



Canadian Council for Refugees Fall 2013 Consultation
“Everyone Has a Part to Play: What’s Your Part?”
28 – 30 November 2013, Kitchener
Conference Report

I. INTRODUCTION

The Canadian Council for Refugees’ Fall 2013 Consultation was held November 28-30 at the Kitchener-Waterloo Hotel and Conference Centre. Over 350 participants from across Canada attended the Consultation, with a strong attendance from across Ontario. Several CCR member organizations and volunteers from across the Kitchener-Waterloo region 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.

The Fall 2013 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. A particular focus for the Consultation was the changing landscape around citizenship issues, as well as the integration of indigenous perspectives into work for refugee and newcomer rights. The day before the Consultation two full-day meetings were hosted by the CCR in partnership with the International Migration Research Centre at Wilfrid Laurier University: the National Forum on Trafficking, and the Strategy Meeting on Migrant Worker Issues. These meetings generated considerable interest and participation. Find summaries and presentations from the meetings at: <http://ccrweb.ca/en/trafficking-nov2013-presentations> and <http://ccrweb.ca/en/migrant-workers-meeting-nov2013-summary-and-presentations>

New approaches and unconventional formats were also experimented with at this Consultation, including a new working group meeting format with a one-hour introductory session on the Thursday morning and a 1.5 hour meeting on the Friday afternoon. There was also a joint strategy session on Somali issues with leadership from the Somali community and each of the working groups.

Thirty-three sessions were offered during the three days of the consultation, consisting of two plenary sessions, three orientations, six working group meeting sessions, nineteen workshops and trainings, two 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.

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 Mennonite Coalition for Refugee Support, K-W Multicultural Centre, Reception House, Welcome Home, YMCA Kitchener-Waterloo, Immigration Partnership and the Community Coalition on Refugee and Immigration Concerns. 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 LOC with delicious food, live music by a Colombian band, and dancing was enjoyed by all who attended.

At this Consultation, the CCR benefited from the in-kind contributions of the Mennonite Coalition for Refugee Support, Kitchener-Waterloo Multicultural Centre, Immigration Partnership, Welcome Home – Refugee Housing Community, Reception House Waterloo Region, and YMCA Kitchener Waterloo.

The CCR gratefully acknowledges financial support for the consultation from the Ontario Ministry of Citizenship and Immigration, Region of Waterloo, Mennonite Savings and Credit Union, Kitchener and Waterloo Community Fund, Office of the Ontario Youth Advocate, Koinonia Christian Fellowship, Kitchener-Waterloo Multicultural Centre, Reception House, York University Centre for Refugee Studies and Mennonite Central Committee.

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 refugee protection and newcomer settlement sector have been identified.

Indigenous Peoples in Canada

The consultation highlighted the need for newcomers and those working with newcomers to learn more about the realities of Indigenous People and respect their rights. Participants took up the message delivered by Justice Murray Sinclair to recognize that we are all Treaty Peoples. A [resolution](#) was passed with respect to the Treaties upon which this country is founded and which bind all of us as Treaty peoples. In addition, the CCR adopted a [Guiding Statement on Indigenous Peoples](#).

Family Reunification

The increasing barriers to family reunification were highlighted by the incoming changes to the Parent and Grandparent Program. A [resolution](#) was adopted calling for the elimination of the income requirement for sponsorship.

Barriers to Citizenship

Service providers report that their clients are being affected by the onerous residence questionnaires being assigned to some citizenship applicants. The questionnaire is very labour-intensive and adds an additional delay of up to three years to processing, which already takes on average more than two years.

Also reported are barriers to citizenship resulting from confusion around the language testing criteria required to apply for citizenship. For some people, including refugees who have spent years in a refugee camp, the new language rules are acting as a barrier to citizenship. There is considerable concern about citizenship becoming harder to obtain and easier to lose, and the impacts this will have on settlement and integration.

Gaps and Challenges for LGBT Refugee Claimants

LGBT refugee claimants are facing increased challenges as a result of the shortened timelines of the new refugee determination system. Consultation participations felt that it was important to offer more support to LGBT claimants, in particular Francophones outside Quebec.

Conditional Permanent Residence

Following the adoption of the new conditional permanent residence rules in October 2012, concerns are being raised over access to the exemption in cases of abuse or neglect. Initial reports suggest difficulty in getting information about how to apply for an exception.

New refugee determination system

At the approach of the first anniversary of Canada's new refugee determination system, the pressures of the short timelines are taking their toll on claimants. While some claimants fare well in the new system, it seems that this is mostly the case for those who have an extensive network of support.

Alternatives to detention

At the invitation of the Canada Border Services Agency, participants are exploring strategies for reducing the number of people in immigration detention, while meeting the government's enforcement objectives. The CCR will be pursuing the discussion.

