National Forum on Trafficking for NGOs the day before, the workshop also presented the recommendations, priorities and concerns that were identified by organizations at the Forum in regards to policy development and implementation, to be discussed with government and law enforcement.

Marty Van Doren provided an overview of his role as RCMP human trafficking awareness coordinator of the Ontario region, and of the RCMP's work with regards to their awareness-raising efforts on trafficking as well as their approach to dealing with trafficked persons and to collaborating and building partnerships with NGOs working on trafficking issues. He examined elements of the RCMP's national strategy to combat human trafficking, including the development of an integrated enforcement team and continued efforts in increasing partnerships with service providers and other departmental agencies. Among the current initiatives highlighted, a strong emphasis was placed on awareness-raising efforts among law enforcement, NGOs and the public through law enforcement training courses, a quarterly newsletter available to the public, the launching of a recent youth strategy and different awareness sessions across the province and the country.

Finally an overview of the recent labour trafficking cases in Ontario, named Project OPAPA, involving the trafficking of 23 Hungarian nationals and the outcomes to these cases was presented. One important gap identified in relation to the recently launched National Action Plan to Combat Human Trafficking was the lack of attention given to the process from identification to recovery and integration of trafficked persons and survivors in the plan.

Drawing on the discussions of the CCR National Forum on Trafficking held on November 28, just the day before the Consultation, the priorities and concerns raised and the recommendations

development by NGOs at the Forum were presented by the co-moderators to be discussed with the RCMP and CIC representatives. The latter points focused on three priority areas: 1) Awareness-raising, 2) Services: housing, community services, rural/urban services, differential access to health care and counselling, and 3) Policy on international cases: temporary resident permits (TRPs), extending protection to families of trafficking survivors, labour exploitation and Temporary Foreign Workers. The table was then opened for discussion and questions with participants.

The CCR was invited to send their recommendations and to follow up with the appropriate CIC officials in Toronto. The moderators asserted that the recommendations developed at the Forum would be sent to Public Safety as well for consideration as part of their ongoing regional consultation process on the National Action Plan.

Resource persons:

Marty Van Doren, RCMP Human Trafficking Awareness Coordinator, Ontario Region
Wendy Quirion and Rose Hanley, Citizenship and Immigration Canada

Moderators: Alexandra Ricard-Guay and Cathy Kolar

Right to Benefits for Migrant Workers

This session featured panel presentations on the types of benefits migrant workers are entitled to, benefits from which they are excluded, and the barriers they face in accessing benefits. A facilitated discussion followed where participants were able to discuss and develop recommendations on what must change so that migrant workers have the same benefits as all other workers, and can access them.

Chris Ramsaroop summarized the current situation for temporary foreign workers in the “low-skilled” streams of the Temporary Foreign Worker Program, which is seeing increasing numbers particularly in the Low-skill Pilot Project, and an increase in racialized workers. He pointed out that although the government announced in April 2011 that employers who violated the rights of workers would be put on a “bad” employers list online, so far there is no one on this list (despite many accounts of exploitative employers). He pointed out some of the recent changes that put migrant workers at an increased disadvantage, rather than protecting them, for example the four-year limit to the time migrant workers in the Low-skill Pilot Project can work in Canada legally, and the 15%/5% wage differential that can be paid to migrant workers in comparison to their Canadian counterparts, that was announced earlier this year. He also discussed current events such as the lawsuit being brought by BC unions over the Chinese miners that were to come to work in Canada. He expressed concern in the role trade unions are playing in this context, and that they may be fuelling xenophobia and racism.

Saleem Spindari presented on the obstacles migrant workers can face in accessing services. The principle obstacle is that most funders and agencies delivering settlement services do not include eligibility for migrant workers, even though they need these services. He pointed out that the needs are even greater in rural areas where isolation is greater, and where many migrant workers are located. He underlines the need to raise awareness through public events and campaigns to promoted non-discrimination of migrant workers regarding their access to services.

Cathy Kolar's presentation focused on benefits, which migrant workers pay into and are eligible for, but they end up not being able to access them because of barriers that exist as a result of Federal and Provincial policies. While migrant workers are eligible for EI, their work permits limit their labour mobility and the structure makes it impossible to collect. The same situation applies for sick benefits and maternity benefits: there is a disconnect between the policy changes and the ability to access services.

