



HOUSE OF COMMONS  
CHAMBRE DES COMMUNES  
CANADA

# **AFTER THE WARM WELCOME: ENSURING THAT SYRIAN REFUGEES SUCCEED**

## **Report of the Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration**

**Borys Wrzesnewskyj  
Chair**

**NOVEMBER 2016**

**42<sup>nd</sup> PARLIAMENT, 1<sup>st</sup> SESSION**

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# **THE STANDING COMMITTEE ON CITIZENSHIP AND IMMIGRATION**

has the honour to present its

## **SEVENTH REPORT**

Pursuant to its mandate under Standing Order 108(2) and the motion adopted by the Committee on Tuesday, March 8, 2016, the Committee has studied the federal government's initiative to resettle Syrian refugees to Canada and has agreed to report the following:





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## PREAMBLE

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On 8 March 2016, the House of Commons Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration (the Committee) agreed to study the federal government's initiative to resettle Syrian refugees to Canada.<sup>1</sup> The Committee heard from 61 witnesses and also received several [written submissions](#).

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<sup>1</sup> House of Commons Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration (CIMM), [Minutes of Proceedings](#), 8 March 2016.



# AFTER THE WARM WELCOME: ENSURING THAT SYRIAN REFUGEES SUCCEED

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## INTRODUCTION

*Welcoming refugees isn't just the right thing to do, it's the smart and caring thing to do, as generations of Canadians have done before us.*<sup>2</sup>

In the four-month period between 4 November 2015 and 29 February 2016, Canada welcomed 26,166 Syrian refugees through resettlement under the government's "#WelcomeRefugees Initiative". It was, and continues to be, a truly national effort, involving more than 300 communities across Canada. While the federal government initiated the resettlement, its success relies on many people.

The Committee agreed to study the federal government's initiative to resettle Syrian refugees, with a particular focus on integration challenges, in order to assess the adequacy of government support and to identify any lessons learned for future refugee arrivals. Both of these points are critical, as resettled refugees continue to arrive in Canada in order to meet additional government commitments to Syrians, as well as the planned intake of refugees from other parts of the world.<sup>3</sup>

This report begins with an explanation of the government's resettlement initiative before moving into a section on lessons learned from the #WelcomeRefugees Initiative, in the areas of integration, specialized settlement programming, supporting the contribution of private sponsors, and funding. Witness recommendations for the future of Canada's resettlement program are summarized in the third section, with the Committee's conclusions and recommendations last.

The government's initiative to resettle Syrian refugees generated a wave of public enthusiasm; "a level of generosity and volunteerism that has rarely been seen".<sup>4</sup> The generosity shown to Syrian refugees by Canadians is a recurring theme throughout this report. This generosity is a gift we should not take for granted, and a spirit the Committee very much wants to keep alive.

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2 The Right Honourable David Johnston, Governor General of Canada, [News Release – Forum on Welcoming Syrian Refugees to Canada](#).

3 These include the commitment to resettle a total of 25,000 Syrian refugees supported by the government before the end of 2016 and the commitment to process in 2016 or early 2017 all of the applications to privately sponsor Syrian refugees received prior to 31 March 2016 (roughly 12,000). Government of Canada, [Syria – by the numbers](#). The total planned intake for 2016 is 44,800 as indicated in the [2016 Immigration Levels Plan](#).

4 CIMM, [Evidence](#), 42<sup>nd</sup> Parliament, 1<sup>st</sup> Session, Meeting no. 17, 2 June 2016, 1215 (Mario Calla, Executive Director, COSTI Immigrant Services).

## THE GOVERNMENT'S RESETTLEMENT INITIATIVE

Over 4 million people have fled Syria since 2011, seeking safety in Lebanon, Jordan, Iraq and beyond. The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) has called on states to resettle the most vulnerable; with an initial goal of 30,000 people to be resettled by the end of 2014, then a second appeal for states to resettle an additional 100,000 people in 2015 and 2016.<sup>5</sup>

It was in this context that the federal government announced Canada's commitment to resettle 25,000 refugees between 4 November 2015 and the end of December 2015; later extended to the end of February 2016 (“#WelcomeRefugees”).<sup>6</sup> Resettlement offers refugees a permanent solution to their protection needs, usually moving them from tenuous protection in a country of first asylum (whether in a refugee camp or urban centre) to a new country willing to accept them.

Normally, the Canadian government signals how many refugees it plans to admit through resettlement in the Immigration Levels Plan, made public in November each year. Visa officers in overseas missions of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada (IRCC) are responsible for processing applications in order to meet the targeted number. Each mission is allocated a target for resettled refugees, although some of the application processing may be handled at other missions or in Ottawa.

In resettling Syrian refugees, the federal government made use of existing refugee resettlement programs; notably, the Government-Assisted Refugees (GAR) program, the Private Sponsorship of Refugees (PSR) program, and the relatively-new Blended Visa-Officer Referred (BVOR) program. The program through which a refugee arrives in Canada has significant bearing on his or her integration, affecting among other things their initial destination and settlement support.

Under the *Canada–Québec Accord*,<sup>7</sup> the Quebec government selects refugees from the pool of federally-approved cases for resettlement and provides them with settlement services similar to elsewhere in the country. Quebec also administers its own private sponsorship program, called collective sponsorship.

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5 United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, [UNHCR new call for resettlement or other forms of admission for 100,000 Syrians](#), 21 February 2014.

6 Government of Canada, [#WelcomeRefugees to Canada](#).

7 Government of Canada, [Canada–Québec Accord relating to Immigration and Temporary Admission of Aliens, 5 February 1991](#).

