



Spring 2019 Consultation report

Roots: Reconciling the Global with the Local

Victoria, 30 May - 1 June 2019

A. Introduction

The Spring 2019 Consultation of the Canadian Council for Refugees (CCR) was held 30 May - 1 June 2019 in Victoria, British Columbia. The CCR acknowledges with respect the Lekwungen-speaking peoples on whose traditional territory the meeting took place and the Songhees, Esquimalt and WSÁNEĆ peoples whose historical relationships with the land continue to this day.

There were over 300 participants, coming from nine provinces across Canada. There was a mix of participants representing NGOs, government officials, academics, people with refugee experience, youth and representatives of the UNHCR and IOM.

B. Consultation Highlights

The consultation theme was *Roots: Reconciling the Global with the Local*, with a special focus on the dialogue about newcomer settlement on Indigenous land and building bridges with Indigenous People.

The tone for the 3-day conference was set at the Opening Plenary, where keynote speaker Carey Newman Hayalthkin'geme shared a very moving presentation on the *Witness Blanket*. Mr Newman Hayalthkin'geme reflected on links between the profound Indigenous relationships to the land and the experiences of those forced to leave their lands. Through a number of workshops the consultation provided further opportunities to deepen understanding of how to build bridges between newcomers and the First Peoples of the land.



The Chairperson of the Immigration and Refugee Board, Richard Wex, was the keynote speaker on the second day, while the Syrian refugee and activist Hassan Al-Kontar addressed the participants at the Closing Plenary.

C. Workshops and sessions

Workshops

- International Students: Between Data and Reality
- Building Bridges: Settlement on Indigenous lands
- Building Bridges: Dialogue about newcomer settlement on Indigenous land
- Group of Five / Community sponsorships
- Towards a Housing Solution for Refugee Claimants
- Sharing best practices between settlement organizations and sponsors
- Legal Aid: Equal Access to Justice
- Migrant Workers: National and Global Context
- Complementary Pathways
- Responding to trauma with care
- New Perspectives on detention
- Trafficking of Indigenous migrant workers: what are the systemic roots?
- Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity and Expression (SOGIE)
- Newcomer Youth engagement
- Root Causes: Canadian Mining Companies & Displacement



Caucus sessions

- Unaccompanied minors
- Fraud in resettlement
- Access without fear
- Family Reunification
- Youth Network
- Trafficking

Working Group Meetings

- Immigration & Settlement
- Inland Protection
- Overseas Protection and Resettlement
- Public Opinion (joint Working Group session)

Plenary sessions

- Opening plenary
- Plenary with IRB Chairperson
- Closing Plenary and General Meeting



