



Canadian Council for Refugees
Conseil canadien pour les réfugiés

Fall 2020 Virtual Consultation Report

**Challenges and beyond:
thriving in the era of a pandemic**

26 November to 11 December



Introduction

Marking the end of an eventful year, the CCR's Fall 2020 Consultation took place online, from November 26 to December 11, on the theme of "Challenges and beyond: thriving in the era of a pandemic". This consultation aimed to highlight key issues affecting vulnerable communities as well new opportunities emerging in the midst of a health crisis.

There were 643 attendees in total, coming from all over Canada and outside the country. Participants included refugees, immigrants, NGO, First Nations and government representatives and academics.

Acknowledgements

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

The CCR would also like to thank the following sponsors and funders:

- AMSSA - Affiliation of Multicultural Societies and Service Agencies of BC
- AQAADI - Association québécoise des avocats et avocates en droit de l'immigration
- BINAM - Bureau d'intégration des nouveaux arrivants à Montréal
- Interactio
- IRCC - Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada
- Kinbrace | Refugee Claimant Housing & Support
- The Canadian Women's Foundation
- The McConnell Foundation



Consultation highlights



Senator Ratna Omidvar

Featuring Senator Ratna Omidvar, CCR President Dorota Blumczynska and a ceremony by Indigenous representative Marie-Émilie Lacroix, the Opening Plenary set the tone for a consultation that sparked critical thinking and problem-solving. The Senator discussed the impact of the global migrant crisis and the pandemic on Canadian refugee policy, as well as the need for Canada to show leadership in protecting the rights of refugees in these unprecedented times and that coordinated global action is needed more than ever to help the most vulnerable of our society.

Through 23 workshops, meetings and sessions, participants shared strategies, tools and resources to move beyond the challenges. The "Global Refugee Regime: Options for the Never-to-be-resettled" session was particularly memorable, as it featured activists based in Amman, Jordan and in Kakuma, Kenya, and examined the cases of people never-to-be-resettled, presenting reflections on what can be done by whom to respond to their needs and realize their fundamental rights. Participants were also able to dialogue with various government officials in different sessions, including IRCC senior officials, Marian Campbell Jarvis, Assistant Deputy Minister, Strategic and Program Policy, and Dr. Nicole Giles, Associate Assistant Deputy Minister, Operations, and from the IRB, Roula Eatrides, Deputy Chairperson, Refugee Protection Division.

The various sessions also culminated in the identification and prioritizing of key advocacy issues and actions items for the upcoming months, detailed on pages 5-7 of this report.



On December 3rd, the CCR held a virtual social event to celebrate and thank participants for attending the Fall 2020 Consultation. The session featured performances by singer Thalia Urbani, spoken-word poet Ahmad Majid, theatre troupe Joussor and artist Kando. Attendees also had the chance to win gift cards by participating in musical quizzes.



Consultation program

Orientation	Working Group meeting
Session	Annual general meeting
Caucus	Social event

There were 16 workshops, 2 caucus sessions, 4 Working Group meetings, 1 general meeting, and 1 special social event over the course of two and a half weeks.

NOVEMBER					
	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
	23	24 -- Orientation day	25	26	27
Early session		Orientation session - English		Opening plenary with Senator Ratna Omidvar	The U.S.-Canada border in the age of COVID
Late session		Orientation session - French		Indigenous perspectives on welcoming newcomers	Innovative approaches to housing
	30	1	2	3	4
Early session	Security inadmissibility: lives in limbo	Working Group meetings part 1	Addressing refugee determination issues during COVID	Family or stranger? Who Canada welcomes	Dealing with the pandemic
Late session	Family reunification challenges	Walk a mile in these shoes	Anti-Black racism – inequities in systems	Youth Engagement Sustainability toolkit launch	Anti-trafficking: seeking remedies and protection
				Social event	
DECEMBER					
	7	8	9	10	11
Early session	Rethinking boundaries: a fireside chat with IRCC	OPR Working Group Meeting	IP Working Group Meeting	Caucus: International Medical Graduates	Annual general meeting
Late session	Changing perceptions by centring newcomer voices	I&S Working Group Meeting	The Global Refugee Regime: options for the Never-to-be-resettled	Caucus: African Refugee Network	



Advocacy priorities

Priorities for advocacy and recommendations were identified in each session, reflecting the issues emerging throughout the consultation discussions:

Creating ally ship: Indigenous perspectives on welcoming newcomers

Build and reinforce bridges between newcomers Indigenous communities by creating a network of interested members and organizations in the CCR collective to share information and develop action plans meant to create alliances in their respective regions.