## A. Government-Assisted Refugees Program

The UNHCR refers refugees to the Canadian government for possible resettlement through the GAR program. After government-assisted refugees arrive in Canada, they receive financial and other support from the federal government. IRCC provides settlement support for GARs through the Resettlement Assistance Program (RAP), which is delivered through a network of service provider organizations. RAP service provider organizations provide basic orientation for GARs, including airport pick-up, temporary accommodation, housing help for finding permanent housing, and enrolment in government programs. These services are generally provided in the first four to six weeks after arrival.

Collectively, RAP service providers had base funding of close to \$20 million (\$19,870,758) for 2015–16, which was augmented by a 25% increase to all RAP-providers in December 2015. IRCC also provided two targeted in-year increases totalling just over \$37 million, allocated according to individual service-provider needs.<sup>8</sup>

Fifty-seven percent of arrivals under the government’s initiative to resettle Syrian refugees by the end of February 2016 were government-assisted refugees (14,994 persons). The government committed to resettling 25,000 government-assisted Syrian refugees in total for 2016, and is on track to reach this commitment, with close to 20,000 arrived to date.<sup>9</sup> This commitment is substantially higher than the average target of 7,300 GARs in recent years.<sup>10</sup>

RAP service providers had enormous support from Canadians to help welcome the government-assisted refugees upon arrival. As described by Mario Calla, of COSTI, the RAP provider in Toronto, the community support his organization received to resettle 1,800 Syrians comprised:

Work with 13 mosques, two churches, and three community groups that befriended 150 Syrian families and helped them with household start-up kits and ongoing support. Another 30 community organizations organized children’s programs in the five hotels. Donations of clothing and toys were managed by another organization, which was formed spontaneously by a group of volunteers. Additionally, more than 300 volunteers provided interpretation in escorting people to medical appointments and housing searches.<sup>11</sup>

Mr. Calla concluded that “COSTI could not have effectively succeeded in resettling these 1,800 newcomers without this level of support”.<sup>12</sup>

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8 Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada (IRCC)’s response to a request for information made by the Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration on 10 March 2016.

9 Government of Canada, [Syria – by the numbers](#). Data updated as of 25 September 2016.

10 Average calculated using the target indicated in the *Immigration Levels Plan, 2010–2015*.

11 CIMM, [Evidence](#), 2 June 2016, 1215 (Mario Calla).

12 Ibid.

## B. Private Sponsorship of Refugees Program

The Private Sponsorship of Refugees (PSR) program is unique among resettlement programs in that sponsors may refer refugees for resettlement to IRCC. The sponsors assume all of the financial costs for the initial resettlement period, allowing more refugees to be resettled to Canada without increasing government costs.

Private sponsors in the PSR program include: incorporated groups with an ongoing agreement with IRCC to sponsor refugees (Sponsorship Agreement Holders (SAHs)); five Canadians or permanent residents (Groups of Five); and community sponsors.<sup>13</sup> Most SAHs are religious, ethnic, community, or service organizations; they undertake the vast majority of refugee sponsorships. SAHs may sponsor refugees themselves or authorize constituent groups to carry out sponsorships under their agreement. For sponsoring Syrian refugees, longstanding SAHs were approached by community groups looking to sponsor a family for the first time. IRCC has agreements with 106 SAHs, 16 of which were new in 2015.<sup>14</sup>

Each SAH is assigned a yearly cap on new sponsorship applications they may submit, possibly including sub-caps for specific visa missions where there is already a backlog of applications awaiting a decision.

Thirty-four percent of arrivals under the government's initiative to resettle Syrian refugees were privately sponsored. Many new sponsorship applications for Syrian refugees were also submitted, to the point where another 12,000 were awaiting processing as of 31 March 2016 (including 4,000 from sponsors in Quebec).<sup>15</sup> The government target for privately sponsored refugees averaged 4,900 from 2010 – 2015, with 6,500 representing the highest target for a given year (2015).<sup>16</sup>

The privately sponsored component of the initiative revealed Canadians' boundless generosity and willingness to help. Across Canada, people stepped up to privately sponsor refugees. The Committee wishes to highlight these examples of incredible fundraising and volunteer support, heard during the course of our study:

- The Islamic Foundation of Toronto (IFT), which raised \$6 million and applied to sponsor 187 refugee families representing approximately 8,500 persons. The IFT has a list of almost 300 volunteers that assist with application forms, provide Arabic translation services, as well as support families as groups of five, taking them to the doctor, showing them how to use transit, enrolling children in school, etc.<sup>17</sup>

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13 For more information, see IRCC, "[2.3 Who may submit a private sponsorship?](#)", *Guide to the Private Sponsorship of Refugees Program – 2. Private sponsorship of refugees program*.

14 IRCC's response to a request for information made by the Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration on 12 May 2016.

15 Government of Canada, [Syria – by the numbers](#).

16 Average calculated using the target in the *Immigration Levels Plan, 2010–2015*.

17 CIMM, [Evidence](#), 31 May 2016, 1115 (Mirza Hakeem Baig, Joint Secretary, Islamic Foundation of Toronto) and 1145 (Salahudin Khan, Vice-President, Islamic Foundation of Toronto).