Somali issues

Responding to the government's decision not to resettle Somalis as Government Assisted Refugees, participants reviewed the various ways Canadian immigration policies have in the past and continue to discriminate against Somalis. A commitment was made to pursue the conversation, under the leadership of Somali Canadians.

Proud to Protect Refugees

As part of the continuing effort to increase Canadian public support for refugees, participants began planning for a cross-Canada Walk With Refugees around World Refugee Day in June 2014. There was also a renewed interest in inter-faith dialogue to promote the same objective.

III. SUMMARY OF THE PLENARIES

Note: a number of the presentations are available online for CCR members at <http://ccrweb.ca/en/fall2013-presentations>

Opening plenary

After a welcome from Mayor Brenda Halloran of Waterloo and Ken Seiling, Waterloo Regional Chair, the Consultation opened with a keynote speech from Justice Murray Sinclair of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada. Justice Sinclair spoke about historical Canadian policies towards indigenous people, including in particular the residential schools, and their disastrous impact on indigenous people. He highlighted the importance of settler and newcomer populations in Canada being aware of the history and present reality for indigenous peoples.

Speakers:

Loly Rico, President, Canadian Council for Refugees

Maria Alejandra Ramirez Bolaños and Treisy Rivera Flores, CCR Youth Network

The Honourable Justice Murray Sinclair, Chair of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission

Moderators: Eunice Valenzuela and Kaylee Perez

Plenary: Planning a strong future for the CCR

The CCR Strategic Plan for 2013-2016 was presented.

Moderators: Rivka Augenfeld and Jean McRae

Annual General Meeting

The consultation concluded with the Annual General Meeting, where members elected new Executive members, passed a number of [resolutions](#) and heard about the CCR's work before the courts from Sharry Aiken, co-chair of the CCR Legal Affairs Committee.

IV. SYNTHESIS OF WORKSHOPS

Note: a number of presentations from the workshops are available to CCR members online at <http://ccrweb.ca/en/fall2013-presentations>

New Challenges for LGBT Refugee Claimants in Canada

This workshop explored the challenges of establishing sexual orientation and gender identity in the context of the new refugee determination process from three different perspectives: the lawyer, the community worker, and the claimant.

The legal perspective discussed preparing clients for intrusive questioning by IRB officials, and emphasized the importance of disclosing sexual orientation at the earliest opportunity. The community worker touched on the difficulties of proving with evidence and demeanour that one is gay. The refugee claimant, a transgender woman, shared her experience arriving in Canada, including detention, and the path towards finally being connected with community services, and her relief a year later with the positive decision accorded to her.

Several suggestions came out of the discussion that followed the presentations:

- Urge the IRB to update their Gender Guidelines to address LGBTQ issues
- Work with those bringing legal challenges to the Designated Country of Origin regime
- Create more support groups for LGBTQ individuals (action request)
- Create more resources for LGBTQ volunteers (action request)
- Address the gap for francophone queer refugee claimants
- Amass resources to help educate the IRB, e.g. on the complexity of the coming out process
- Work within cultural groups to understand issues facing LGBTQ people from their community

Resource persons:

Alyssa Manning, lawyer, Refugee Law Office, Toronto

Biko Beuttah, refugee claimant

Karlene Williams Clarke, The 519 Church Street Community Centre, Toronto

Moderators: Aviva Basman and Francisco Rico-Martinez

Connecting Newcomers with the First Nations People of Turtle Island (Canada)

This workshop explored aboriginal issues that refugees and other newcomers should be made aware of in their orientation to Canada.

The three speakers from Laurier University expressed their personal experiences and concerns as indigenous people and in particular indigenous women. They also echoed some of the points that Justice Sinclair had made during his keynote speech at the opening plenary. Their presentations were very moving, and they revealed that much of the information that exists on indigenous people is wrong, and that much more should be provided to refugees before arriving in Canada. Abdi, the director of IRCOM provided a number of concrete examples of how IRCOM, during

the past five years, has brought together refugee and First Nations people who live in the downtown core of Winnipeg. Also, IRCOM staff have met with the staff of several First Nations organizations and the Treaty Commissioners staff.

During the discussion, participants agree that the “Welcome to Canada” guide and Discover Canada resources all need to be overhauled significantly to include an accurate and true history of indigenous peoples of Canada. Indigenous communities should be consulted/take leadership on this. It was felt that the example set by IRCOM through programming and training initiatives should be followed by others, and we should continue to facilitate dialogue between newcomers, settlers and indigenous peoples, as well as within the CCR.