The U.S.-Canada border in the age of COVID

Making information more accessible and clear info for advocates and users (in multiple languages) in order to close the gap between government and on the ground. Continue advocacy against the STCA to pursue an opening of the border to refugee claimants who are crossing irregularly.

Innovative approaches to housing

Collaboration between newcomer specific housing supports/advocacy and more general housing advocacy at local and national levels.

Security inadmissibility: lives in limbo

Creating a committee from the IP Working Group (and potentially the OPR Group) to lead an advocacy campaign centred on the Ali case in order to raise awareness about security inadmissibility and mobilize public opinion.

Family reunification challenges

Campaign to ask for "express entry" for family reunification, think about advocacy strategies with the Youth Network to allow unaccompanied minors to sponsor family members.

Walk a mile in these shoes

Creating a 2SLGBTQ+ task group with appropriate trans-representation, as well as webinars aiming to raise awareness about social isolation amongst 2SLGBTQ+ immigrants and provide practical skills to help build communities and make safer spaces.

Addressing refugee determination issues during COVID

Offering more training resources for claimants, lawyers and settlement workers on how to better prepare claimants in the new virtual context.

Anti-Black racism – inequities in systems

Continue conversations with Peter Flegel, Director of the Government of Canada's Anti-Racism Secretariat, and Farahdine Boisclair, Director of the Anti-Racism Task Force at the IRCC to help them better understand inequities in immigration policies and practices, and consequently to push for change with concerned parties.



Advocacy priorities

Family or stranger? Who Canada welcomes

Promote IRCC's GAR commitment equal to that of the PSR Commitment and educate the public on the global refugee crisis and how the public can engage (PSR Program, BVOR, G5, etc.)

Youth Engagement Sustainability toolkit launch

Engage CCR members in studying the toolkit through the [Talk to Action initiative](#), and come up with best practices around youth engagement in the organizations. Create spaces for sharing additional best practices and strategies to engage youth.

Dealing with the pandemic

Advocate for the embedding of mental health services in the community, ensure Trauma and Violence Informed Care training of staff and act on the social determinants of mental health.

Anti-trafficking: seeking remedies and protection

Improve the IRCC response to people who have faced exploitation and abuse in all three of the permits discussed (VTIP, TRP and OWPVW).

Rethinking boundaries: a fireside chat with IRCC

Issues raised included anti-racism efforts within IRCC and extending the exemption from the travel ban for resettled refugees. The CCR will follow up sharing more information about the concerns raised.

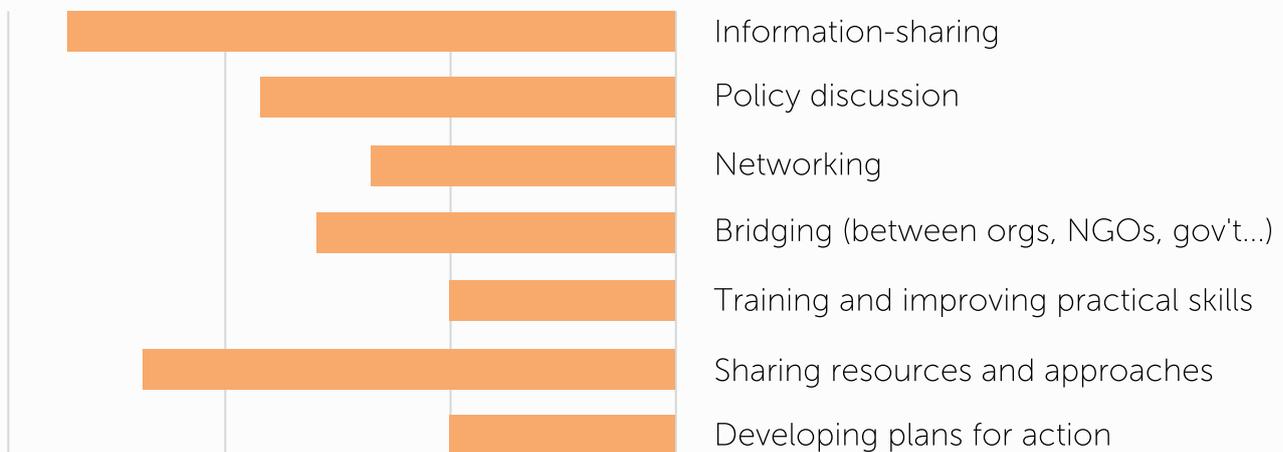
Changing perceptions by centring newcomer voices

Use the ideas raised during the workshop discussion to build a collaborative guide for members and non-members in order to equip them in encouraging newcomers to share.

