



**Canadian Council for Refugees Spring 2009 Consultation
“Protecting Refugees and Immigrants in Hard Times”
28-30 May 2009, Quebec City**

Conference Report

I. INTRODUCTION

The Canadian Council for Refugees’ 2009 Spring Consultation was held 28-30 May at Hotel Pur in Quebec City. The Consultation was a success on many levels, including attendance, content, refugee participation, bilingualism and outcomes. The Consultation also successfully met its objectives of providing a unique opportunity for information-exchange, networking, strategy development and discussion. 425 participants from across Canada attended the Consultation, about half of them francophone. Reflecting the current international context, the theme of the Consultation was “Protecting Refugees and Immigrants in Hard Times”.

Participants at the Quebec City Consultation included refugees, immigrants, staff and volunteers at organizations serving newcomers and ethnocultural organizations, youth, students, private sponsors of refugees, representatives of various levels of government and of UNHCR, lawyers, academics, labour representatives and others involved in refugee and immigrant issues. Among the participants, there was also a group of Rohingya refugees who recently arrived in Quebec City as government assisted refugees. They were accompanied by two translators.

The 2009 Spring Consultation addressed newcomer and community needs by providing a space for a wide range of stakeholders, including newcomers themselves, to meet and discuss priority issues and service gaps, leading to the development of strategies and concerted actions, as identified by participants themselves.

28 sessions were offered during the three days of the consultation, including two plenary sessions, three working group meetings, 22 workshops and training sessions, and the General Meeting. The program included three or four concurrent workshops, apart from the times when participants met in plenary. Workshop streams focused on (a) immigrant and refugee settlement and integration, (b) refugee resettlement and (c) refugee protection. Simultaneous translation between English and French was available in all sessions. This facilitated francophone participation at its highest level in the history of CCR Consultations (about 50%).

The Consultation sessions offered a participatory format intended to be particularly inclusive of those who are new to Canada and new to the CCR. Moderators were informed and trained to promote CCR’s commitment to provide an environment that is free of racism, sexism, discrimination and bias, where all individuals are treated with respect and dignity.

Workshop topics were chosen during the CCR's February Working Group meetings, in which participants identified topics that responded to current needs, and selected volunteers to plan the workshops. The resource persons chosen to speak at Consultation sessions represented different perspectives: service providers, refugee advocates, government, lawyers, youth, refugees, labour, academics, etc. They were chosen by taking into consideration different factors: participation of refugees, immigrants and people from racialized communities; gender balance; regional diversity; balance between English and French speakers; representation of local resource people; a youth perspective, and experience and knowledge of the issues.

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. Gender-based and anti-racist perspectives were included in discussions about the direction of future work.

Participants' oral and written evaluations were overall extremely positive. Participants appreciated the networking opportunities offered by the Consultation, the good organization, the content of the workshops, the quality of presentations and the bilingualism of the event.

The success of the Consultation was made possible thanks to the very efficient work of the local organizing committee, made up of staff, volunteers and Board members from the Centre multiethnique de Québec. Participants were also very fortunate to be welcomed by a wonderful team of more than 40 volunteers, who created a friendly atmosphere throughout the event.

II. SUMMARY OF THE PLENARY DISCUSSIONS

Opening plenary

This session served as a welcome and introduction to the consultation. Lisette Lepage, Quebec City Executive Committee member, welcomed participants to the city.

CCR President Elizabeth McWeeny reflected on the 40th anniversary of the signing by Canada of the Refugee Convention. She highlighted why the Convention is important and some key moments in the history of Canada's response to refugees. She drew attention to successes that need to be celebrated since Canada signed the Convention, as well as areas of where Canada falls short in meeting its obligations towards refugees.

Roberto Jovel, CCR Vice-President introduced the draft CCR Anti-Oppression Policy, to be adopted at the General Meeting at the end of the consultation.

Representatives of the CCR Youth Network made a short presentation about their activities, and encouraged CCR member organizations to support the active participation of youth.

Moderators: Marie-Claude Gilles, Centre Multiethnique de Québec, and Anne-Marie Kabongo, CCR Executive

Thursday evening plenary session: Protecting Refugees and Immigrants in Hard Times

The current economic crisis is having a disproportionate impact on refugees, immigrants and generally on people from racialized communities. Women amongst them are particularly affected.

To address this topic, two actors from the Montreal-based company, Mise au jeu, presented a series of sketches addressing various aspects of the challenges faced by newcomers in the labour market, and attitudes in the host community.

The popular theatre performance was followed by presentations from two knowledgeable and provocative speakers, who challenged participants to bring a deeper analysis to the structural barriers to newcomer economic success, notably deep-seated racism.

Resource persons:

Uzma Shakir, Atkinson Economic Justice Fellow

Jean-Claude Icart, International Observatory on Racism and the Centre for Research on Immigration, Ethnicity and Citizenship (CRIEC), UQAM

Moderators: Roberto Jovel and Wanda Yamamoto

General Meeting

The Consultation concluded with the CCR General Meeting. A total of 14 resolutions were adopted, including one approving the Anti-Oppression Policy. The resolutions can be found at <http://www.ccrweb.ca/documents/resmay09.htm>

III. SYNTHESIS OF WORKSHOPS

Planning for Resettlement of Refugees with High Needs

The government is focusing more and more on resettlement of refugees from protracted situations, many of whom have high needs. This workshop focused on the importance of effective pre-arrival communication and information sharing about refugees with high needs, in order to facilitate and support effective and relevant planning for their reception and early weeks in Canada. Focusing mainly on the context for the resettlement of government assisted refugees with high needs, similar issues for private sponsors were also addressed.