Resource persons:

Dr. Kathy Absolon, Jean Becker, Darren Thomas, Wilfrid Laurier University
Abdikheir Ahmed, IRCOM, Winnipeg

Moderator: Jim Mair and Fikre Tsehai

Migrant Workers – Global Context

This workshop looked at the global context of temporary labour migration, including root causes and international efforts to protect the human rights of migrants.

Jenna Hennebry gave a presentation to introduce participants to the dynamics of global labour migration.

Unfortunately the second speaker, Evelyn Encalada, was unable to make it to the Consultation to talk about her transnational experience organizing around migrant workers’ rights. To give some perspective from the labour movement, Angela Contreras Chavez presented some slides and speaking notes from Karl Flecker of the Canadian Labour Congress. This brief presentation focused on the way that international institutions such as the UN are bringing together state governments and other stakeholders to “manage” migration. The Global Forum on Migration and Development and the UN High-level Dialogue on Migration and Development are examples of these forums, which focus on seizing on benefits of international migration, such as remittances, with little meaningful discussion of migrant rights, and seemingly no promotion of the view that governments must create decent jobs and that migration should be a choice, not an economic necessity. There is also very limited representation of migrant groups themselves in these forums. Connie Sorio discussed the activities of the International Migrants Alliance, and showed a video to give an example of migrant justice struggles around the world.

Resource persons:

Jenna Hennebry, International Migration Research Centre – Wilfrid Laurier University, Waterloo
Connie Sorio, International Migrants Alliance, Toronto

Moderators: Tess Tesalona and Angela Contreras Chavez

Youth: Stereotyping and Violence

This workshop used interactive activities and mediums to unpack some of the stereotypes that exist for racialized youth and to unravel how these prejudices manifest themselves in different forms of violence. It was a participatory workshop where there were group activities, and participants started off watching a video which initiated discussion about negative stereotypes, our human biases, perceptions and prejudices and power dynamics and privileges.

The workshop was designed to create dialogue and to engage participation and sharing of personal and professional experiences or what people have heard others experiencing.

There were 25 participants and participants were divided small group to work on the following questions:

1. What are negative stereotypes you have heard of or you are guilty of espousing?
2. Confusion of intergenerational conflict and stereotypes
3. How do stereotypes lead to violence?

All participants shared their ideas on a flip chart and a presenter from each group gave feedback. Facilitators highlighted the similarities and key points. All participants were asked to replace every negative stereotype with a positive one, or any good action that shall influence positive change.

To wrap up, participants were divided into two groups, and each had a long rope. Every participant shared their thoughts and how they felt about the workshop. They held onto the yard rope and gave the end to another participant, and so on until there was a web connecting all the participants. The facilitator explained how we are all connected no matter what race, colour, religion or gender or however one might decide to identify. The facilitator moved the rope up and down, so participants could feel the effect as everyone held the rope.

Youth, youth leaders, settle workers, directors, legal advocates and community members participated in the workshop, emphasizing the importance of being heard, having a voice and sharing cultural values, traditions and experiences. All agreed that stereotypes takes away people's individuality and put everyone into a category rather than looking at one's personality and individual worth.

The action plan was for everyone to take this discussion to their communities and continue the dialogue, and to challenge stereotypes and be self aware our own bias and prejudices. Some participants felt this was a needed workshop and there should be more dialogue and space to discuss sensitive issues that everyone is aware of but often go undiscussed.

Resource persons:

Sharmarke Mohamed, Victoria Immigrant and Refugee Centre Society

Letitia Annamalai, Inter-Cultural Association of Greater Victoria

Alternatives to Detention

Canada Border Services Agency is exploring alternatives to detention. This workshop provided an opportunity for NGOs to give their input. Discussion focused on the level of principles –

developing a strategic vision for meeting government objectives while respecting the rights and dignity of individuals.

CBSA officials gave an overview of detention facilities across Canada, and the CBSA approach to detention: reasons for it, numbers, guidelines, programs, etc. emphasizing that detention is a last resort, and that the decision to detain an individual is risk-based. They discussed the Toronto Bail Program as one cost-effective, efficient and less intrusive alternative in the Toronto area which could potentially be expanded in the future.

Grant Mitchell spoke about the over 50 alternatives to detention that exist at the global level. While no one model fits everywhere, he suggested the community assessment and placement model in particular, involving case management and community support. Legal support and collaboration between government and NGOs working together towards sustainable solutions are also important elements. One priority is for it to be written into policy that detention should be a last resort. The key steps he recommended are:

- 1) Presumption against detention
- 2) Screening and assessment of individual – situation, context and vulnerabilities
- 3) Community-based case management if needed
- 4) Reporting, location mandates and bonds
- 5) Detention as last resort

Nadia Williamson reinforced the point of view that detention is undesirable, seeking asylum is not an illegal act, and detention should be a last resort. She pointed out that there is no empirical evidence that detention is necessary. Alternatives to detention must be considered, with periodic oversight and not a direct replacement. Alternatives should be tailored to vulnerable groups at front and back end.