- The Armenian Community Centre (ACC), located in Toronto which sponsored 2,300 Syrian and Iraqi refugees since becoming a SAH in 2010. Representative Shahen Mirakian told the Committee that the ACC was “motivated by a desire to do their fair share”, then set an ambitious goal and opened their doors widely. He noted that they were “nearly overwhelmed by the scope of their ambition” and thanked the tireless work of ACC volunteers and IRCC staff that helped them to succeed.<sup>18</sup>
- A private sponsorship group in Collingwood, Ontario, with a population of only 19,500 that raised more than \$90,000 in a few months to sponsor two Syrian families.<sup>19</sup>
- Humanity First, from Concord, Ontario, also a private sponsor (and SAH), working with over 60 co-sponsor groups, each comprised of 10 to 15 individuals, which means they are engaging about 500 to 600 volunteers. These volunteers include doctors, lawyers, neighbours, work colleagues, students, families, ladies, alumni and sports friends, “all with a passion to help refugees”.<sup>20</sup>
- Levant Settlement Centre, located in Scarborough, Ontario and servicing the Greater Toronto Area, that worked “24/7” on refugee resettlement for the eight months preceding their appearance, helping 200 families (over 600 people).<sup>21</sup>
- Or Shalom Refugee Initiative in Vancouver, which raised \$158,000 from 185 donor households. More than 100 volunteers are committed to supporting their families and in kind donations have been sufficient to fully equip four apartments.<sup>22</sup>

### C. Blended Visa-Officer Referred

The Blended Visa-Officer Referred (BVOR) resettlement program was introduced in 2012 as a partnership between the UNHCR, federal government, and private sponsors. Under this program, the UNHCR refers refugees for resettlement and the government and private sponsors each provide financial support for the sponsored family’s first year in Canada. The private sponsor provides emotional and social settlement support for the same duration. BVOR refugees accounted for 8.5% of refugees resettled under the government’s initiative.

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18 CIMM, [Evidence](#), 2 June 2016, 1205 (Shahen Mirakian, Government Relations Coordinator, Armenian Community Centre SAH).

19 CIMM, [Evidence](#), 31 May 2016, 1215 (Thomas Vincent, Founder and Co-Chair, Collingwood Syrian Sponsorship Committee).

20 CIMM, [Evidence](#), 7 June 2016, 1210 (Dr. Aslam Daud, Chairman, Humanity First).

21 CIMM, [Evidence](#), 2 June 2016, 1115 (Aris Babikian, Chair, Levant Settlement Centre).

22 Ibid., 1100 (Sandy Berman, Steering Committee Member, Or Shalom Synagogue).

## LESSONS FROM THE “#WELCOMEREFUGEES” INITIATIVE TO RESETTLE 25,000 SYRIANS

The government’s initiative to resettle Syrian refugees was quite unusual, in that a large number of refugees arrived in Canada over a short time period. The accelerated arrivals created challenges – such as overburdened private sponsors or extended stays in temporary accommodation for families – that do not normally occur when the numbers arriving are lower and arrivals are more spaced out. However, the experience of these refugees and the stakeholders assisting them provide lessons of enduring relevance, given that the integration process is ongoing and that private sponsors are still fulfilling their responsibilities while continuing to submit new applications.

This section of the report highlights the experience and recommendations heard by the Committee in relation to the #WelcomeRefugees Initiative in a number of areas, starting with different aspects of integration into Canadian society. Next it summarizes input on specialized settlement services and the private sponsorship contribution to the effort. The final section deals with testimony related to funding.

### A. Integration and Settlement Support

In Canada, integration is premised on the notion of a two-way street, which means that there are mutual obligations between new immigrants and Canadian society.<sup>23</sup> To further the goal of integration, IRCC funds more than 500 organizations across Canada to deliver settlement services, which assist “immigrants and refugees to overcome barriers specific to the newcomer experience, such as a lack of official language skills, limited knowledge of Canada and the recognition of foreign credentials.”<sup>24</sup> Settlement services are available free of charge to all permanent residents and include programs such as language training, employment counselling (mentoring, bridging), and social connections.

Regular settlement funding for services outside of Quebec is close to \$600 million annually. The money is distributed according to the National Settlement Funding Formula across IRCC’s three domestic regions: Ontario, eastern Canada (including the four Atlantic provinces), and the western provinces and territories.<sup>25</sup> The amount disbursed to each region is based on the number of immigrants received on a three-year rolling average, with refugees weighted more heavily in the calculation than other immigrants.

In order for settlement agencies to meet the needs of the new Syrian arrivals, \$6.8 million in additional funding was provided by IRCC “to service providers to address immediate settlement needs, prioritizing language assessments and referrals, and reducing waitlist pressures for training at basic levels” in 2015–16.<sup>26</sup> In information

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23 *Immigration and Refugee Protection Act* [IRPA], S.C. 2001, c. 27, s. 3(1)(e).

24 IRCC, “[Sub-Program 3.1.1: Settlement](#),” Report on Plans and Priorities 2016–17.

25 CIMM, *Evidence*, 19 February 2015, 0905 (Catrina Tapley, Assistant Deputy Minister, Strategic and Program Policy, Department of Citizenship and Immigration).

26 IRCC’s response to a request for information made by the Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration on 10 March 2016.

provided to the Committee, IRCC also indicated that “approximately \$125 million in supplementary funding will be invested in settlement services, over a four-year period, targeted to help Syrian refugees”.<sup>27</sup>

Successful integration comprises several aspects, including income support, housing, language training, employment, health, and education. Testimony in relation to each of these issues is described below.

## 1. Income Support

Resettled refugees are eligible for income support during their first year in Canada; from the federal government’s RAP for government-assisted refugees, and from sponsors in the case of privately sponsored refugees. Under RAP, recipients receive a one-time payment to cover basic household needs, as well as a monthly stipend. The amount provided is based on the social assistance rate in the province of residence (see Table 1). Private sponsors have to provide their families with a living allowance, and often cover start-up costs through donated household goods and clothing.