Some of the recommendations that came out of the discussion (many of which are already on the CCR's agenda) were:

- More education around the issue
- Status upon arrival rather than creating a class of workers with no access to residence
- Equal access to entitlements
- Work with unions
- Promote open work permits rather than tied to employer

Resource persons:

Saleem Spindari, MOSAIC, Vancouver

Chris Ramsaroop, Justicia for Migrant Workers, Toronto

Cathy Kolar, Legal Assistance of Windsor

Moderator: Carlos Idibouo and Claudette Legault

Corporate Responsibility and Refugees

Participants in this workshop learned about the principles of socially responsible investing, which holds corporations accountable for their human rights and environmental impacts. The workshop also explored how to identify the activities of corporations that affect the rights of refugees and migrants and take action to protect those rights.

Heather Lang gave an overview of the role of Sustainalytics, where investment advisors become agents to change corporate behaviour, by profiling the nature of their activities and their impact on the environment and human rights. She pointed out that Sustainalytics welcomes ongoing dialogue regarding the incorporation of refugee concerns into company screens, as well as information from NGOs on rights that are violated.

Resource person:

Alan Harman, Scotia McLeod

Heather Lang, Sustainalytics

Moderator: Gloria Nafziger

Statelessness Around the World: Why it matters

The 2011 celebration of the 50th anniversary of the Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness has given renewed attention to the phenomenon of statelessness globally. The workshop will examine the problem of statelessness around the world and will build on a recent UNHCR report and seminars on this issue.

Sebastian Köhn gave an overview of the history and definition of global stateless populations, and made the distinction between stateless people and stateless refugees. The panelist with a personal experience of statelessness explained the pain, frustration and fear that stateless people face using his own situation as a stateless Palestinian from Iraq. Andrew Brouwer described the inadequacies of the present Canadian legislation for dealing with stateless people. He also spoke of the new Canadian legislation creating new categories of stateless people born in Canada.

Some recommendations coming out of this workshop were:

- Training of CBSA officers to identify stateless people during Port of Entry interviews
- Research countries with distinct procedures for determining statelessness and identify best practices
- Consider urging the Private Sponsorship community to use resettlement as a tool of protection (albeit a limited one)

Resource persons:

Sebastian Köhn, Program Officer, Open Society Justice Initiative, New York

Andrew Brouwer, Refugee Law Office, Toronto

A stateless person who wished to remain anonymous

Moderator: Glynis Williams

Assisted Voluntary Return Program

Since June 29, the Canada Border Services Agency has been running a pilot Assisted Voluntary Return and Reintegration program in the Greater Toronto Area, implemented by the International Organization for Migration (IOM). Participants at the workshop were able to learn about the principles of the AVRR Program, projections for returns (7,000 in 3 years), the reintegration process imagined through the program, enrolment and file transfer processes, and the IOM's involvement and tasks as part of the program.

Issues that came out of the workshop included:

- Travel time and costs from Windsor to CBSA airport road in Toronto. One trip alone is costly and stressful for failed refugee claimants
- Since neither CBSA nor IOM provides an interpreter for potential participants in the program, the cost of the interpreter is an added expense for the returnees. In Windsor, the rate per hour for interpreter varies plus they also charge the family the following on top of the interpretation service itself: mileage, food and accommodation if necessary (example: if appointment at CBSA is scheduled for 8am, the family and interpreter will

have to travel the night before, requiring an overnight stay.) All these expenses combined add up to \$500-\$1000 depending on the number of people in the family.

- Additional costs: there have been cases where a CBSA asked the potential participants of the AVRR program to bring a baby sitter that can stay with their children in the waiting room of the CBSA office in Toronto while the parents are inside with the officer. This is an additional cost for the family, especially if they have no other family members or friends in Canada to help with childcare.
- Travel document issues. Since most failed refugee claimants are without a passport or any travel document, they are required to acquire travel documentation in order to proceed with the AVRR program.

Recommendations:

- CBSA should agree to accept faxed copies of travel documents once issued by their respective countries, instead of asking them to appear in person again to CBSA in Toronto prior to their departure date
- CBSA should consider that only the head of the family should be required to appear for the final steps in completing the process.
- CBSA should consider that failed refugee claimants that choose to apply and proceed with the AVRR program should be given the opportunity to do so within their local city of residence

Resource persons:

Greg Zawadzki, Canada Border Services Agency

Nicola Graviano, International Organization for Migration, Toronto

Moderator: Eunice Valenzuela

Youth Creating New Media for Social Change

This workshop invited participants to develop a better understanding of how social media can be used by youth and those who work with youth to effectively share their new media projects with a greater public, and to advance a given advocacy initiative. The workshop aimed to result in five concrete tips that can be used to run a successful advocacy campaign that uses social media as a dissemination tool. This workshop was broadcasted online.

