



Highlights Report: CCR National Forum on Trafficking in Persons, Gatineau, QC, November 2014

On 26 November, 2014, the Canadian Council for Refugees (CCR) hosted a National Forum on Trafficking in Persons in conjunction with the CCR Fall 2014 Consultation in Gatineau. The forum provided a space for learning, experience-sharing and networking among people involved in work to protect trafficked persons and to increase public awareness of trafficking in Canada.

The forum facilitated constructive exchanges between representatives of non-governmental organizations, service providers, academics, as well as representatives of different levels of government and law enforcement. Over 50 individuals participated in the forum, primarily from Ontario, Quebec, New Brunswick, Alberta and British Columbia.

The forum was divided into four overarching sessions dedicated to:

- Sharing challenges, experiences, responses and strategies to better assist trafficked persons and raise awareness about trafficking in Canada;
- Analyzing existing policy directions, gaps and policy development priorities;
- Examining recent research findings on sex trafficking for the purpose of community planning in Edmonton, Ottawa and York Region;
- Identifying priorities and approaches to improve protection and prevention measures, as well as collaboration efforts to address the barriers faced.

Highlights

The forum discussion stressed the need to improve prevention efforts by continuing to pursue targeted awareness-raising across sectors on the different forms of trafficking in Canada. Overall, participants stressed the need for standardized data collection on a national level. Labour trafficking was particularly identified as a growing concern and the need for specific research was strongly emphasized. Participants also repeatedly called attention to the importance of carrying out more research on the trafficking of Aboriginal populations, and supported the call for a national inquiry on missing and murdered Aboriginal women.

The forum underlined the importance of recognizing the link between prevention and protection, and of addressing the structural factors that create vulnerable situations for individuals. Concerning protection challenges, it was noted that greater emphasis is currently being placed on prosecution and on a proof-based approach, than on a rights-based and victim-centred one. In response to this, participants called for a stronger human rights lens to be applied to the issue of trafficking.

Finally, it was recognized that continuing to build partnerships is crucial to moving forward. Participants felt that more collaboration is especially necessary between the government and the non-profit sector. Networking and information sharing opportunities such as this one were acknowledged as particularly useful in creating a space for dialogue and cooperation.

Priorities in moving forward

Participants raised a number of priorities throughout the forum discussion. These have been organized in the areas of policy, service provision and awareness-raising so as to provide guidance on the actions required in each area. NGOs, service providers, law enforcement, policy makers and others involved in anti-trafficking work are encouraged to consider ways to move forward on the priorities suggested at the forum.

Policy

- Entrench protection in law with no conditions to cooperation in criminal investigations or prosecution efforts.
- Temporary Resident Permits (TRPs):
 - Create a more direct pathway to permanent residence for survivors of trafficking, beyond the use of TRPs;
 - Include family members of trafficking survivors in TRPs;
 - Create a provision in the TRP guidelines for trafficked persons to extend protection to family members who are outside Canada;
 - Provide specialized training on TRPs, particularly for CIC and CBSA officers.
- Improve the effectiveness of the National Action Plan to Combat Trafficking by:
 - Creating a centralized body on a federal level to act as liaison between NGOs on the ground and relevant federal departments overseeing anti-trafficking efforts.
 - Developing a process for identifying trafficked persons and a coordinated, integrated approach to address trafficking at the federal level that includes the voices of experiential women and men.
- Address the role of recruitment fees as an important factor that facilitates exploitation.

Services

- Invest in more resources for victim services and long-term support services, including trauma-informed care, recovery centres and other specialized services.
- Diligently explore solutions to address the lack of adequate housing for trafficked persons with different needs.
- Set up more centralized support procedures, nationally and regionally, to provide faster and more appropriate referrals.
- Support the development of a national network of service providers.
- Develop a national assessment tool to provide clarity on what trafficking looks like.

Awareness-raising

- Carry out targeted awareness-raising efforts across sectors, including through training on identifying and providing adequate support to trafficked persons.
- Establish standardized data collection nation-wide through the development of provincial and national central databases.
- Expand local and municipal involvement, including through the changing of bylaws and policies, to improve prevention and protection measures at these levels.