Participants first heard a representative from CIC present on the issue. He started by providing background information:

- There has been a significant increase in the number of high-needs cases (medical and settlement) post-IRPA.
- A network of medical supports has been put in place to meet refugee needs in many centres.
- The need for relevant medical/settlement information has been clearly identified by service provider organizations and sponsoring groups.

He also spoke about gaps in information collection and sharing, and about improvements to current processes. He then presented the Resettlement Needs Assessment Form, which is being

piloted for the Bhutanese movement. As next steps, CIC will monitor and assess how the new form is working and will consider a possible implementation worldwide.

CIC's ongoing policy development includes:

- Determine in-Canada support capacity for high-needs cases
- Refining definitions of what constitutes high settlement or high medical needs
- Development of a refugee health framework and options for 2010
- Working with other resettlement countries on best practices for the integration of high needs refugees

The representative from Access Alliance spoke about what constitutes high needs and how to best respond to refugees with high needs. In addition to obvious physical injuries and developmental issues, we need to consider other issues, such as chronic illness (symptomatic/asymptomatic), mental health issues, and refugees facing integration challenges. A significant number of individuals seen by his centre suffer from post traumatic stress disorder and depression, and often symptoms don't manifest themselves pre-migration or early upon arrival. Transportation loans are also a major cause of worry, stress, and anxiety.

He underlined that increased communication of medical information pre-migration (with consent) is needed and emergence of refugee health clinics would facilitate this. Refugee health clinics are now present in most urban centres across Canada. They facilitate integration of newly arrived refugees, allow for the cultivation of skills required to address the unique needs of refugees, and can contribute to enhanced communication with different stakeholders (reception centres, CIC, IFH, provincial authorities etc.).

Consequences of high needs medical issues include: difficulty seeking employment; difficulty with language acquisition; multiple medical appointments; multiple stressors on family; and increased burden of travel loans. The integration of refugees with high needs requires novel programs that facilitate integration with greater involvement of refugee health clinics; enhanced communication pre-arrival; accessible interpretation services; and expanded settlement worker programs.

The Director of the Centre multiethnique de Québec presented on the realities and challenges faced by the organization in the reception and settlement of government assisted refugees. Many of the refugees arriving in Quebec City come from protracted refugee situations and have high needs.

As an outcome of the workshop, the following action item was suggested:

The prior information on the special needs of government assisted refugees is required to prepare for the arrival of refugees destined to specific communities. Insufficient settlement funding is currently being provided to prepare adequately for the settlement of refugees with special needs upon arrival; and additional resources and supports are often required and must be solicited from the local community.

The CCR should ask the federal government to provide, in a timely manner, settlement agencies and/or sponsor groups with the same detailed Needs assessment for all government assisted

refugees as is currently being provided through a pilot project for all Bhutanese refugees being resettled to Canada.

Resource persons:

Ron Parent, Operational Management and Coordination Branch, CIC

Dr. Meb Rashid, Access Alliance, Toronto

Dominique Lachance, Centre multiethnique de Québec

Moderators: Wanda Yamamoto, MIIC, Winnipeg and Gary Obas, CSAI, Montréal

Anti-Oppression Research: Community-Oriented Approaches

There are numerous models for conducting research that are relevant for members of refugee, immigrant and racialized communities. This workshop highlighted good practices, promoted strategies and offered space for discussion on what it means to do community-oriented research from an anti-oppressive perspective.

Presenters commented on the challenges and good practices developed when working with communities around research projects. One of the presenters dealt with issues of racialized youth and drop-out rates; the other one with issues facing LGBTQ refugees in Canada.

Presentations looked at power relations, uneven access to resources, role of the researcher, role of the communities, and how all these factors shape a research endeavour from the onset (research questions and design) to the outcomes and impact (research results, recommendations).

Participants stressed the importance of a better grounding of research projects in the community-based sector (groups, organizations, activists, direct service providers, members of the communities themselves) and invited CCR to continue shaping research efforts that meet immigrants and refugees needs.

Other outcomes: The panelists and the participants pointed to a number of elements that would eventually help define best practices. The discussion will hopefully help local organizations as well in their future collaborations with academic or community-academic projects.

Resource persons:

Jean-Claude Icart, Centre for Research on Immigration, Ethnicity and Citizenship (CRIEC)

Edward Lee, LGBT Refugee Research Project

Moderators: Roberto Jovel and Mary Fiakpui

The role of the designated representative

The designated representative (DR) system: what model would be most responsive to the needs of minors and persons with disabilities? To explore this topic, participants heard about how the DR system currently functions at the Immigration and Refugee Board, what relevant principles might guide our thinking about the DR's role, and what we can learn from the experiences of refugee advocates who have served as DRs.

Presentations were made by experienced designated representatives, by a representative of the IRB and by a lawyer/academic. The discussion that followed highlighted the major divergences on views and practices on some key areas, including:

1. Whether the role is that of a “supportive” or “substitute” decision maker
2. Considerable lack of regional consistency in terms of requirements regarding qualifications
3. Gaps/inconsistencies in procedures – e.g. legal role of DR ends with IRB decision, but CBSA will sometimes accept their signature for PRRA purposes.