Presenting a summary of Canadian NGO reflections, Jenny Jeanes pointed out that surveillance should be avoided, that it is not a real alternative, and that alternatives are generally easier and cheaper than detention. There is a great variation in practices between regions, and she discussed detention monitoring in Quebec, where the role of NGOs needs to be defined more clearly. It was suggested that principles should be established, such as: not detaining children, case management, enhanced risk assessments to deter detention, etc. It was suggested that the International Detention Coalition could be looked to for examples.

During the discussion several concerns and demands were raised, some of which are listed here:

- Bad conditions for striking migrant detainees in Lindsay Ontario.
- Some voice reporting programs haven't accepted shelter phones.
- Alternative programs that are working should be expanded
- No detention of vulnerable people
- No use of prisons or segregation from society
- No to detention as a fundamental principle
- No detention of people with medical or mental health issues.
- Respect for individual and families (keeping families together)
- Increased screening and assessment to better understand the context of each person

- Guidelines for transfer to provincial prisons should be made

It was suggested that there should be a CBSA ombudsman to address individual cases. Participants felt overwhelmingly that the criminal justice system is not the right place for vulnerable refugees.

Resource persons:

John Helsdon, Manager, Hearings and Detentions Unit, CBSA
Leah Johnston, Program Manager, Transformation Programs, CBSA
Grant Mitchell, International Detention Coalition
Nadia Williamson, UNHCR
Jenny Jeanes, Action réfugiés Montréal

Moderator: Debbie Hill-Corrigan and Tanya Aberman

Syria: An update on the refugee crisis and international responses

This workshop provided an update on the Syrian refugee crisis and the devastating humanitarian disaster that has ensued. It aimed to examine Canadian and international responses to the crisis.

The presenters gave an overview of the history of the refugee crisis based on UNHCR statistics, discussed the work of World Vision and the displacements seen, and finally the viewpoint of Syrian-Canadians in terms of approaches to government, impacts on the life of Syrian-Canadians, and their hopes that the Canadian population will mobilize in solidarity.

The discussion emphasized the importance of making the Canadian population aware of the humanitarian crisis in Syria, since efforts to date have had little traction.

Resource persons:

Michael Casasola, Resettlement Officer, UNHCR
Mike Weickert, Acting Director, Global Rapid Response Team, World Vision International
Malaz Sebai, Syrian Canadian

The ABC's of Citizenship: The law, the regulations, the risks and practical considerations

This training workshop outlined the main features of the Citizenship Act and regulations: how to acquire citizenship and the risks of losing citizenship. Also considered were the realities and obstacles facing applicants, as experienced in the daily work of practitioners in a community settlement organization.

Jenny Stone discussed how to apply for citizenship, applying for accommodation of a disability, applying for a waiver of the citizenship exam, how to deal with residence questionnaires, where to go for English testing to prove level 4 for citizenship, and possible strategies for dealing with situations where a person returns to their home country at some point after being granted refugee status.

Liljana talked about the stress, frustration and confusion of clients at her settlement agency who must fill out a residence questionnaire. She talked about the difficulties of gathering all the documents required, as well as the expense.

Workshop attendees discussed how to prove that an individual will never be able to learn enough English to apply for citizenship. Attendees wanted a template of a letter they could give to ESL teachers so they could write a letter to explain that a particular student is not advancing at all in their English skills, to use in support of a citizenship test waiver.

There was a recommendation to disseminate information to settlement organizations to inform clients not to apply for citizenship if they are refugees who have been back to their home country in the past four years prior to applying for citizenship. They should wait long enough so that they won't have to refer to the return visit on the citizenship application. Organizations also need to warn clients not to apply for a home country passport if they were accepted as refugees as this could also be used to provoke cessation proceedings.

It was suggested that if someone's citizenship application is taking a very long time or if they can't remember the dates they left Canada to fill out their travel portion of the citizenship form, they or their lawyer/support worker can apply for their entire immigration file through Access to Information.

Resource persons:

Jennifer Stone, lawyer, Inter-Clinic Immigration Working Group, Toronto
Liljana Kalaba, Multicultural Association of Fredericton

Moderator: Heather Neufeld

Family Reunification

This workshop aimed to increase awareness and understanding about the impact of the proposed changes with respect to the sponsorship of parents and grandparents and dependent children, and conditional permanent resident status.