**Table 1 – Estimate of Income Support Provided Through the Resettlement Assistance Program**

City	Family of Four (two parents, two children under 18)		Single Person	
	One time start-up amount	Monthly support for up to one year	One time start-up amount	Monthly support for up to one year
Vancouver	\$5,440	\$1,349	\$2,050	\$734
Toronto	\$5,455	\$1,507	\$2,065	\$810
Halifax	\$5,458	\$1,252	\$2,068	\$616

Source: Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada, Submission to the House of Commons Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration, 10 March 2016.

One of the first integration challenges facing the newly arrived Syrian refugees is living on the amount of income support provided. Refugees Mustafa Hajji Mousa and Abdulbari Hajmusa said that low income is the most significant problem facing Syrian refugees generally, because it is not proportionate to the cost of living.<sup>28</sup>

Refugees’ low level of income posed a significant barrier in the search for affordable and suitable housing. For instance, Aleem Syed, of the Scarborough Muslim Association, reported that a family in Toronto receives \$1,070 in their monthly support payment and pays \$1,000 for rent.<sup>29</sup> Several settlement organizations told the committee

27 Ibid.

28 CIMM, [Evidence](#), 27 September 2016, 1535 (Mustafa Hajji Mousa, as an individual).

29 CIMM, [Evidence](#), 16 June 2016, 1150 (Aleem Syed, Representative, Scarborough Muslim Association, Greater Toronto Area Mosques).

that learning how to balance finances and live on a low income is part of the training they provide to newly arrived refugees.<sup>30</sup>

For some refugees, inadequate income support was offset by generous donations from private sponsors, settlement organizations, and others in the community. Huda Bukhari, of the Arab Community Centre of Toronto, observed that private sponsors “stepped up in adding some more money to their particular groups so that they can buy food”.<sup>31</sup> Others reported that donations and food hampers from Arab stores, faith groups, and mosques, were especially helpful in covering the three-month period until families received the Child Tax Benefit.<sup>32</sup>

While some witnesses felt that refugees’ entitlement to a full year of income support gave them the freedom to concentrate on learning English or French or having foreign credentials recognized,<sup>33</sup> others explained that the low level of income support led some refugees to forgo language training or take classes part-time so that they could work.

Not all witnesses shared the view that the income received during this crucial first year was inadequate. Rabea Allos, of the Catholic Refugee Sponsors Council, cautioned that the current regime of income support was too generous, and should be reduced to three months to ensure that refugees “don’t develop a sense of entitlement” to government assistance, rather than find work.<sup>34</sup>

However, the majority of witnesses felt that the income support provided was inadequate; they recognized that the root problem was the level of social assistance set by the provincial governments, whose rates, we were told, were insufficient to sustain a family in many cities. As such, witnesses told the Committee that the Syrian refugee resettlement initiative “had highlighted the need for a poverty reduction strategy, including the increase in social assistance rates”.<sup>35</sup> Though social assistance rates are a matter of provincial jurisdiction, witnesses felt that federal leadership would be welcome. When asked, many witnesses indicated their support for convening a federal-provincial table to discuss increasing welfare rates for all people.

## 2. Housing

Government-assisted refugees are provided temporary accommodations through the RAP when they first arrive in Canada. Under normal circumstances, there are enough places at RAP reception houses; when necessary, RAP-providers use hotels to shelter families until permanent accommodations are found. There is no federally funded assistance for refugees’ housing needs aside from the income support available under RAP.

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30 CIMM, [Evidence](#), 19 May 2016, 1135 (Huda Bukhari, Executive Director, Arab Community Centre of Toronto).

31 Ibid.

32 CIMM, [Evidence](#), 19 May 2016, 1135 (Huda Bukhari); CIMM, [Evidence](#), 2 June 2016, 1240 (Mario Calla).

33 CIMM, [Evidence](#), 2 June 2016, 1245 (Shahen Mirakian).

34 CIMM, [Evidence](#), 30 May 2016, 1615 (Rabea Allos, Catholic Refugee Sponsors Council).

35 CIMM, [Evidence](#), 7 June 2016, 1120 (Leslie Emory, Board Director, Ontario Council of Agencies Serving Immigrants).

For a variety of reasons, including the large number of arrivals in a concentrated period and the limited availability of suitable accommodations, government-assisted Syrian refugee families spent a longer time in temporary accommodations at hotels than usual. For example, in Toronto, the Committee heard it took on average five and a half weeks to move families into permanent accommodation.<sup>36</sup>

Although some refugees felt that the stay in temporary accommodations delayed their integration into Canadian society,<sup>37</sup> service providers suggested that having a group of newly arrived families staying together for a period allowed them to provide a wide range of services at the same time and allowed the families to make connections.

Finding suitable affordable permanent housing was a challenge for many Syrian refugees and the individuals and organizations supporting them; in some cities it was the major issue.<sup>38</sup> Inadequate income, paired with the high cost of living, was one aspect of the challenge in many destination cities. In addition, large family sizes made it more difficult to find appropriate housing for government-assisted refugees, in particular, due to the limited housing stock for larger families and the reluctance of some housing corporations to sign on tenants with many children.<sup>39</sup> The Committee also heard reports of unscrupulous landlords taking advantage of the situation by requiring, for instance, a full year's rent in advance.<sup>40</sup>

Families, sponsors and service-provider organizations used various strategies to overcome these issues. Some families have had to compromise on hygiene, or make do with basement apartments. In some cases, private sponsors contributed so that suitable accommodations could be found at market rent.<sup>41</sup> Others rely on fundraising or charity or generous landlords. The Arab Community Centre of Toronto, for instance, was approached by landlords who wanted to work with sponsorship groups to house larger families in townhouse units.<sup>42</sup> Despite these efforts, some refugee families continue to live in crowded conditions, like refugee Amer Alhendawi, who told the Committee that his family of seven shares a two-bedroom unit.<sup>43</sup>

For the Syrian refugee initiative, the private sector stepped in to offset costs of housing, most notably through the Welcome Fund for Syrian Refugees administered by Community Foundations of Canada.<sup>44</sup> Through this program, local community foundations

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36 CIMM, [Evidence](#), 2 June 2016, 1215 (Mario Calla).