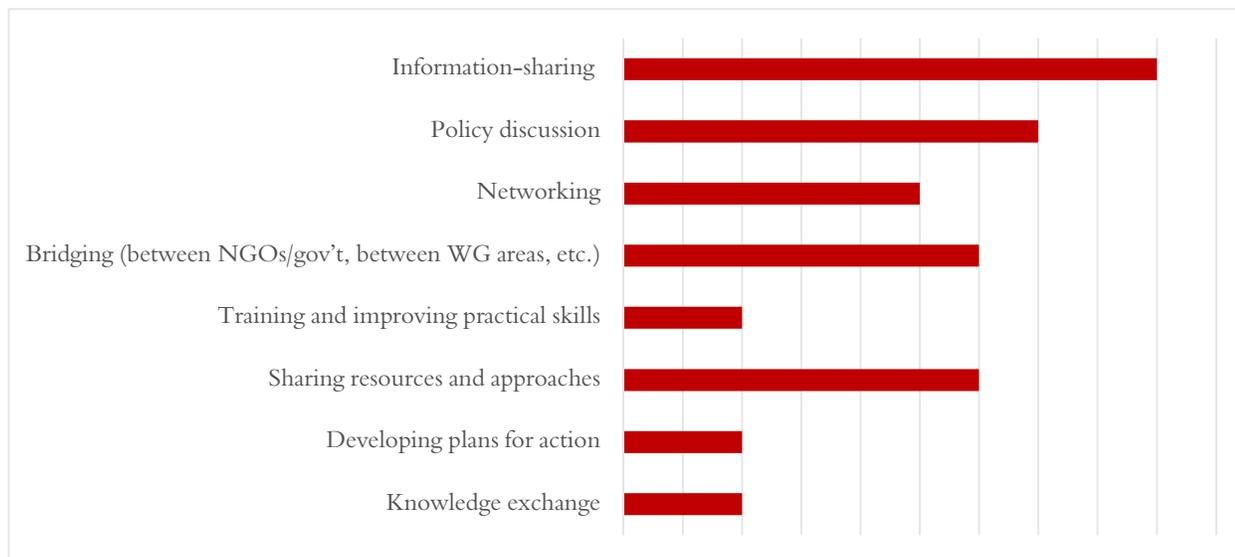
D. Key Issues

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

- Issues affecting **refugee claimants** were prominent, in light of significant upcoming changes to the refugee determination system, and dramatic recent cuts to **legal aid** in Ontario.
- Participants were very concerned about the potential for negative **public opinion**, particularly in this election year, and shared strategies for promoting positive messages.
- **International students** attracted attention, touching on access to permanent residence and their vulnerability.
- **Mental health issues for LGBTQ+** refugees and immigrants were highlighted.
- There was significant continuing concern about the impacts of **Quality Assurance on Sponsorship Agreement Holders**.
- With respect to the development, in Canada and internationally, of “**complementary pathways**” as alternative solutions for refugees, participants highlighted the importance of ensuring that they are not limited to the “best and brightest”.

E. Outcomes of workshops

The workshops achieved a range of objectives:



a. Resolutions

At the General Meeting at the close of the consultation, CCR members adopted four resolutions on the following issues:

- Legal Aid
- Developing a National Framework for Unaccompanied Minors in Canada
- Housing
- Equity for International Students

The full text of the resolutions can be found at ccrweb.ca/en/resolutions-june-2019

b. Resources shared and recommended

Many presentations delivered at workshops are available to CCR members and consultation participants at: ccrweb.ca/en/spring-2019-presentations

Participants were directed towards important existing CCR resources including the Positive Public Opinion toolkit: ccrweb.ca/en/positive-public-opinion-toolkit

Other resources recommended

Youth Engagement Report: Learning from Fostering Change and Fresh Voices:

www.vancouverfoundation.ca/about-us/publications/youth-engagement-surveys-and-reports/youth-engagement-report-2018

c. Some key highlights from workshops

- Refugees are the ones who are paying the ultimate cost of fraud in resettlement: through long wait times, difficulties of life in host countries and lack of protection and safety.
- Youth need to be involved in conversations (especially those concerning them)!
- LGBTQ individuals are disproportionately impacted by family reunification rules: the common law definition doesn't work for folks who often cannot prove the relationship for the very same reasons they were persecuted.
- The right to legal representation should be asserted through a constitutional challenge under section 7 of the Charter.
- There is need for greater funding for vicarious trauma experienced by staff.
- We need to improve access to resources for trans refugees who face unique barriers and gaps in services.
- "Trauma-mainstreaming" of policies and programs is vitally important for the health of the sector.
- We need to counter the normalization of immigration detention.
- There should be greater regulation of Canadian mining companies' activities abroad that lead to displacement.
- Private sponsors should consider sponsoring some of the Eritrean plaintiffs in the Nevsun case.
- There is a lack of access to settlement services in remote areas where private sponsors need support to settle newcomers.
- We should include refugees in the settlement process and avoid speaking for/on behalf of the refugees.
- Refugee communities are keen to learn more on how they can relate with Indigenous communities in a respectful way and be allies.