Avvy Go gave a review and critical analysis of the legislative and regulatory changes that are impacting family reunification. Marta Kalita gave a front line perspective from her settlement agency on the real impacts of the changes on newcomers and their families. Lean Gerente is the daughter of a live-in caregiver who died while her application for permanent residence – which included her two daughters – was being processed. She and her sister are now in Canada with temporary residence permits, and Lean explained the real impact of barriers to family reunification through her own lived experience.

Discussion at this workshop resulted in the proposal of two resolutions: one to eliminate the minimum income threshold for family sponsorship, and one to complete processing of permanent residence applications when the primary applicant passes away during processing. An action request for members was also suggested for member organizations to use Family Day as a campaign day to bring attention to issues of family reunification. Another suggestion was that

with the next election in mind, a statement on "family values" and family reunification be drafted, and members ask their local MPs and other party candidates to sign onto the statement.

Resource persons:

Avvy Go, Metro Chinese and Southeast Asian Legal Clinic

Lean Gerente, Toronto

Marta Kalita, Manitoba Interfaith Immigration Council, Winnipeg

Moderators: Victor Porter and Erika Gates-Gasse

The New Refugee System: Nearly One Year On

This session constituted an examination of the evolution of the new refugee determination system as it approached the first anniversary of its implementation. The workshop was divided into two parts, dealing first with the hearing before the Refugee Protection Division (RPD) and then the appeal at the Refugee Appeal Division (RAD).

Discussion focused on the challenges faced by the tight timelines including gathering evidence, requesting postponements in order to present medical or other evidence, lengthy delays in making decisions, and the important role of community workers in guiding claimants. Statistics on the RAD were provided, and the standard of reasonableness was discussed. RAD officials were unable to provide clarity regarding a number of ongoing concerns.

CCR needs to monitor the IRB website for announcements of three member RAD panels and to continue with the legal challenges.

Part I

Resource persons:

Aviva Basman, Refugee Law Office

Diana Ballesteros, former refugee claimant

Ross Pattee, Deputy Chair, Refugee Protection Division, Immigration and Refugee Board

Part II

Resource persons:

Deborah Morrish, Acting Deputy Chairperson, Refugee Appeal Division, Immigration and Refugee Board

Andrew Brouwer, Refugee Law Office, Toronto

Moderators: Catherine Bruce and Mitch Goldberg

Gender Persecution, Trauma and their Impacts on Refugee Claimants

This workshop was geared towards service providers including lawyers who support refugee women who have experienced sexual assault, intimate violence and other forms of gender persecution. Unfortunately one of the programmed panellists, Rubaiyat Karim, was unable to attend.

The workshop covered the challenges of working with survivors of trauma, challenges of the refugee system with regard to the way trauma impacts refugee claimants, and best practices from a counselling and legal perspective. The workshop also touched on community efforts to address trauma from a grassroots perspective.

Participants felt it would be important to have a group or committee that keeps VAW issues on the table on an ongoing way at the CCR, between Consultations and not only at them. The suggestion was made to collect cases of challenges faces by legal and settlement workers on the issue of conditional permanent residence.

Resource persons:

Pat Durish, therapist, Toronto

Satran Sulevani, Barbra Schlifer Clinic, Toronto

Moderators: Krittika Ghosh and Rita Acosta

Refugees in East Africa: We die on the way or we die here

Conditions are dire in refugee camps in East Africa. So bad, in fact, that many refugees take their chances in the Sinai desert or in the high seas. At the same time, the Government of Canada has decided not to resettle any more Somali refugees. This workshop shed light on the denial of basic human rights in the camps where refugees have the choice of staying indefinitely or risking their lives to get somewhere else. How can we help, what can we do?

Awet Haile spoke about the dire conditions in refugee camps in Sudan and Kenya, highlighting the unemployment, lack of education or health access and insecurity. He noted the abuse and corruption of Sudanese police and corruption within refugee camps in regard to distribution of food rations. He also explained how and why refugees risk their lives on the high seas and through deserts to cross borders.

Rustom Gebrhwet spoke about the smuggling and trafficking of Eritrean refugees, particularly abductions and trafficking of refugees from Shagarab refugee camp near Kassala to human traffickers of the Rashaida and Hidarib tribes in East Sudan. He presented a CNN report, Death in the Desert: <http://thecnnfreedomproject.blogs.cnn.com/category/death-in-the-desert/>. He also spoke about African refugees in Israel (xenophobia and harassment) as well as some issues faced in Ethiopia. His presentation covered how young refugees risk their lives on the Mediterranean Sea and discussed the situation of Eritrean refugees held for ransom in Sinai, Egypt.

Ambaro Guled spoke about Somali refugees and internally displaced persons, using her own life experience to illustrate the issues.