37 CIMM, [Evidence](#), 14 June 2016, 1145 (Eman Allhalaq, as an Individual).

38 CIMM, [Evidence](#), 19 May 2016, 1220 (Carl Cadogan, Executive Director, Reception House Waterloo Region); CIMM, [Evidence](#), 2 June 2016, 1215 (Mario Calla).

39 Centre for Immigrant and Community Services, [Written Submission](#), p. 4; CIMM, [Evidence](#), 27 September 2016, 1535 (Mustafa Hajji Mousa).

40 CIMM, [Evidence](#), 31 May 2016, 1150 (Emily Woods, Sponsorship Program Officer, Action Réfugiés Montréal); CIMM, [Evidence](#), 2 June 2016, 1135 (Aris Babikian).

41 CIMM, [Evidence](#), 7 June 2016, 1215 (Dr. Aslam Duad).

42 CIMM, [Evidence](#), 19 May 2016, 1130 (Zena Al Hamdan, Programs Manager, Arab Community Centre of Toronto).

43 CIMM, [Evidence](#), 31 May 2016, 1225 (Amer Alhendawi, as an Individual).

44 Community Foundations of Canada, [Welcome Fund for Syrian Refugees](#).

disbursed grants to settlement and community organizations to set up a rent subsidy program, among other initiatives, in several cities, including Toronto, Ottawa, London, and Calgary.<sup>45</sup>

While most refugees were living in homes of their own at the time of the Committee's hearings, there was some concern about the sustainability of their housing arrangements. As expressed by Mike Murray, of the Region of Waterloo, "As a municipal government, we are really quite concerned about month 13. Several things may happen. Rents may go up. For some landlords who have done this out of the goodness of their hearts, their approach may change."<sup>46</sup> Another witness candidly explained to the Committee that some families would not be able to afford their housing without the income support associated with the sponsorship period, and were under the assumption that they would have to move again.<sup>47</sup>

Some witnesses felt that housing sustainability was more of a concern for government-assisted refugees in particular.<sup>48</sup> As Carolyn Davis, of Catholic Crosscultural Services explained:

Many of the government-assisted refugees have a very low level of English language skills, and there is a fair bit of illiteracy in their own language. There are issues around employment and whether or not there are skills that are transferable to an urban life in Canada. I am not as optimistic as my fellow witness as to the GARs being self-sufficient after a year. This is a group that will probably require more than a year's worth of support.<sup>49</sup>

However, housing sustainability also posed a dilemma for private sponsors, as explained by Sandy Berman of the Or Shalom Refugee Initiative:

We have been debating about raising extra money in order to afford accommodation, because the family will be faced with a dilemma at the end, since a welfare rate will not cover the extra amount for rent that we have raised. We are very concerned and we see this as a real ethical challenge for us.<sup>50</sup>

She concluded by saying that the group was moving forward with subsidized accommodation, but was concentrating on supporting the family to find employment so that they would not necessarily rely on welfare.

Again, witnesses put housing affordability in context, saying for instance, "the availability of affordable housing is a challenge for all Canadians of limited economic means. The Syrian refugee project has focused the lens on how serious a problem this

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45 For an example of a city-level initiative, see the London Community Foundation, [Welcome Fund Supports Syrian Refugee Families with Housing Initiatives](#).

46 CIMM, [Evidence](#), 19 May 2016, 1250 (Mike Murray, Chief Administrative Officer, Region of Waterloo).

47 CIMM, [Evidence](#), 2 June 2016, 1220 (Sanja Sladojevic, Early Years Refugee Program Manager, Mount Pleasant Family Centre Society).

48 CIMM, [Evidence](#), 2 June 2016, 1130 (Aris Babikian).

49 CIMM, [Evidence](#), 31 May 2016, 1135 (Carolyn Davis, Executive Director, Catholic Crosscultural Services).

50 CIMM, [Evidence](#), 2 June 2016, 1150 (Sandy Berman).



is.”<sup>51</sup> They proposed that “the Canadian government develop a national housing strategy that can begin to address the unavailability of affordable housing in major centres in Canada”.<sup>52</sup>

Others suggested special measures for the Syrian refugees, including rent subsidy programs.<sup>53</sup> Aris Babikian, of the Levant Settlement Centre, felt that the government could further encourage private sector contributions towards incentives for landlords to offer reduced rent, including a program targeted to privately sponsored refugees.<sup>54</sup>

Finally, in response to the particularly long stay in temporary shelter faced by several families, some witnesses suggested that it would be helpful to facilitate settlement agencies’ access to refugees staying at temporary accommodations.<sup>55</sup>

### 3. Language Training

Being able to speak English or French is an essential component of integration in Canada, facilitating access to employment and independence in other areas of life. In the words of Mr. Alhendawi:

Whatever we want to do, we need English to communicate. If we have doctors’ appointments, whether for me or for one of my family members, my wife, it is a very difficult for us to continue.... I cannot keep on asking my friends or people I know to come and help me with appointments. If we have a telephone call and there is a voice message, I have to ask, “Can you come and translate it for us?” That’s very difficult. Sometimes we are very hesitant even to answer our phone because we don’t know what language the person on the other end is going to speak. If it’s English, it’s very difficult for us.<sup>56</sup>

Funding for language instruction comprised 45% of settlement funding in 2014–15.<sup>57</sup> These programs may include child care and subsidy for travel to attend the class. As indicated above, officials from IRCC informed the Committee that approximately \$6.8 million in additional funding was allocated in an effort to reduce waitlists for language classes. Some provincial governments also fund English as a second language, although these programs do not always provide child care.