Resource persons:

Ritva Ahti, Legal Advisor, Immigration and Refugee Board, Eastern region

Tess Sheldon, ARCH Disability Law Centre, Toronto

Marian Shermarke, PRAIDA, Montreal

Moderators: Deborah Isaacs and Rick Goldman

Refugee and Immigrant Women as Leaders

This informal session was intended for refugee and immigrant women, to allow them to get to know each other and strategize about their involvement in the consultation, in the CCR and in their local communities.

Participants first heard two of the speakers talk about their experience as refugee women. This was followed by a group discussion. Men in the room expressed that men and women need to work together. Suggestion was made that there is a need for people who can speak women’s native tongue, so they might easily learn French, in settlement programs. The following suggestions were also made: there should be more awareness of people’s (women’s) pasts; and women need to help other women locally to have self-esteem. There were also questions brought forward related to youth.

Other outcomes of the workshop include the possible need to have the next workshop focus on women being empowered locally.

Resource person:

Esperance Mukamarara, Centre multiethnique de Québec

Co-presenters: Alexandra Kotyk and Anne-Marie Kabongo

Responding to refugees with medical needs

Faced with different challenges, such as high needs cases and access to services, how can organizations serving newcomers better respond to the medical needs of the people they serve, including resettled refugees, refugee claimants and people without status? This workshop presented perspectives and best practices from organizations in Alberta, Ontario and Quebec.

The first presentation was about the Refugee Health Clinic of Quebec City. The clinic was established in June 2007. It includes one doctor (part time), one nurse and one secretary. The Centre multiethnique de Québec, which hosts the refugees, is their main partner. The nurse first does a bio-psychosocial screening; refugees are then seen by the doctor. The clinic has maximized its efficiency in a short time by making several adjustments based on experience. The level of satisfaction is high and the clinic serves as a model for other regions.

The second presentation focused on the services offered by Access Alliance in Toronto to government assisted refugees (GARs). The presentation first focused on the protocol used by Access Alliance for newly arrived GARs:

- All new arrivals are seen within 3 days for assessment of initial needs (a CXR is done for those at high risk for TB).
- A complete physical exam is offered within 10 days.
- Routine visits are schedule at 1,2,3,6 and 12 months to address preventative health issues (immunizations, PAP tests etc).
- All new arrivals are offered an appointment with a dietitian and are referred to a social worker when necessary.
- Settlement workers from COSTI work with clients in the community.

The following has worked well for Access Alliance:

- Acquisition of trust
- Thorough health assessments on all clients
- Opportunity to address mental health issues
- Communication with colleagues at IFH, CIC and other refugee health centres
- Development of a skill set to address issues in mental health issues, tropical medicine, advocacy work, interpretation services.

The following challenges exist for Access Alliance:

- Capacity: over 800 GARs come to Toronto each year
- Exit strategy: when and whom?
- Maintaining adequate skill set to work with high need GARs
- Interpretation issues

The clients face these challenges:

- Dental services
- Expansion of IFH formulary
- Increased support in the community - settlement workers
- Travel loan repayment
- Targeted English language training
- Skills development, recognition and training

Refugee Health Clinics

- Are currently in place in most urban centres in the country
- Allow for the cultivation of expertise to serve GARs (tropical medicine, mental health issues, interpretation issues, advocacy work etc)
- Facilitate communication with other stakeholders

Take Home Messages

- Given the immense burden of illness (often asymptomatic illness), it was strongly recommended that all GARs be offered an assessment by well trained clinicians upon arrival.

- This would allow for the identification of illness, for the provision of preventative services and for the initiation of a relationship with a health care provider.
- Development of trust is a critical issue in providing health care to GARs.

The third presentation focused on PRAIDA (Programme régional d'accueil et d'intégration des demandeurs d'asile) in Montreal.

Health care for refugee claimants is under federal jurisdiction and funded through the Federal Interim Health Program (IFH) and administered by a private company (FAS, Funds Administrative Service).

Systemic challenges impact on access to health care, such as ignorance of the IFH, cumbersome administration; communication problems; time limits; unwillingness to accommodate unusual requirements; difficulties in providing culturally appropriate care (psychiatry) and prejudice against patients.

Refugee claimants also face challenges in accessing health care due to their lack of awareness of services, and existing and available resources; communications problems (language, culture, customs, Rx), fear of consequences on status, other priorities (legal process, work, housing come before health).

PRAIDA offers social services and health services. They have the regional mandate to provide services to asylum seekers. PRAIDA's mission is to offer expertise and support to government and community agencies. They also work on informal networking with other services and "IFH friendly" clinics in Montreal, research, training and raising awareness.

PRAIDA's model of care includes a multidisciplinary team and offers the following health services: front-line services and referral centre; services with and without appointment; health check adapted to the individual (non-systematic); case management and psychiatric follow up. PRAIDA has medical expertise for survivors of organized violence, torture and rape. The psychosocial support they offer is backed by social services and various agencies.

Challenges in organizing health care:

- Ensure that refugee claimants know and assert their rights to health care.
- Communicate refugee claimants' needs and rights to health care network (especially in times of restricted resources at the provincial level).
- Make known professionals and institutions' obligations regarding this population.
- Ensure commitment of professional and administrative institutions concerned.