Dr. Don Diplo and Negin Dahya are collaborating with other colleagues at the York Centre for Refugee Studies on the Borderless Higher Education Project. It is a response to the absence of any education opportunities beyond the secondary level in refugee camps where refugees spend many years in protracted situations. <http://crs.yorku.ca/bher>. The project involves training teachers in the camp. There is a huge imbalance between girl and boy students (fewer than 30%

are girls). Refugees in the camp are using social media to share their stories. The speakers shed light on how education can be a beacon of hope.

In discussion a number of issues for follow up were identified:

- Eritrean concerns: Canada is identifying Eritreans as a priority population for resettlement. We should review past CCR positions on Eritrea and see what future action is required.
- Somali resettlement: Along with other resettlement countries we need to combat the negative attitude toward resettlement of Somalis.
- Canada should take a role in advocating on the issue of human trafficking of Eritrean refugees and the tragedy taking place at the Mediterranean Sea, now referred to as the cemetery of migrants.

Resource persons:

Awet Haile

Rustom Gebrhwet

Ambaro Guled

Don Dippo and Negin Dahya, Borderless Higher Education Project, Centre for refugee Studies

Moderators: Liz McWeeny and Sharmarke Mohamed

Proud to Protect Refugees: How can I play a part?

This interactive workshop focused on practical situations when we can change the conversation about refugees in our communities and tips to do this effectively. Workshop participants were invited to contribute common questions they hear about refugees, how they respond and how we can make our voices stronger together.

This workshop explored the CCR Proud to Protect Refugees campaign. Lynn Shulze and her students showcased their work raising awareness about refugees, including public speaking, theatre and visual presentations of lived experiences in their school. Steve Tulloch presented on his work as part of a faith community and Dr. Michael spoke on the capacity and need to engage healthcare providers. The session ended with a lengthy but lively discussion on the campaign and the support CCR can provide to initiatives such as those raised in the workshop.

The workshop resulted in several suggested action requests for all working groups:

- Call on CCR members to contribute examples of activities they have done to raise awareness about refugees
- Call on CCR members to identify champions (people who have already set good examples), speakers (people with a story to tell), and resources (especially funding and information tools)
- Strongly encourage all members to support the “Proud to Protect Refugees” CCR campaign

Resource persons:

Lynn Schulze, teacher and students, Waterloo Collegiate Institute, Kitchener-Waterloo

Dr. Michael C. Stephenson, Director of Sanctuary Refugee Health Centre, Kitchener-Waterloo
Steve Tulloch, pastor with Elevation, Kitchener-Waterloo

Moderator: Monica Abdelkader

Honouring Abilities: Refugees and Immigrants with Disabilities

This workshop examined the selection, reception and settlement experiences of refugees and immigrants with disabilities. The workshop objectives were to

- present first-person accounts of settling in Canada with a disability
- present examples of supports available and share examples of success stories
- address the issue of inclusion/exclusion based on medical needs or perceived disabilities
- Offer the opportunity to explore and share resources for supporting persons with disabilities

Given the lack of services for newcomers with disabilities, the presenters focused on examples of services and programs for newcomers with disabilities, in both urban and rural contexts. A review of the legislation and regulations impacting newcomers with disabilities was provided, and one presenter shared her lived experience of settlement and integration with a disability, with a focus on the intersectionalities of identity, and how this plays into experience and use of and access to services.

The main outcome was a request for the CCR to more consciously include issues of disability in its policy recommendations and communications, to help provide more visibility to the issues and the need for services.

Resource persons:

Rabia Kheder, Canadian Association of Muslims with Disabilities, Mississauga

Teresa Peñafiel, L'Association multiéthnique pour l'intégration des personnes handicapées (AMEIPH), Montreal

Shauna Jimenez, East Kootenay Friends of Burma, Kimberly

Moderator: Erika Gates-Gasse

Dialogue with CIC on Citizenship

Representatives of Citizenship and Immigration Canada were invited to discuss policy and operational issues related to citizenship with participants. What can be done to overcome the barriers and delays for applicants for citizenship? What policy changes are on the horizon?