According to testimony before the Committee, access to language training for Syrian refugees has been uneven across the country. While some refugees did not seem

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51 Ibid., 1215 (Mario Calla).

52 Ibid.

53 CIMM, [Evidence](#), 7 June 2016, 1120 (Leslie Emory); CIMM, [Evidence](#), 30 May 2016, 1535 (Hon. Peter Kent, as an Individual).

54 CIMM, [Evidence](#), 2 June 2016, 1155 (Aris Babikian): Levant Settlement Centre, [Written Submission](#).

55 CIMM, [Evidence](#), 19 May 2016, 1115 (Sherman Chan, Executive Committee Member, Canadian Council for Refugees); 1120 (Huda Bukhari).

56 CIMM, [Evidence](#), 31 May 2016, 1300 (Amer Alhendawi).

57 The figure includes funding to all provinces and territories but Quebec. The province of Quebec is completely responsible for all settlement programming, including language instruction, under the terms of the Quebec-Canada Accord. IRCC response to a request for information made by the Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration on 10 March 2016.

to have a problem enrolling in classes, access to language instruction was a significant integration challenge for others.

For some refugees, the issue was a shortage of classes offered at the lowest language levels.<sup>58</sup> A shortage of language classes that offer child minding was also raised, leading to a longer wait for women to access training, possibly resulting in extended periods of isolation. Benhaz Azad, of University Settlement, informed the Committee that child minding at language classes is not available at all for infants, creating an access gap for some women.<sup>59</sup>

Department officials indicated that the wait list for language classes at the end of April was particularly long in northern and southern Alberta, Saskatchewan, and Manitoba.<sup>60</sup> Refugees who appeared before the committee also reported long wait times in British Columbia; in the case of Mr. Alhendawi and his family, this was a wait of almost a year,<sup>61</sup> and in the case of Eman Allhalaq, a wait of three months for a spot with child care, eventually abandoned in favour of taking turns attending classes with her husband.<sup>62</sup> Karen Shortt, of Vancouver Community College, reported a wait list of over 800 students.<sup>63</sup> However, even in areas where adults generally had successfully enrolled and began English as second language programs, such as Toronto, programs were closing down for the summer due to a lack of funds.

Adeena Niazi, of the Afghan Women's Counseling and Integration Community Support Organization, explained the impact of these closures: "We have women waiting for classes for a period of four or five months, and now, when the classes close, another two or three months are added to that."<sup>64</sup> She elaborated that any delay in providing proper settlement services for the Syrian refugees will cause other problems, including delay in participation in Canadian society and the Canadian economy. Along the same lines, Mr. Calla stated "[the Syrian refugees] have 12 months of government support, during which time they should be making the most of that time. To then have a two-month pause really works against that".<sup>65</sup>

Witnesses identified an immediate need for informal language learning opportunities; for example, Sherman Chan, representing the Canadian Council for Refugees, suggested "there is an opportunity to recruit more tier one teachers and

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58 CIMM, [Evidence](#), 19 May 2016, 1120 (Sherman Chan).

59 CIMM, [Evidence](#), 27 September 2016, 1605 (Benhaz Azad, Director, Language, Settlement and Social Services, University Settlement).

60 CIMM, [Evidence](#), 9 June 2016, 1205 (Catrina Tapley).

61 CIMM, [Evidence](#), 31 May 2016, 1300 (Amer Alhendawi).

62 CIMM, [Evidence](#), 14 June 2016, 1220 (Eman Allhalaq).

63 CIMM, [Evidence](#), 2 June 2016, 1220 (Karen Shortt, President, Vancouver Community College Faculty Association).

64 CIMM, [Evidence](#), 16 June 2016, 1155 (Adeena Niazi, Executive Director, Afghan Women's Counseling and Integration Community Support Organization).

65 CIMM, [Evidence](#), 2 June 2016, 1235 (Mario Calla).



develop curriculums and have conversation circles to support them”.<sup>66</sup> Informal options were proposed both as an interim measure to deal with wait times for formal classes, but also as good way to draw in adults who are unfamiliar with structured learning environments.<sup>67</sup> Witnesses also suggested there is a need for “more language classes for different levels of learners, and different service times outside of the usual daytime classes in many more locations”.<sup>68</sup> Finally, Ms. Shortt stated simply that the government should “restore funding [for language training] to the level it was.... And then add some more”.<sup>69</sup>

#### 4. Employment

Employment-related services form one component of IRCC’s settlement program. Through this program, clients are eligible for services such as skills development and training, work placements, employment networking, client-mentor matches, and employment counselling.<sup>70</sup> Provincial governments also fund employment-related programs, including in areas related to foreign credential recognition.

Syrian refugees have had different experiences when it comes to employment, though witnesses stressed that the newcomers are eager to get to work and to contribute to Canadian society. The Committee heard that some refugees had found work within the first two to four months of arriving in Canada, while others were still unemployed months later. Refugees who are working mentioned that work provides an important means of integrating, giving them exposure to Canadian society and the opportunity to practice speaking English as well.

In finding employment, these newcomers often benefitted from help offered by private sponsors, volunteers, and ethnic communities.<sup>71</sup> Employers also reached out to settlement agencies, as Zena Al Hamdan of the Arab Community Centre of Toronto explained:

We have had overwhelming support from private sector employers. We had employers such as FreshCo. coming to our recent job fair and basically hiring on the spot. They take into consideration the fact that the refugees have virtually no English language skills, and they’re willing work with settlement organizations in terms of supporting their new employees, fitting them in within the workplace culture, and that sort of thing. On the other hand, they’re looking to settlement organizations for cultural interpretation for their employees, in order to absorb the new refugees that are coming in.<sup>72</sup>

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66 CIMM, [Evidence](#), 19 May 2016, 1120 (Sherman Chan).