Looking forward:

- Maintain a research component to better represent the needs of refugee claimants
- Develop a strategy for training / awareness raising of other centres
- Continue to act as an expert and advocate in establishing Canadian guidelines and a comprehensive health assessment for newcomers
- Formalize existing partnerships
- Facilitate links between the system's various levels and stakeholders
- Regularly collect testimonies from the ground because theory and practice are far apart.

- Strengthen application of rules (e.g. access for people with IFH) by supporting institutions

The last presentation addressed challenges in providing health services to people without status, from the perspective of an Edmonton organization. Agencies receive no funding to help people without status. They may have no identity documents and not say where they come from. No resources are available for people without status. One extreme example was of a youth in Edmonton who wanted to fight to get arrested by the police so he could get health care.

Funders determine who can have access to an organization's services. The speaker insisted that once someone comes in, we have an obligation to help them because they are human beings.

Resource persons:

Dr. Meb Rashid, Access Alliance, Toronto

Dr. Lavanya Narasiah, PRAIDA, Montreal

Marie Hélène Domingue, Clinique Santé, Québec

Mary Fiakpui, Catholic Social Services, Edmonton

Moderators: Yasmine Dossal, COSTI, Toronto and Mercedes Orellana, Service d'aide aux Neo-Canadiens

Fostering youth engagement in refugee sponsorship and overseas protection: A participatory workshop on what we can do

With a voluntary sector in Canada that has been labeled as “aging”, how can we foster youth engagement in refugee sponsorship and overseas protection? This workshop highlighted the work of organizations who have been engaging Canadian youth to take action and reach out to refugees overseas. Participants in the workshop were asked to brainstorm on strategies to increase youth involvement in refugee sponsorship, protection, overseas issues and key CCR campaigns.

The workshop covered the following themes/questions: the refugee crisis is also a youth crisis; why should we be concerned as youth; why do youth get involved in refugee issues; how can youth help? In other words, in what ways can youth be involved in overseas protection and sponsorship of refugees?

Participants held group discussion and came up with the following suggestions:

- Creation of programs that engage newcomer youth
- University could give credit for participating in refugee issues
- Public education and awareness in high school, e.g. creating curriculum
- Capitalizing on people's stories and experiences, especially those with a refugee background
- Creating links between youth in Canada and youth in refugee camps through internet, e.g. by providing computers to refugee camps.

Resource persons:

Lynne Leblanc, WUSC, Ottawa

Leo Johnson, founder of CURE Canada, Hamilton

Valerie Beaulieu, Eastern Townships Mae Sot Education Project

Moderator: Hanna Caplan

Introduction to the Refugee Convention

40 years ago, Canada signed the Geneva Convention relating to the Status of Refugees. This workshop gave participants an opportunity to celebrate the anniversary by learning the basics about this crucial human rights instrument that guarantees refugees the protection of their rights.

The workshop covered the 1951 Refugee Convention and the 1969 Protocol. Some of the Convention articles were outlined and discussed in more detail. There was also a detailed description of the inclusion and exclusion clauses.

Resource persons:

Christine Harrison Baird, Department of Law, Carleton University

Annick Legault, lawyer

Moderators: Lisa Wyndels and Oana Grigorescu

Connecting Newcomer Youth and Communities

Numerous programs and approaches exist across Canada that aim to connect newcomer youth to resources in the community and to guide them in their first days in schools, using public transit, finding community centres, accessing healthcare services and much more. This workshop explored some of the existing programs and looked at how they can be improved, adapted and adopted in other communities.

The first resource person spoke about youth experience in the first days of arrival in Canada. He described his own experience as a newcomer youth, especially day-to-day difficulties such as taking the bus and looking for community services. He presented the Orientation Guide for Newcomers available in Vancouver.

The second presentation focused on the needs of newcomer youth in school, particularly the first days in schools. A four-day orientation program for newcomer high school students was presented. This orientation program takes place one week before school starts. The program helps newcomers know about existing services in school, helps them with school schedule, tour of school and classes, etc. The presentation also mentioned the movie “New moves”, which focuses on high school students talking about their experience and a weekly plan to show students how to use resources in school.

The third presentation focused on how to mobilize youth against dropping out of school and delinquency; how community actors can help newcomer youth in their resettlement; and activities in which young people are involved that help release tensions and increase their confidence.

Resource Persons:

Mustafa Delsoz, MY Circle Action Team, Vancouver

Darcy MacCallum, Newcomer Orientation Week Coordinator, Toronto

Line Chaloux, Le Coffret, St-Jérôme, QC

Andrea Aragon, Le Coffret, St-Jérôme, QC

Moderators: Oana Grigorescu, CCR Executive and Youth Network and Kamal Farmaly, OCASI

Protracted Refugee Situations and the Canadian Civil Society Response

In December 2008 the UNHCR held a Dialogue on Protection Challenges related to protracted refugee situations. This Dialogue led to a meeting of Canadian government, NGOs and academics in Ottawa in January 2009 to examine how Canada can contribute to solutions to these situations. This workshop explored the following question raised at that meeting: “What contributions can Canadian civil society make to protect and find durable solutions for refugees in protracted situations?” Participants learned about problems related to protracted refugee situations and had an opportunity to propose ideas for CCR research and advocacy on this issue.