Items discussed included:

- Eligibility requirements to become a Canadian citizens
 - Residence requirement
 - Adequate knowledge about Canada
 - Knowledge about Canada
 - Meeting English language level 4 benchmark (need to be substantiated through documentation and text provided by third parties contracted to do so)

- Generally the compliance rate to newer requirements (language) and passing rate of citizenship test has been increasing
- Statistical analysis indicate a trend that certain immigration applications (class and country of origin) are doing well in meeting the citizenship requirements

Many issues were raised with regards to the language requirements:

- Submission of incomplete education credentials
- Submission of assessment documents issued to place students in language classes rather than language evaluations done by the contracted third parties
- Limited processing capacity resulting in longer processing times
- About 200,000 applications are accepted annually while there is a capacity to process only between 140-160,000 applications which has been creating more backlog
- Program implemented to deal with fraud and to ensure program integrity has slowed down the process
- The residence questionnaire is not a new tool but it has been implemented more frequently in light of reports of fraud (related to residence)
- Applicants who have been in and out of the country frequently tend to get the residence requirement questionnaire
- Once you have received the residence questionnaire, completed and returned it, you will have to wait for a number of months. Some applicants were told to wait for 48 months
- The waiting period after the issuance of the residence questionnaire does not reflect the future timelines, but indicates how long it has actually taken to process applications in the last 12 months.

Moving forward

- The program has received \$44 million as part of this year's budget and this is expected to help in increasing the resources required to process more applications
- There is a newer and shorter version of the residence questionnaire which only requires applicants to provide information for the last four years rather than since the time of their arrival in Canada
- The new residence questionnaire has been implemented in the last two weeks following concerns raised and feedback received from CCR in last September's roundtable meeting with CIC
- Those who fail the citizenship test are allowed to do a second test within four weeks. If they fail the test for a second time, they will have to wait until they are called for an in-person evaluation by an immigration judge. When they will be called depends on workload of the particular judge responsible for their area.

A number of suggestions to CIC arose from the session's discussion. Here are some of them:

- CIC should consider the evaluation done to place newcomers for LINK/ESL and other classes as a way of proving the language benchmark required. This may relieve applicants from incurring cost to pay for a third party language test administrator or going back to school especially for those who are working or caring for children.

- Those who have already received the older version of the questionnaire should be allowed to submit information relevant to processing citizenship application as required by the newer version of the form i.e. information for the last four years only.
- There is a need to review the new version of the questionnaire and monitor its implementation
- Concern was raised on the extent of the information and documentation required, especially by the older residence questionnaire and whether any information gathered could be used to initiate a revocation of PR status or invoke a cessation of refugee status. Although assurance was provided about the intention of the information collected which is only intended to prove that residence requirements have been met, monitoring on how this information is used may be needed.
- CIC needs to ensure that proof of language proficiency documents issued by educational institutions are not simply returned saying that they are transcript documents or for other reasons
- Special consideration should be provided to refugee applications coming from protracted refugee situations or those identified as having high needs, as they may be unable to meet the language requirements. In current policy, you have to individually prove that you are unable to meet the language requirements because of health and other considerations, and there is need for general or systemic recognition of this matter for those who are considered refugees with high needs.
- Improve services by increasing the access to and quality of information provided by the call centre in regard to citizenship and other immigration inquiries.

Resource persons:

Rell Deshaw, manager, Legislation and Program Policy, CIC

Alexandra Hiles, A/Director, Citizenship Program, CIC

Moderators: Jean McRae and Yosief Araya

Protecting Trafficked Persons: The challenges of definitions

This workshop examined the challenges behind existing trafficking in persons definitions in Canada and internationally, in light of the diverse and complex realities faced by trafficked persons. Speakers explored the limits to a definition of human trafficking that focuses only on the crime rings or sex trafficking. It was felt that there is a general denial or lack of awareness that human trafficking occurs in Canada. Using recent cases, speakers also analyzed Canada's anti-trafficking legislation and international protocols. It was concluded that the role of NGOs is essential in providing information and services to trafficked persons.

Resource persons:

Idil Atak, Ryerson University

Angela Contreras Chavez, PLEI Project for Live-in Caregivers in BC

Victor Porter/Rosalind Currie, Office to Combat Trafficking in Persons

Moderators: Louise Dionne and Rita Acosta

Citizenship in Canada: The trend towards impermanence, exclusion, and increased barriers and its impacts

This workshop explored the erosion of citizenship, looking at how it is becoming less durable, more exclusive and more difficult to obtain. The workshop included a theoretical overview of current trends, and a practical guide for front-line workers assisting applicants to overcome the barriers to citizenship, and a review of the psychological and settlement impacts of citizenship denial and delay. There was also a strategy session aimed at trying to influence the current trends.

Some suggestions that came out of the workshop discussion included having a webinar with Sharry Aiken on the Canadian and international trends regarding citizenship, as a means to further educate ourselves; starting to collect data, including stories of barriers or stories of losing citizenship; and keeping track of potential legislative changes in order to be ready to speak out as policy or legislative barriers move ahead.