67 CIMM, [Evidence](#), 7 June 2016, 1215 (Khim Tan, Senior Program Manager, Immigrant Service Program, Options Community Services).

68 CIMM, [Evidence](#), 7 June 2016, 1120 (Leslie Emory).

69 CIMM, [Evidence](#), 2 June 2016, 1225 (Karen Shortt).

70 IRCC, [Funding Guidelines: National Call for Proposals 2015](#).

71 CIMM, [Evidence](#), 31 May 2016, 1145 (Mirza Hakeem Baig); CIMM, [Evidence](#), 16 June 2016, 1155 (Moy Wong-Tam, Executive Director, Centre for Immigrants and Community Services).

72 CIMM, [Evidence](#), 19 May 2016, 1130 (Zena Al Hamdan).

Al Hamdan concluded by saying, “We have had overwhelming support, even from small shops. They would come in and say, “I’m looking for so-and-so, I’m willing to train”. It’s not one example. It’s not one sector. It’s everybody coming and offering support.”<sup>73</sup>

Based on his experience with private sponsorship, Dr. Aslam Daud, of Humanity First, claimed that finding employment was the biggest challenge for Syrian refugees.<sup>74</sup> Imadeddin Sawaf, who volunteered helping refugees find work in the Lower Mainland, emphasized the importance of getting the newcomers on the right path to employment, so that they are not tempted to take offers in the black market, or for cash.<sup>75</sup>

The two barriers to employment that were raised most often by witnesses were inadequate English or French for the workplace and problems related to having foreign qualifications (education credentials in particular) assessed and accepted.

As noted by several witnesses, the Syrian refugee population (government-assisted refugees in particular) included a group of skilled tradespeople who spoke little English or French upon arrival. These language barriers sometimes impede them from accessing employment services<sup>76</sup> and create a “catch-22” for refugees torn between trying to find work or enrolling in language training.<sup>77</sup> In this situation, Emily Woods of Action Réfugiés Montréal suggested, “We need to think creatively to help those who are interested in finding employment right away.”<sup>78</sup>

The Committee heard about some creative ways out of this conundrum. For instance, some refugees enrol in evening language classes, so that they can work during the day.<sup>79</sup> Others are able to bridge to employment by starting work with Arabic speaking proprietors or foremen. The Committee heard about one successful refugee who gained his first Canadian experience this way, before transitioning to a non-Arabic speaking company, working as a professional painter and making more than \$20 an hour.<sup>80</sup> Mr. Sawaf spoke to the Committee about the need to establish programs similar to what he was doing on his own because “putting them on the right path, I think, is the most important thing. Otherwise, the reality is they’re being offered jobs under the table, ‘Let me pay you cash; I’ll pay you \$9 an hour.’ It’s happening.”<sup>81</sup>

Employers and unions have also stepped up with solutions. John Mandarino, of LiUNA, spoke about their training centres, where new recruits learn about the jobsite

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73 Ibid.

74 CIMM, [Evidence](#), 7 June 2016, 1255 (Dr. Aslam Daud).

75 CIMM, [Evidence](#), 14 June 2016, 1130 (Imadeddin Sawaf, as an Individual).

76 Centre for Immigrant and Community Services, [Written Submission, p. 3](#); CIMM, [Evidence](#), 31 May 2016, 1210 (Emily Woods).

77 CIMM, [Evidence](#), 2 June 2016, 1140 (Aris Babikian).

78 CIMM, [Evidence](#), 31 May 2016, 1210 (Emily Woods).

79 CIMM, [Evidence](#), 14 June 2016, 1130 (Imadeddin Sawaf).

80 Ibid.

81 Ibid.

and safety requirements and prepare for employment in construction, hospitality or manufacturing.<sup>82</sup> Officials from IRCC informed the Committee about employers who hire refugees while providing them with additional support, such as interpretation services, language classes or on-the-job language training, social activities to build networks, and even scholarships for employee’s children.<sup>83</sup> Three businesses – Cinnaroll Bakeries Ltd. (Calgary, Alberta), Highline Mushrooms (Leamington, Ontario) and the Prince George Hotel (Halifax, Nova Scotia) – had such exemplary practices that they were awarded the 2016 Employer Award for Refugee Employment.<sup>84</sup>

The Committee also heard about employment barriers experienced by professionals, often privately sponsored refugees. Mr. Babikian informed the Committee that “the most difficult part is the highly educated people ... doctors, dentists, pharmacists, interior designers, and engineers. These people are quite proud, and they are not asking for any kind of support”.<sup>85</sup> Syrian refugee professionals face the same barriers to having their foreign credentials recognized as other newcomers to Canada, but also face some unique challenges due to their inability to produce documents proving their credentials due to the state of war in Syria.<sup>86</sup> They are also lacking Canadian experience, which some employers are requiring.<sup>87</sup> In light of these barriers, some settlement agencies are encouraging their Syrian refugee professional clients to transition to a related but alternate career. Yet, Ms. Azad testified that she had been surprised at the professionals able to find work in their field, so these barriers are not universal.