Participants first heard about the following issues related to protracted refugee situations:

- Definitions, context and challenges
- Importance of cooperation between government, NGOs, refugees (Diaspora communities), other countries (government) and media
- Diversifying our approaches
- Dilemma: Management rather than finding sustainable solutions in camps
- How to go beyond the basic needs in the camps
- Examples of camp situations in Kenya and Darfur

Outcomes of the workshop:

Public Education:

Raise awareness of the following stakeholders about the context of refugees in protracted situation: government; members of civil society and media. Different approaches can be used: lateral, sectoral, community, participatory.

Mapping: Uniting our efforts, funds and tools and mapping all the stakeholders

Opening to the international development sector (Canadian, Quebecois).

In the camps:

- Work on the following: Location of camps; opening to agriculture; higher education; giving work to refugees; investing Canadian funds to avoid major problems of integration in Canada
- Review the definition of “durable solution” as it sometimes limits resettlement.
- Involve the diaspora communities in Canada more.

Resource Persons:

Jessie Thomson, Humanitarian Affairs and Disaster Response Group, Foreign Affairs Canada

Elizabeth McWeeny, CCR President

Caroline Saint-Mleux, Care Canada

Moderator: Natasha Normand, CREDIL

Seeking Refuge

Seeking Refuge follows newly-arrived claimants awaiting their hearings and captures the lives of those who have been denied asylum and are facing deportation. It is a moving look at people who must navigate Canada’s complex refugee determination system. The session began with the film being screened in two rooms (one with the English version and one with the French version). Once finished, the two groups gathered in one room for discussion. This focused on how the film can be used in ongoing public education efforts in local communities. The filmmakers were present to answer questions.

Participants explored with the filmmakers ways to develop a bank of ideas to use this film for public education purposes. For example, it was suggested that the film could be used in segments to highlight particular challenges faced by refugee claimants, such as the Canada-US Safe Third Country Agreement, statelessness, the use of interpreters, the need for an appeal process for refugees, etc.

Because it may be costly for some groups to acquire the film and its screening rights, some strategies to share copies of the film among groups were put forward. It was also suggested that local institutions such as municipal libraries and school boards might acquire copies.

InformAction Films is looking into the possibility of developing educational materials to complement the film. The CCR may be able to play a role in helping to advise on the content.

For more information about *Seeking Refuge / Terre d'asile* and how to order copies, see: www.informationfilms.com

Resource Persons:

Gloria Nafziger, Amnesty International
Karen Cho, Seeking Refuge director
Ian Oliveri, Seeking Refuge producer
Peter Showler, Refugee Forum

Moderator: Fernand Gauthier

Moving to implement the Anti-Oppression Policy

In advance of the General Meeting at which the Anti-Oppression Policy was to be submitted to the CCR membership for approval, this session explored what needs to be done to make the commitment to anti-oppression real within the CCR – and how members can adapt the policy to their own organizations.

Participants first looked at the policy proposed and its areas of implementation, as well as the proposed table of contents for the toolkit.

Participants then discussed some changes in wording of the policy. They also made suggestions for implementation. The CCR may want to approach feminist groups to participate or “borrow” resources they may already have.

Facilitators took note of how to support smaller organization that may not have agency support for implementing an anti-oppression policy. One solution could be to ask larger organizations to support smaller organizations in the same region.

Facilitators: Roberto Jovel and Wanda Yamamoto, CCR Executive

Housing for Refugees and Immigrants: Taking Action

Research has shown that there are important barriers to access affordable and adequate housing for refugees and immigrants, and that newcomers find themselves increasingly caught in spaces of urban decay. In the context of CCR’s Task Force on Housing, this workshop offered an opportunity to look at priorities for action in this area from the perspectives of income security and equitable urban planning.

The following issues were discussed:

- Refugees should be better informed about housing when they arrive to avoid committing too fast to signing a one year lease for housing that is inadequate for their needs.
- More advocacy is needed.
- Abuse of landlords: illegal requirements, insalubrity, etc
- Availability of housing (families having to separate, increase of costs)
- Issues of social housing and affordable housing
- Role of stakeholders at different levels: federal, provincial, municipal

It was suggested that the CCR take a leadership role on this issue and address the different stakeholders: federal, provincial and municipal. There should also be local involvement (NGOs, municipalities).

Resource Persons:

Susan Irwin, Federation of Canadian Municipalities, Ottawa

Sherman Chan, MOSAIC, Vancouver

Aneas Maclinns, Multicultural Association of Fredericton

Moderators: Debbie Douglas, OCASI, and Sylvie Guyon, TCRI

Visa office resource allocation and processing

The workshop discussed resource allocation for Canadian visa posts and its relationship to processing times. It explored delays facing the private sponsorship program in particular in Sub Sahara African visa posts from the point of view resource allocation. Even though the discussions focused primarily on the private sponsorship of refugees program, the workshop addressed similar issues in other programs, notably family reunification.

CCR had invited CIC to send a resource person to the workshop, but they had declined.

The workshop covered the relationship between resource distribution at Canadian visa posts and the effect on immigration processes. The workshop highlighted the situation at the visa post in Nairobi where a private sponsorship case takes 51 months. The workshop was supported by statistical and comparative data at different Canadian visa posts.