The global refugee regime: options for the never-to-be-resettled

Use the opportunity presented by [Bob Rae's recommendations](#) to do some advocacy urging the government to adopt and take meaningful action on the report recommendations.

The workshops achieved a range of objectives:





Outcomes

Action requests from Working Groups

The Working Groups voted to prioritize three action items:

Overseas Protection and Resettlement

1. Improved communications with the IRCC
2. Anti-racism inequities
3. Exemption to the travel ban

Inland Protection

1. Develop a campaign on security inadmissibility issues
2. Do advocacy on pandemic border closure for refugee claimants entering irregularly
3. Protest resumption of removals

Immigration and Settlement

1. Ask IRCC and CBSA to report out on their respective plans to address systemic anti-Black racism and systemic racism, with measurable outcomes and timelines.
2. Form a CCR working group that focuses on advocating for housing that meets the needs of refugees, claimants, temporary status and for the right to housing for all.
3. Urge federal, provincial and territorial governments to fully implement the 94 calls to action of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission and the 231 calls to Justice by the National Inquiry into the MMIWG.

Resources shared and recommended

Many presentations delivered at workshops are available to CCR members and consultation participants at: <https://ccrweb.ca/en/fall-2020-consultation-resources>



Logistics



This second consultation in a virtual format was hosted on the Pheedloop platform in order to facilitate information-sharing, discussion and networking.

Attendees could find workshop streams, helpful links, resources and chat with others all in the same place.

On average, there were 133 people in each session, and participants attended approximately 5 sessions each.

Simultaneous interpretation (English and French) was offered through the Interactio app.



Out of 956 sessions* opened on the application, 857 were used to listen to webinar content in English, and 99 in French. On average, there were 42 participants who used Interactio in each session.

*Every log in to the app for this event is counted as one (1) use



Evaluations

Positive points

The evaluation form was sent to participants after the consultation.

Overall, respondents agreed that the event program was strong, especially in terms of workshop, caucus and session diversity. The broad range of topics and variety of resource persons involved was applauded.

On the sharing of lived experiences, one participant said:

"I really appreciated the courage and generosity of those who told their stories of struggle and overcoming enormous barriers. It made the information really sink in"

Several survey respondents, as well as participants commenting during the consultation, shared their appreciation for highlighting Indigenous perspectives and discussions on anti-Black racism as an integral part of the work we do.

The virtual format of the consultation continues to produce new opportunities as well as challenges, requiring a delicate organizational balance and careful consideration. While on-line sessions can be easier to access versus traveling to a location, networking happens less naturally. With the Pheedloop platform, we were hoping to provide space for these connections to happen.

Areas of improvement

When asked what the CCR could do differently for the next consultation, several respondents brought up translation issues with the application. For example, some interpreters were unclear, and it was hard to go back and forth between the session stream and the translation app. Workshop time management also came up as a concern. Some attendees felt there was not enough time spent on certain topics, not enough time for dialogue, while others felt it was difficult to commit and/or focus on two sessions per day.



Evaluation results

The following are the results from an online evaluation:

94%

of respondents rated the event as "very good" or "fair"

82%

of respondents thought it was easy to navigate Pheedloop

94%

of respondents felt the consultation helped them acquire knowledge, understanding, and insights that will be useful in their work

92%

of respondents felt the consultation was well organized

82%

of respondents expressed satisfaction with the overall program

51%

of respondents appreciated the translation, 35% didn't need it

68%

of respondents said that the consultation provided good opportunities to participate and contribute to the dialogue

100%

of respondents agreed that both participants and panelists were diverse

78%

of respondents felt included in the space

80%

of respondents said this was a safe space for them to express themselves

67%

of respondents agreed their accessibility needs were met

80%

of respondents expressed satisfaction with the consultation's bilingualism

76%

of respondents stated that the consultation met their expectations

94%

of respondents would attend the consultation again / recommend it to others