The resource persons presented briefly on their organizations and how they use media as a way to create social change. Participants then split into five discussion groups (one group participated online) to come up with a campaign using social media on one of the following topics: Interim Federal Health cuts, negative stereotypes of newcomer youth, and access to education. The groups were given guiding questions to help them plan their campaign. The groups then presented their campaigns and the activity was concluded by identifying key strategies to implementing a successful campaign using social media:

- Know the action you want people to take
- Identify your key audience (who are the people you want to hear your message)

- Identify your key message and spokespersons (what is the key message and who should be sharing it)
- Have the message relatable (focus on similarities)
- Value access and anti-oppression (diverse mediums, access points and diverse representation)
- Run on hope (share difficult stories as well as optimistic ones. Not always focusing on the negative)
- Light on text (simplicity)
- Never underestimate yourself as a resource
- Balance between “new” and “old” media

Workshop participants suggested disseminating the workshop results as follow-up, by posting the above listed strategies on the CCR website and the Youth Network page, making them accessible to all future Speak Up! participants, and encouraging people to use the CCR network to find resource materials and people to get their campaigns going.

Resource persons:

Kehinde Bah, co-founder of the Remix Project, Toronto
 Simmi Dixit, United Nations Association of Canada, Ottawa
 Devon Ostrom and Kate Fraser, ARRIVALS, Toronto

Moderators: Heather Neufeld and Madeleine Whalen

Charitable Status and Political Activities

This practical workshop sought to respond to the question “what may we do, which activities should we avoid, and what should we be doing as advocates?” Zachary Euler covered the requirements of the Canada Revenue Agency around political activities (10% of resources and time), and made the distinctions around talking with political representatives and government representatives, and making a call to action or taking partisan positions. Mark Blumberg focused on what organizations can do, recognizing that the charitable sector in general devotes far less than 10% of resources to political activity, he provided examples of what can and cannot be done. Both gave good, concrete examples, and useful PowerPoint presentations.

Some resources people can refer to for information are:

- Both presenters’ presentation slides (Available to CCR members [here](#))
- Canadian Revenue Agency website
- www.canadiancharitylaw.ca and www.globalphilanthropy.ca (Mark Blumberg)
- Charityfocus.ca and Imaginecanada.ca

Resource persons:

Zachary Euler, Senior Policy Analyst, Charities Directorate, Canada Revenue Agency
 Mark Blumberg, lawyer, Blumberg Segal LLP, Toronto

Moderator: Jean McRae

Refugee Health at Risk: Impact of IFHP cuts, strategies for advocacy

This workshop aimed to identify the emerging gaps in access to physical and mental health care as a result of the cuts to the Interim Federal Health Program (IFHP). How are the changes affecting refugee claimants, refused claimants, resettled refugees, private sponsors, etc.? Presenters and participants shared current and potential strategies for responding at the individual, provincial and national levels.

The following suggestions for strategies were proposed in a brainstorming session:

- Ask provincial governments to provide plain language information to beneficiaries and to health care providers (video for claimants?)
- Create list of pro-bono doctors and university clinics, sharing resources etc.
- Monitor billing, to ensure that beneficiaries who have coverage do not pay for services that should be covered
- Produce CCR pamphlet to counter pamphlets of conservative MPs – need to deconstruct notion of supplementary services – medications are essential not supplementary!
- Use social media as this has been effective
- CCR to ask CIC to clearly indicate entitlements of people with H&Cs in process
- CCR to follow up on requests for exceptional coverage – survey members for results and go to the media.
- Communicate with professional orders (doctors, nurses, social workers, midwives, etc.) in each province to ensure their members have the correct information on who is eligible for what and ask how they can help in advocacy efforts
- Bring cases to the human rights tribunal – health care is a right
- Keep communication open between provinces and sponsorship holder groups
- Refugee Sponsorship Training Program (RST) website has links to alternative ways to raise funds – can there be more of these? BUT it should be used only for extreme/emergency cases and not as a regular way to address the cuts / pool resources between groups for emergency situations
- Another not long-term solution for need for psychological support services: build repertoire with professionals trained outside of Canada who can't legally practice in Canada but they can help provide psycho-social support services
- Raise awareness of removal of “pre departure medical screening” – also a public health issue
- Bring cases into the public eye
- Example of Johnson and Johnson campaign in UK – “penny to Kenney” campaign to change public's perception
- Distribute Saskatchewan premier's youtube video widely (and create more of these!)
- Replicate public protests that have been effective (led by health professionals – high standing with the public)
- Present MPs with facts, give opposition MPs talking points for question period in House of commons
- Develop national FAQ for health professionals
- Bring more awareness to sponsorship agreement holders re: what they're going to be responsible to provide in terms of health care
- Document cases
- Engage the media