Some of the issues discussed were:

- Sponsorship applications for refugees from the Horn of Africa are submitted in order to offer these refugees protection and/or a durable solution. However, the lengthy processing times mean that their problems are simply perpetuated. “Protection delayed, protection denied” was how one of the panelists summarized the effect of the slowness of the process in Nairobi.
- The slowness of the process also impacts refugee families who want to be reunified with family members left behind. This has caused much frustration, depression and other serious health problems.
- Could the disproportionately long delays in Africa be challenged in the courts on the grounds of discrimination?

Resource persons:

Yosief Araya, Catholic Cross-cultural Services, Toronto

Lisa Wyndels, Neighbourhood Legal Services, Toronto

Moderator: Fikre Tsehai, Canadian Lutheran World Relief

Options for regularization

For refused refugees and many other women and men living in Canada without status, available solutions to obtain permanent status seem to be few. This workshop explored current options (other than H&C) for obtaining permanent status both within Canada and subsequent to removal, when it is unavoidable.

Francisco Rico-Martinez presented the CCR's proposal for regularization (available at ccrweb.ca/regularization.html), as well as some further possible recommendations to respond to the current backlog of refugee claims.

David Chalk discussed skilled worker and provincial nominee programs as a possible option for refugee claimants. He noted that these almost always require that the person leave Canada at some point. He emphasized the importance of exploring such options early in the refugee claim process, since processing times for these programs are about 12 months. If the removal order takes effect before a decision on the skilled worker application, the person will also have to obtain an Authorization to Return to Canada, which can be very difficult and time-consuming. If, on the other hand, they leave Canada promptly to avoid falling under a deportation order, their time outside of Canada will be much longer than if they had applied earlier.

Stan Raper spoke about ongoing litigation in several provinces to allow seasonal agricultural migrant workers to unionize. He also deplored the fact that there was no track to landing for seasonal agricultural workers. He gave the example of a man who has been coming to Canada for 40 years, and is still no closer to being landed.

Resource persons:

Francisco Rico-Martinez, FCJ Refugee Centre, Toronto

David Chalk, lawyer, Montreal

Stan Raper, United Food and Commercial Workers Canada (UFCW), Toronto

Moderators: Francisco Rico-Martinez and Rivka Augenfeld

Temporary workers

The unprecedented growth of Canada's Temporary Foreign Worker programs has serious implications for the workers themselves, for organizations serving newcomers and for Canadian society as a whole. This workshop examined questions of human rights and social justice in the context of Canada goals for immigration and citizenship and the current economic crisis.

Speakers' presentations focused on the following points:

- History of Temporary Workers Programs and the impact of the change in philosophy in Canada: from a country of permanent migration to a country of temporary residents.
- Restrictions of temporary workers rights in terms of working conditions, possibility of changing employers, length of stay, etc.

- Changes in the type of temporary workers: from skilled to “unskilled” workers”. Despite workers’ vulnerability, governments do not offer services (information and prevention) or protection.
- With Temporary Workers Programs, protection and enforcement depend largely on employers’ willingness.
- “Race” is a major issue in the Canadian immigration system, as in Temporary Workers Programs.

Participants had the following questions and comments:

- Unionization is an issue for temporary workers. Among them, caregivers, who are isolated, face specific challenges
- Some employers do comply with Temporary Workers Programs
- Employers should be required to respect temporary workers’ rights
- Structural problems with Temporary Workers Programs: workers seen as disposable units; difficulty of enforcing labor rights and human rights, issues of “race” and “racialization” with “low-skilled” jobs.

Action item: Support the recent report of the Standing Committee on temporary workers.

Other outcomes:

- One participant recommended the book: *Immigrants: Why your country needs them*, by Philippe Legrain.
- It is important to address the issue of “race” and the situation of racialized persons in Temporary Workers Programs as well as their potential integration, i.e. their socio-economic position in society.

Resource persons:

Anne-Claire Gayet, Oppenheimer Chair, McGill University, Montreal
 Uzma Shakir, Atkinson Economic Justice Fellow, Toronto
 Yessy Byl, Alberta Federation of Labour

Moderators:

Alexandra Pierre, Association des aides familiales du Québec
 Fariborz Birjandian, Calgary Catholic Immigration Society

Addressing the needs of women with no immigrant status

The workshop was intended to benefit settlement workers, lawyers, academics and all those who could contribute to reduce the barriers to services and resources faced by non-status women. Women who have lost their immigrant status, never had one, or were trafficked, do not look for help for fear of deportation or other repercussions. Identifying services and best practices would help to address the parenting, housing, health and other needs experienced by non-status women. The workshop aimed at providing an initial inventory of services and resources and a set of recommendations regarding best practices.

The presentations covered the following topics:

- Definition of non-status women and clarification of the term as used in Ontario and Quebec.

- Identification of main issues faced in relation to access to legal and social services: health, education, employment and housing: total lack of access and vulnerability of women both in Ontario and Quebec.
- The issues were presented as findings from direct experiences of organizations that serve non-status women (one in Ontario, one in Quebec).
- Naming and explanation of best practices: networking named as the most effective; Midwife's Network; "Don't ask don't tell" campaign; forums and roundtables of organizations serving non-status women; holistic approach to address needs; keeping anonymity of women and research.