Resource persons:

Sharry Aiken, Faculty of Law, Queen's University, Kingston

Justin Mohammed, articling student at Canadian Centre for International Justice, Ottawa

Eileen Finn, Association of Future Canadians, Montreal

Moderators: Sule Tomkinson, Khim Tan and Chantal Tie

The New Face of the Private Sponsorship Program: Opportunities and Challenges

This workshop targeted people considering privately sponsoring a refugee but not sure where to begin, or who wanted to learn more about changes to the Private Sponsorship of Refugees Program (PSRP) that have been mentioned lately in the media. The workshop was designed to address these questions and also to explore possibilities on how settlement agencies and private sponsors can work collaboratively to support refugees for good settlement outcomes.

Moses Moini gave a brief overview of the history of the PSRP and current challenges. Duperlys spoke about her experience being sponsored with her family from Colombia, and what that meant to her. Shauna gave her personal experience of encouraging people to do Group of 5 sponsorships. Sara presented on the procedures and challenges of Group of 5 applications, and Paul Clarke presented some statistics from Quebec, contrasting the Quebec private sponsorship program with the rest of Canada.

Participants divided into two discussion groups – one group was able to ask questions about the PSRP, answered by Moses and Sara, and also talked about linking privately sponsored refugees with settlement agencies. The other group talked about action and advocacy around the changes and challenges, many of which will be taken up by the Overseas Protection and Sponsorship Working Group. These issues include:

- Caps on sponsorship
- Central Processing Office – Winnipeg processing of applications
- Overseas processing of applications
- Refugee protection

- Refugee selection
- IFH cuts
- Transportation loans

Resource persons:

Moses Moini, Mennonite Central Committee Ontario

Shauna Jimenez, East Kootenay Friends of Burma

Paul Clarke, Actions Réfugiés Montreal

Sara Shahsiah, Refugee Sponsorship Training Program

Duperlys, former refugee from Colombia

Moderators: Gilbert Iyamuremye and Rose Dekker

Barriers within Education for Newcomers

This workshop focused on the barriers newcomers face within education. Barriers examined include wrong or false information from guidance counselors and resource personnel, exclusion from school groups because of language (or perceived accent), and precarious immigration status making it difficult to disclose immigration status.

The workshop also covered additional barriers such as the lack of anti-racist anti-oppression frameworks and cultural sensitivity of educators, counselors, SWIS workers and Post-secondary education vis à vis newcomers and francophone students; assigning students to the wrong levels, pushing them too fast, getting them “job-ready” instead of university ready, lack of parental involvement, etc.

Participants felt that there should be more training resources for key actors including guidance counselors, SWIS workers and educators, as well as accountability measures and standardization of information.

Resource persons:

Latifa Ben Malek, Centre d'accueil et d'établissement du Nord de l'Alberta, Edmonton

Malini Singh, Thorncliffe Neighbourhood Office, Toronto

Dina Ganan, Make It Count Campaign, Vancouver

Moderator: Philip Ackerman

V. PARTICIPANT EVALUATIONS

Participant evaluations of the Consultation were overwhelmingly positive. Most cited among the outstanding aspects of the Consultation were the workshop content and presentations, the opportunity to connect with other like-minded people while at the same time gaining a wealth of knowledge, and the camaraderie of the atmosphere. Several people mentioned feeling motivated by 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. Several appreciated the variety of attendees from across all sectors, regions, and backgrounds, the participation of refugees and youth, and the respectful environment, although they would have liked to see more participation from the east and west of the country. There was an outpouring of appreciation for the opening plenary keynote speech by Justice Sinclair, as well as the focus on making links between the experiences of indigenous people and refugees.

The majority of respondents had good feedback about the venue, and appreciated that all the meeting rooms were on one floor, however there were complaints about the heat or cold in meeting rooms. Several respondents lauded the social event as one of the most enjoyable ever. Respondents appreciated how participation and inclusion were fostered at the Consultation, for example by promoting an inclusive and respectful environment where everyone can participate at the beginning of each session. New participants overwhelmingly replied that they felt included and welcome. However, many felt that participation could be more effectively included by having more small group discussion during sessions. One ongoing issue is that of francophone inclusion – participants had some suggestions on how to address this, including having a year-round process to identify and promote francophone participation, namely participation of Francophone people of colour. Respondents appreciated a wide variety of workshops and Working Group meetings, and a few people felt that it was particularly powerful to have speakers who were affected by the issue under discussion to share their experiences, and that this should be done more.

There were also some useful suggestions to be taken into consideration for future events: several people loved the keynote by Justice Sinclair, but were dismayed at the amount of time taken for the preamble, which took away from his speaking time. While some respondents noticed an overall improvement in the way sessions were moderated, there were still complaints regarding ineffective time keeping and lack of intervention when participants dominated the microphone or got off-topic.

Overall, respondents felt that the conference was a success, and many were excited about new ideas and practices to take back and implement in their workplaces.