Things to keep in mind in advocacy efforts:

- Doctors more successful than refugee advocacy groups (they have more credibility) so we need to continue to collaborate with them and contribute to their efforts
- Need to counter misleading and xenophobic government discourse, services have never been “gold-plated”, they are emergency/essential services
- Need to show that refused refugee claimants are still legally here exercising legal recourses and deserve healthcare while they are here
- Everyone has a right to health care – make sure provinces still advocate towards the federal government (“they’re not off the hook” – hold the feds responsible for doing their share)
- Refugees are part of “the public” – can there be a legal challenge to interpretation of “public health and public safety” coverage?

Resource persons:

Meb Rashid, Canadian Doctors for Refugee Care, Toronto

Alexandra Kotyk, Anglican United Refugee Alliance (AURA), Toronto

Francisco Rico-Martinez, CCR

Moderators: Debbie Hill-Corrigan and Marian Shermarke

Immigration Issues for Youth in Care

This workshop addressed the particular immigration challenges faced by non-citizen youth in care. The session aimed to raise awareness about these challenges and promote dialogue between protection agencies and immigrant and refugee-serving organizations, as well as to identify strategies to improve the situation for youth in care.

Workshop presenters described how Children’s Aid Societies (CAS) don’t necessarily keep records of children’s immigration status. Sometimes, a child’s lack of status is not noticed until the child is leaving the care system, by which time it is too late to help. Children often think their CAS worker is seeking status for them, but this might not be true. CAS may not be aware of what they can do to apply for status for children. There is no consistent system for assisting children who enter Canada as unaccompanied child refugee claimants. Some families who are deported also end up having to leave Canadian-born children behind in care.

The recommendation coming out of this workshop was around the need to educate CAS on immigration issues and make sure a system is put in place to determine each child’s immigration status and the steps to be taken to seek permanent status for that child. The Provincial Advocate raised the idea of a gathering where newcomer youth in CAS care could meet with decision makers to talk about what changes they think would help them. It was felt that CCR should advocate for a national policy on unaccompanied refugee claimant children. The academic presenter described rules under the US immigration system wherein children without status who would be homeless or abandoned if sent to their home country are able to obtain a Special Immigrant Juvenile Status to remain in the US permanently. Attendees also mentioned that some European countries have well-developed procedures for assisting asylum-seeking children who are alone.

Resource persons:

Irwin Elman, Provincial Advocate for Children and Youth

Francis Hare, professor, School of Child and Youth Care, Ryerson University

Moderators: Heather Neufeld and Steven Rempel

Sharing Refugee Stories Online

This workshop addressed the following questions: what groups are sharing refugee and newcomer stories online in Canada? What have they learned from their experiences? How can we share these lessons with others? How can the CCR help to share refugee storytelling tips, as well as refugee stories, more widely? Its objectives were to share ways to promote the faces and stories of refugees, refugee claimants and newcomers to Canada. During this session, participants and presenters explored ideas to share refugees' and newcomers' stories and common questions about storytelling as a part of a national project.

Resource persons:

Carolina Teves, FCJ Refugee Centre, Toronto

Adnan Amin and Jennilee Austria, North York Community House, North York

Moderator: Eunice Valenzuela

Intersectionality, Identity, and Access to Services

As individuals, we have many identities that make up our whole person. For immigrants and refugees who have identities that are often marginalized (e.g. those with disabilities, LGBTI and youth), settlement services may not address their whole experience or may offer services in ways that segment their identity. This created the opportunity to reflect on the importance of considering multiple identities, their intersectionalities, and what they mean for settlement services.

Rabia Khedr provided an overview of barriers for immigrants and refugees with disabilities in accessing services, both in terms of eligibility (if one is a sponsored family member) as well as the accessibility of service locations and services themselves. She also focused on how intersectionalities of identity can complicate access even more (gender, sexual orientation, immigration status, age, etc.)