The following action items were suggested:

- 1) That CCR review its "Proposal for the regularization of individuals and families without status" in light of the Anti-Oppression Policy
- 2) That the Gender Core Group discuss possibilities for the CCR to establish a national network of organizations serving non-status women.
- 3) That the Gender Core Group develop a proposal on how to engage with the feminist movement in a manner that (the movement) recognizes and actively works to include issues faced by non-status, refugee and immigrant women.

Resource persons:

Katia Atif, Centre des femmes de Verdun
Loly Rico, FCJ Refugee Centre, Toronto

Moderators: Jeannethe Lara, PWRDF and Roberto Jovel, OCASI

Combating fraud targeting refugees and immigrants in Canada and abroad

What progress have we made - what needs to be done? This workshop looked at different ways refugees and immigrants are targeted and efforts to date to address fraud. Participants were asked what NGOs should do to identify and support victims and what recourses they have.

It was noted that fraud can come from many sides:

- Non-authorized Immigration consultants in Canada and abroad charge exorbitant fees to:
 - arrange jobs in Canada (often illegitimate)
 - obtain Canadian visas (often black market)
 - falsify travel documents or credentials
 - provide applications which should be free
 - "fast-track" applications
 - provide misleading or incorrect advice
- Employers in Canada or recruiters abroad sell fraudulent job offers to prospective immigrants through the provincial nominee program or Live-in Caregiver Program
- There have been cases of immigration officials falsifying documents or accepting payment for fast-tracking applications
- Various people disseminate false information (e.g. consultants in the U.S. misrepresenting opportunities in Canada)
- Immigrants themselves can sometimes commit fraud: marriages of convenience, using false documents, giving false information on applications

Problems in the immigration system

- Disconnect between the requirements of the points system and demand for low skilled labour creates incentive to circumvent the system
- Staff shortages, inadequate training, backlogs, lack of monitoring make overseas missions vulnerable to fraud
- Inadequate procedures for recognizing false documents
- Canada does not deal with fraud by representatives abroad – complaints must go to the local authorities who are often ineffective
- Fraud by representatives in Canada is dealt with by their regulatory body or the Better Business Bureau.

Consequences of immigration fraud

- If an immigration consultant commits fraud in an application (by submitting false documents), the client can also be criminally prosecuted
- If CIC finds an immigrant has committed misrepresentation, they can be banned from entering Canada for a minimum of two years
- Only refugees are permitted to enter Canada through illegal means
- Immigration fraud intensifies migrants' vulnerability and creates backlogs which undermine the system.

What is being done:

- In March 2009, CIC launched a fraud advisory information campaign.
- A multilingual video was posted on the CIC website and youtube, ads were run in Canadian news media, and brochures will be distributed to missions abroad.
- Town hall meetings were held in Toronto and Vancouver and a survey was released on CIC website to gather information from victims of immigration fraud.
- Information on how to protect oneself from fraud is provided on CIC and some foreign embassy websites.
- Canada has an Immigration Intelligence Network of 45 Migration Integrity Officers (MIO) posted abroad that works to stop irregular migration.
- MIOs oversee document integrity and work with airlines and local authorities to prevent fraud.
- Investigation teams have reportedly been sent to high-fraud regions to look into marriage fraud practices.
- Enforcement efforts are largely focused on preventing fraud against the government, not against potential immigrants.

Possible solutions

- More widely disseminated information campaigns (i.e. for those without internet).
- More active prosecution of fraudulent immigration consultants, recruiters, etc.
- More engagement with countries of origin in preventing immigration fraud abroad.
- Allocate more resources to immigration offices abroad to aid in detecting and preventing fraud.
- Making the CIC website available in other languages (e.g. Spanish, Tagalog, Mandarin, in order to reach those most affected by immigration fraud).

Participants were asked to give possible actions or additions to the ones already suggested.

Comments:

- There are significant barriers to prosecution of CIC officers.
- Lack of resources
- Important to frame discussion as refugees/immigrants as victims

Suggestions and possible solutions:

- Call for ombudsman
- Protect whistle blowers
- Look at labour law in Manitoba
- Talk to Human Resources Skills Development Canada – Better Business Bureau
- Communication to be direct between visa officers and sponsors
- Training for SAHs

Resource persons:

Rivka Auginfeld, SEIIM

Francisco Rico-Martinez, FCJ Refugee Centre

Moderator: Leticia Adair, Immigrant and Refugee Support Centre

Settlement and Integration: Strategies for the evolving context

The session explored the implications for settlement and integration of the current economic crisis, as well as other aspects of the evolving context: changes in immigration selection; new orientations in settlement service delivery; increased resources in some areas in recent years and the involvement of new stakeholders and different public sectors.

Eyob Naizghi from MOSAIC in Vancouver spoke about challenges faced by the NGO immigrant and refugee serving sector, following the changes in recent years, in terms of service delivery, economic downturn, unemployment and support for organizations.

The representative of CIC spoke about the vision and enduring role of the federal government in terms of settlement and integration, given the current context and reviewing roles and responsibilities with the provinces.

The representative of the Quebec government presented on integration policies and directions of the *Ministère de l'Immigration et des Communautés culturelles du Québec*. He spoke about challenges in selecting and teaching French to newcomers, and integration and values of Quebec society.

The representative of the Federation of Canadian Municipalities presented the results of a recent FCM study on immigration and diversity. She spoke about the critical role municipalities have to play in terms of the national immigration project.