- There is concern that the development of Complementary Pathways not impact the prioritization of the most vulnerable refugees (will economic migrants come to Canada faster than refugees?)
- There is an urgent need for better communication from IRCC to Group of Five
- There is no uniformity in the implementation of IRB Guideline 9 on Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity and Expression. There is concern that there is no real accountability for members to follow the guidelines.

d. Some follow up recommended

- Produce more practical resources relating to family reunification.
- Develop a resource for NGOs on trauma-informed services: about every-day approaches that are mindful of trauma and support the care needed by newcomers
- Encourage NGOs to share their experiences of fraud in refugee resettlement.
- Clarify roles and responsibilities of private sponsors and settlement workers to avoid duplication of services and find formal ways to include sponsors as settlement workers' clients
- Organize cross cultural training among Refugees and Indigenous communities
- Organize a virtual meeting on labour mobility complementary pathways with IRCC
- Promote the option of an economic stream for lower-skilled (blue collar) refugees (i.e. to replace TFWs used by employers who need long-term/permanent employees)
- Support networking and information-sharing opportunities for Groups of Five
- Develop training resources for organizations working with SOGIE claims around implementation of IRB guideline 9 (on Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity and Expression)



F. Building Bridges: settlement on Indigenous lands

The consultation included a two-part workshop designed to promote dialogue between Indigenous communities and the refugee and newcomer serving sector. The session was led by the Indigenous Perspectives Society.

The following are key suggestions and insights from the Indigenous Panelists.

“It is critical for Indigenous People and their allies to discuss good relationships in times of peace, to give us all time to reflect.”

Ten Things You Can Do Right Now

1. At meetings and other public events, first acknowledge the traditional territory
 - a. E.g. “I would like to acknowledge that we are meeting on the traditional territory of *name of nation*, the place in which we live, work and play.”
2. Address prejudice and racism, stop stereotyping and correct misinformation about Indigenous peoples.
3. Do not use colloquialisms that have culturally significant or derogatory references in them. E.g. “The low man on the totem pole”, “We need to powwow about that”, “Indian Giver”
4. Support Indigenous activism either financially, by volunteering, donations, partnership or by simply being present.
 - a. E.g. First Nations Child and Family Caring Society of Canada’s campaign for equal educational opportunities for Indigenous children and safe schools – <https://fncaringsociety.com/i-am-witness>
 - b. E.g. Indspire, a national Indigenous registered charity that invests in the education of Indigenous people – <http://indspire.ca/>
5. Attend open community events with your children, family and friends through local community Indigenous organizations – E.g. June 21 National Aboriginal Day events
6. Support either financially, through volunteering or partnerships, non-profits that work with the community’s most marginalized people’s.
 - a. E.g. (in Victoria) PEERS – <https://www.safersexwork.ca/>; or Aids Vancouver Island – <http://avi.org/>
7. Donate. For a list of Aboriginal-specific non-profits in Canada, see <https://www.canadahelps.org/en/explore/charities/category/indigenous-peoples/>
8. Actively learn more about our shared history and Indigenous cultural diversity and resurgence.
9. Advocate to schools and media outlets for programming that honours Indigenous diversity and cultural resurgence.
10. Support Aboriginal-owned business, artists, musicians etc.

Other Suggestions From the Panel:

- Walk on the land lightly, with a good heart and good mind, be grounded and grateful to Nature.
- Listen carefully to Indigenous peoples and you’ll pick up little nuggets of information
- Healing can be accomplished by supporting Indigenous peoples in practising their culture and language
- Be mindful of the importance of family to Indigenous people and how that has helped in their resilience

- It's ok (and in fact, encouraged) to ask an Indigenous person “Where are you from? Tell me a little about yourself.”
- To help create a different relationship between Indigenous peoples and the rest of the country going forward, read the **Truth & Reconciliation Commission's Calls to Action** and follow-through with whatever recommendations you are able. https://nctr.ca/assets/reports/Calls_to_Action_English2.pdf

Panelists' Answers to Specific Questions:

1. How can I link/interest the immigrant/refugee community in Indigenous issues/experiences?
 - a) First, dispel the stereotypes that they may have picked up about Indigenous people through exposure in media, etc.
 - b) Offer training/workshops
 - c) Invite local Indigenous leaders/elders to address newcomers
 - d) Recognize Indigenous- Related days & events. E.g. First People's Day - <https://www.canada.ca/en/canadian-heritage/campaigns/celebrate-canada-days/aboriginal-day.html> or Orange Shirt Day - <http://www.orangeshirtday.org/>
 - e) Explain the purpose of the Truth & Reconciliation Commission and discuss the recommendations
 - f) Bring them to community events at Native Friendship or Band Centres
 - g) Start with the young people; educate immigrant and newcomer children
2. How can we support Indigenous people in reaching their goals?
 - a) Volunteer with First Nations communities and non-profits. E.g. Sporting events and youth conferences
 - b) Make connections with of Indigenous people and organizations and specifically ask this question
 - c) Some larger First Nations have community outreach people – ask them how you can help
 - d) Go to events open to the community and build relationships
3. Do you have suggestions for how our LGBTQ+ non-profit can connect with the local 2-Spirit community?
 - a) First, it should be noted that the term “2-Spirit” is reserved specifically for the Indigenous community and shouldn't be appropriated
 - b) Ask questions – contact local organizations, such as the Native Friendship Centres or PRIDE organizations or Vancouver's Native Cultural Society (Facebook Page - <https://www.facebook.com/gvnncs78/>)
 - c) Building relationships is crucial, be patient.
4. The name of our province, British Columbia, seems to symbolize colonialism, would you like to see the name changed?
 - a) Our people see no borders, no limitations, we have family across the water in the USA. The term “province” has no significance to us – if we're thinking of changing names, start locally – those have more importance.

Resources Mentioned or Identified by the Panel:

- “8th Fire” – Documentary on Indigenous History – <https://www.cbc.ca/firsthand/blog/8th-fire-wabs-walk-through-history>
- “Witness Blanket” – <http://witnessblanket.ca/#!/project/>
- “Moose Meat & Marmalade” – <https://aptn.ca/moosemeatandmarmalade/episode-guide/season-1/>
- “The Story of Coast Salish Knitters” https://www.nfb.ca/film/story_of_the_coast_salish_knitters/
- Territory Acknowledgement – <https://native-land.ca/territory-acknowledgement/>
- First People’s House at the University of Victoria holds events that are open to the public, it’s a good way to make contacts and learn about Indigenous issues (check your community’s university to see if it has anything similar) – <https://www.uvic.ca/services/indigenous/house/>
- To find out which Indigenous Territory you are on:
 - <https://native-land.ca/>
 - Contact the local Native Friendship Centre and ask
 - Victoria -<http://www.vnfc.ca/>
 - Links to those in Canada – <https://nafc.ca/en/>
 - To find out how to pronounce band or nation names, phone the band office after hours and see how they pronounce on their answering machine
- Truth and Reconciliation Commission – <http://www.trc.ca/>

Final Thought

In response to the question, “Do you think of immigrants and newcomers as ‘invaders?’”, one panelist answered:

“My heart and your heart are the same. You are here in Canada and I welcome you and wish you to be happy. We accept you with an open heart because we feel the pain that many newcomers feel – we are all a long way from home.”

G. Evaluations

Overall, the consultation was well received and people responded positively.

90% of participants agree that the overall program was strong, including scheduling, and the mix of workshops, plenaries and caucuses.

86% of participants agree that the consultation helped to acquire knowledge, understanding and contacts that will be useful to me in my work

94% of participants agree that overall, the consultation was successful and they would recommend others to participate in the future

80% of participants agree that the consultation provided good opportunities to participate and contribute to dialogue

82% of participants agree that there was a good diversity of participants.

57% of participants agree that there were significant efforts to promote bilingualism.

With respect to the Building Bridges session:

76% of participants agree that this session helped them gain a better understanding of the history, current realities and issues of some of the Indigenous peoples affecting their full participation in society

74% of participants agree that the session helped deepen their appreciation of the interconnections between Indigenous peoples, refugees and newcomers

Suggestions for future consultations included:

- Having more spaces for new participants to be included in the discussions
- Including Indigenous groups and persons throughout the consultation
- Organizing further workshops to create a practical and concrete understanding of the link of settlement work and Indigenous persons.
- Ensuring better accessibility (including functioning microphones and consistent powerpoint use for people with hearing impairments, ensuring rooms are wheelchair accessible).

H. Acknowledgements

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