Maria Alejandra Ramírez Bolaños spoke about the barriers experienced by youth, using her own experience as well as her work with other youth, and provided her recommendations in addressing some of these.

Christina Olivieri and Emilio Garcia explored the complexities of LGBTI identities (sexual orientations and gender identities) and how these can shape LGBTI refugees' access to the asylum process and settlement services. They also spoke in particular about Bill C-31, and how its provisions, in conjunction with LGBTI identities, will further reduce access to services that will support LGBTI refugees in making successful refugee claims.

Participants were very engaged and found the workshop to be informative, and helped them think about the impact of intersectionalities of oppression in their work. Participants strongly expressed a desire to have more workshops related to the topics discussed, that were more focused on specific issues (e.g. disability and services) to allow for a more in-depth exploration, whereas this workshop had provided a good introduction to the issues.

Resource persons:

Christina Olivieri and Emilio Garcia, AGIR, Montreal

Maria Alejandra Ramírez Bolaños, FCJ Refugee Centre Youth Network, Toronto

Rabia Khedr, Canadian Association of Muslims with Disabilities, Toronto

Moderator: Erika Gates-Gasse and Jean McRae

Bridges between First Nations and Newcomers

Through an interactive tool called the “Blanket Exercise” this workshop took a look at the history of colonization of Turtle Island and the impact on Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples. The workshop also discussed the model of the “dialogue circles” as another tool to promote dialogue, build bridges and encourage mutually supportive relationship between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples in Turtle Island.

Participants discussed issues around the history of relationships between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples in Canada and how specific pieces of legislation in Canada’s history impacted on Indigenous peoples in Turtle Island. Participants also viewed a video which documented the launching of a project called “Dialogues between First Nations, Urban Aboriginal and Immigrant Communities in Vancouver”. The project, a joint venture of the City of Vancouver and community partners including CCR member MOSAIC, aimed to increase understanding and strengthen relations among the city’s Aboriginal and newcomer/non-Aboriginal communities.

The resolution on building relationships between the CCR and indigenous peoples as well as recognizing the territory on which CCR holds activities that was passed at the Annual General Meeting came out of this workshop. Participants felt it was important to continue education of CCR membership on Indigenous peoples in order to build bridges between Indigenous peoples and new Canadians.

Facilitators:

Julie Graham and Alfredo Barahona, KAIROS, Toronto

Saleem Spindari, MOSAIC, Vancouver

Protection through Resettlement? New directions in Canada’s Refugee Resettlement Program

The new CIC initiative on “New Directions in Resettlement” seeks to improve the current program but narrows access to resettlement for specific groups of refugees and those living outside designated regions of the world. In the context of resettlement as a tool of protection, this workshop examined the new initiatives as they challenge many of the existing principles of Canada’s refugee resettlement program.

The panelists presented from a wide range of perspectives (CIC, UNHCR, CCR, Sponsorship Agreement Holder, Resettlement Assistance Program/Service Provider Organization, and academia), examining the changes to Canada's refugee resettlement program and in response to the papers shared by CIC during July 2012. The objective of the session was to inform the membership of the pending changes, identify some of the main issues and various responses so far from CCR and other sectors. In addition, NGO presenters also identified issues that are priorities for advocacy by their own organizations as well as by CCR.

An action item that resulted from this workshop was for CCR membership, especially members of the Overseas Protection and Sponsorship Working Group and the Immigration and Settlement Working Group to work together to consolidate the CCR policies pertaining to the Government of Canada's changes to the Refugee Resettlement Program in order to develop advocacy activities responding to the new policy and operational environment.

One of the challenges faced by the CCR and also by other NGOs is the fragmentation of the advocacy voice due to focus in specific areas of resettlement such as pre-departure, integration, global approaches to refugee protection and asylum issues relating to resettlement such as family reunification. The need for better communication between the various sectors, understanding how the issues transect our mandates and the possibility of more effective advocacy strategies led to the action item approved by the participants.

Resource persons:

Debra Pressé, Director Resettlement, CIC, Ottawa

Michael Casasola, UNHCR, Ottawa

Colin McKay, COSTI, Toronto

Jennifer Hyndman, Professor and Associate Director, Centre for Refugee Studies, York University

Alexandra Kotyk, Anglican United Refugee Alliance, Toronto

Moderators: Rob Shropshire and Liz McWeeny

Protection of Roma Refugees in Canada

Canada's Roma community has been shrouded in stereotypes, misinformation, and suspicion. As the community tries to challenge ongoing institutionalized discrimination, they are grappling with how new changes to the refugee determination system (Bill C-31) and refugee healthcare cuts will affect them.