The representative of the Canadian Labour Congress presented on the impact of the economic crisis on immigrants, refugees and people from racialized communities, who are overrepresented among Canada's poor.

The Director of Metropolis Quebec spoke about the impact of recent shifts in the immigration sector on civil society and the importance of cultural issues.

Resource persons:

Eyob Naizghi, MOSAIC, Vancouver

Susan Irwin, Federation of Canadian Municipalities, Ottawa

Deborah Tunis, Director General, Integration Branch, CIC

Annick Germain, Quebec Metropolis Centre

Hassan Yussuff, Canadian Labour Congress

Yvon Doyle, Assistant Regional Director, Immigration-Québec

Moderators: Debbie Douglas, OCASI, and Stephan Reichhold, TCRI

Children in detention

Despite the change in the law in 2002 to make detention of children a matter of “last resort”, children continue to be held in immigration detention, in some cases for weeks and even months. Some are accompanying adults, others are on their own. This workshop examined the reasons why children are detained and explored alternatives.

Participants heard about particular examples of the detention of children in Canada, as well as legal issues raised. Presentations also covered children who are considered guests at these centres, because they are accompanied a detained parent. The question period gave participants a chance to make suggestions.

Outcomes of the workshop included two resolutions (see ccrweb.ca/documents/resmay09.htm):

- A resolution asking that CBSA not detain children by considering all possible alternatives; and that IRB and CBSA respect their obligations under the Convention on the Rights of the Child and give primary consideration to the best interests of the child when making decisions on detention of children or of adult guardians of children, which affects their children.
- Another resolution recommending that, when a person who alleges to be a minor is detained for reasons of identity, they must be presumed to be a minor, until otherwise established.

Resource persons:

Isabelle Germain, Immigration and Refugee Board, Immigration Division

Aviva Basman, Refugee Law Office, Toronto

Jenny Jeanes, Action réfugiés Montréal

Ginette Archambault, Canadian Red Cross

Moderator: Deborah Isaacs

Myth-busting: Promoting positive public opinion about refugees and immigrants

We encounter myths and misconceptions about refugees and immigrants every day. How can we better promote positive images about refugees and immigrants in our communities? This workshop allowed participants to share experiences and to come up with strategies for promoting

positive messages about refugees and immigrants and for sharing myth-busting ideas in the future.

The workshop was divided into three parts:

Part I – Examining myths and messages

The main questions that participants were asked to consider were:

1. What myths about refugees and immigrants do you hear in your community?
2. Where do you hear them?
3. Who does the myth target?
4. What messages do you use to counter these myths?

General observations that lead to myths and misconceptions:

- Confusion between the definitions of ‘refugee’ and ‘immigrant’
- Misunderstanding of the refugee determination and immigrant selection processes
- There is a lack of empathy towards newcomers
- A lack of information breeds ignorance about the challenges faced by refugees and immigrants
- Racism, discrimination and racial profiling are still prevalent and need to be addressed

Part II – Plans of action

In the second part of the session, participants looked at strategies to bust some of the myths from the first part of the session and to promote positive messages about refugees and immigrants.

The group came up with these tips:

- Promoting positive images *melts* myths, helping to dispel them and stop them from spreading.
- We need to talk to those around us about refugees and newcomers in our communities. They are our greatest allies and ambassadors.
- We also need to promote positive attitudes within our own groups and communities (agency staff, volunteers, faith congregations, board members, etc.)
- Tell real, personal stories. Putting a human face on an issue helps people to sympathize with and better understand the challenges faced by refugees and newcomers in our communities.
- Emphasize personal experience. Ask people to put themselves in the place of a refugee. What would they do in a similar situation?
- Develop your instinct to respond to misinformation. Don’t let opportunities to respond pass you by. If we don’t act, who will?
- Have long-term goals: changes in attitude will happen slowly and over time, but change WILL happen.
- Engage in the ‘winnable’ debates and conversations with people who are willing to listen and concentrate less on people who are steadfast in their opinions.
- Be patient: Being misinformed does not mean a person is unwilling to change their opinion.
- Confront racism and discrimination wherever they occur.
- Take our efforts into the mainstream. Take part in community events that are already planned to reach new audiences.

- Use the media to confront racism and discrimination and to confront negative perceptions of refugees and immigrants. We shouldn't underestimate the power and impact of local media and ethnic media in our efforts. Take national media stories about refugees and immigrants and provide a local perspective by showcasing an affected person or family in the community.
- Emphasize the value of education of host communities through the private sponsorship of refugees
- Don't give up!

Part III – What next?

1. Where can you go with the information from this session?
2. How to use these ideas locally?
3. How can we work together for ongoing collaboration and training?

For future steps, participants suggested the following:

- CCR should have a participatory workshop on media-training at a future Consultation
- Need to engage federal government to help bust myths.
- Explore ways to better share myth-busting information and resources online and ensure that we can add to the resources that already exist.
- Explore use of new outreach tools: in print and in multimedia (like blogs, short online videos/ads, for example).
- Use existing tools, resources and ideas to raise awareness in small groups who can act as 'ambassadors' for refugee and immigrant rights.
- Need to find ways to bring to light and share resources and public information more quickly.
- We need more than public awareness-raising ideas, but also suggestions for concrete actions.

Facilitators: Debbie Hill-Corrigan, Sojourn House, and Sylvain Thibault, Montreal City Mission