The Roma people are their history, including where they have lived, the legacy of persecution and the reasons for that persecution: racism, discrimination, exclusion, marginalization, abject poverty, criminalization, among others. The term "apartheid" was used to describe the systemic approach against the Roma, enforced by the neo-nazi paramilitaries and political parties.

The Canadian approach to the Roma was described as racist and discriminatory, with Bill C-31 mentioned as the political response to the influx of Roma during the last years. The corrupt legal representation of the majority of Roma cases was identified as an issue. It was felt that the IRB should deal with the Roma case as one of systemic discrimination amounting to persecution. The Federal Court has decided in two Roma cases that there is not state protection in Europe.

The case of one Roma family was presented at the workshop. They described the violence that they suffered back home, and their disillusionment at finding upon arrival in Canada that the legal system is politically influenced against them.

It was decided that the Roma Community Centre, in coordination with lawyers, will put together an information package of country conditions, reasons for rejection and legal and humanitarian arguments to support Roma cases.

Resource persons:

Gina Csanyi-Robah, Roma Community Centre

James Gildiner, lawyer

Laszlo Sarkozi Jr., Romani youth

Moderator: Francisco Rico-Martinez

Power of Rhymes: Exploring arts education through hip hop and spoken word

This workshop explored arts education with a focus on hip hop and spoken word, through participatory activities and a discussion featuring artists from Test their Logic, Nomadic Massive and The Fusionists. The goal of the workshop was to work towards creating a space within the CCR Youth Network where all members regardless of their first language or educational status can feel able to participate fully in the work of advocating for newcomer rights.

Participants discussed and explored the barriers inherent in the standard educational system with a particular focus on newcomer youth. They looked at how these barriers have a ripple effect on integration of new Canadians in general. The groups split into smaller discussion groups to come up with a creative way of presenting barriers to education in an artistic or unconventional way. Language, accreditation, discrimination and lack of appropriate support were just a few of the barriers identified. The groups presented drawings, skits and spoken word pieces in a variety of forms and languages. Participants felt that the exercise was very successful because it exemplified how much can be communicated in an engaging way when we allow for creativity. After this exercise, youth hip hop artists spoke about why they chose hip hop or spoken word as a method of communication and dissemination around important issues.

The workshop provided a space for newcomer youth to come together and explore different ways of learning and presenting, and to think through how this can be translated into civil participation more broadly. It also provided a platform for different groups to connect and explore possibilities for further collaboration. Feedback from participants indicated that they were very excited about these new connections and the possibility of further mentorship initiatives.

Facilitators:

Tamaisha Eytel, OCASI, Toronto

Bana Kidani, FCJ Refugee Centre Youth Network, Toronto

Samanta Garcia, CCR staff

V. PARTICIPANT EVALUATIONS

Participant evaluations of the Consultation were overwhelmingly positive. Most often cited as the most outstanding aspects of the Consultation were the workshop content and presentations, the networking opportunity offered by the social event and the camaraderie of the atmosphere. Several people mentioned feeling motivated by connecting with their colleagues from across the country, and being inspired by the feeling of being surrounded by others with shared values for refugee and newcomer rights. Some people enjoyed the social events, and one highlighted the homage to Fred Franklin that took place at the welcome reception. Several respondents mentioned the Friday plenary which was used to discuss the CCR's future, and the extra working group time to discuss IFH as valuable. The diversity of participation, including significant youth presence, was also cited as a positive. Several people said they felt that attending the Consultation would be helpful for them in their work.

Respondents appreciated how participation and inclusion was fostered at the Consultation, for example by allowing ample time for discussion and smaller group work, stronger moderation so that certain individuals don't dominate the microphone, and consistently reminding attendees that we strive to make the Consultation a safe space, free of oppression, in which people can express themselves.

There were also some useful suggestions to be taken into considerations for future events: although the majority of respondents had good feedback about the venue and its staff, a few people felt that for future Consultations we should find less fancy venues, as they are incongruent with the realities of so many refugees around the world. Another suggested having refugee voices at the opening plenary (perhaps not realizing that the CCR president Loly Rico herself came to Canada as a refugee). As usual, several respondents mentioned they would like meals and snacks to be included in the conference registration fee: unfortunately this is impossible due to lack of funds.