Witnesses made a number of recommendations related to employment. On the issue of foreign credential recognition, Dr. Daud suggested that a mentoring program would be helpful.<sup>88</sup> Mr. Babikian suggested that the “federal government and the governing bodies of various professions should initiate programs or relax some of their strict regulations to provide professional refugees the opportunity to upgrade their credentials and skills”.<sup>89</sup>

Other programs that witnesses suggested would be helpful for improving Syrian refugees’ integration into the labour market include those targeting employers, which would “create incentives and expand employer awareness of what jobs they can offer and how they can restructure to support refugee skill development”.<sup>90</sup> Another suggested

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82 CIMM, [Evidence](#), 16 June 2016, 1215 (John Mandarino, Executive Director, LiUNA Canadian Tri-Fund).

83 CIMM, [Evidence](#), 12 May 2016, 1115 (Catrina Tapley).

84 Government of Canada, [2016 Employer Awards for Refugee Employment](#).

85 CIMM, [Evidence](#), 2 June 2016, 1125 (Aris Babikian).

86 Centre for Immigrant and Community Services, [Written Submission, p. 3](#).

87 CIMM, [Evidence](#), 2 June 2016, 1120 (Aris Babikian); Agincourt Community Services Association, [Written Submission](#).

88 CIMM, [Evidence](#), 7 June 2016, 1235 and 1255 (Dr. Aslam Duad).

89 Levant Settlement Centre, [Written Submission](#).

90 CIMM, [Evidence](#), 7 June 2016, 1220 (Jessica Ferne, Director of Programs, International Development and Relief Foundation).

workplace classes or classes focused on work-related vocabulary or learning, designed for “experiential learning” rather than “book learning”.<sup>91</sup>

A number of recommendations were also directed at employment counselling; specifically that people be able to register with more than one agency,<sup>92</sup> and that existing service providers be funded to hire qualified Arabic-speaking employment counsellors, job developers or interpreters.<sup>93</sup>

While LINC funding cuts had resulted in VCC cancelling English as a Second Language (ESL) classes for 220 students in April 2016, Ms. Shortt stressed that VCC has a proven track record of bridging language and employment training to provide newcomers with language skills, employment skills, and the employment counselling to obtain work:

We had a group of immigrants, all engineers, go through our ESL pathways program for engineers. After completing the program with a curriculum specific to engineering, they then went into our seven-month drafting program. After completing this, they all gained employment, because they were able to transfer the skills of being an engineer into a seven-month drafting program and go out and get a job rather quickly.... In fact, 93% of our graduates are working in their field.<sup>94</sup>

## 5. Health

Along with catch-up vaccinations, urgent dental care was identified as a pressing medical condition for the 26,166 Syrian refugees resettled in Canada from 4 November 2015 to 29 February 2016.<sup>95</sup>

The Interim Federal Health Program (IFHP) provides short-term health care coverage to cover any waiting period prior to provincial/territorial health coverage. It also provides supplemental coverage (such as eye and dental coverage and prescription drug coverage) for resettled refugees for the first year in Canada.<sup>96</sup> The IFHP is funded by IRCC and administered by Medavie Blue Cross.

Several witnesses expressed gratitude that privately sponsored Syrian refugees were given access to full IFHP benefits, after a period where PSR coverage had been reduced.<sup>97</sup> Leslie Emory, representing the Ontario Council of Agencies Serving

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91 CIMM, [Evidence](#), 16 June 2016, 1125 (Moy Wong-Tam).

92 While this did not seem to be a widespread problem, it was reported as a frustration and barrier for the refugees who encountered it. CIMM, [Evidence](#), 2 June 2016, 1115 (Aris Babikian).

93 Centre for Immigrant and Community Services, [Written Submission](#), p. 3.

94 CIMM, [Evidence](#), 2 June 2016, 1220 (Karen Shortt).

95 L. Hansen, L. Maidment, and R. Ahmad, [“Early observations on the health of Syrian refugees in Canada,”](#) Canada Communicable Disease Report, Volume 42-S2, 17 March 2016.

96 IRCC, [Health care for refugees from Syria – About the Interim Federal Health Program](#).

97 CIMM, [Evidence](#), 16 June 2016, 1110 (Adeena Niazi); CIMM, [Evidence](#), 7 June 2016, 1115 (Leslie Emory).

Immigrants, noted that as a result, “the risk of large medical costs no longer deters sponsors”.<sup>98</sup>

According to the Canadian Dental Association (CDA) and other witnesses, IFHP coverage for dental work is inadequate and cumbersome. Randall Croutze, President of the CDA, explained that coverage does “not always align with the generally accepted standards of care”, a deficit that dentists sometimes cover at their own expense.<sup>99</sup> El Hafed Ezzabour, of the Maison Internationale de la Rive-Sud, stated that the IFHP doesn’t allow Syrian refugees to receive proper care for their teeth, with dentists sometimes recommending that teeth be pulled as the most feasible option.<sup>100</sup> The Committee was reminded that poor dental health not only affects overall health, but may also impact on confidence and employability.<sup>101</sup>

In terms of how the IFHP is administered, witnesses raised concerns about the pre-authorization required for dealing with routine procedures such as fillings, and difficulty in finding dentists that would accept the IFHP certificate because of the amount of paperwork involved and delays in payment.<sup>102</sup> Mr. Chan felt that coverage should be enhanced for dental care, hearing difficulties and developmental delays.<sup>103</sup>

Access to interpretation was raised as a healthcare issue, most tragically in the personal story of Ms. Allhalaq, who was not informed of her breast cancer diagnosis until she happened to encounter an Arabic speaker at the hospital on her third visit. Another witness noted that without adequate translation, some serious health conditions are going untreated.<sup>104</sup> In contrast, SickKids hospital in Toronto was credited with providing excellent service to a Syrian refugee family, with quick turnaround for services and interpretation offered on site.<sup>105</sup>

Witnesses recommended that the dental policies of the IFHP be assessed in order to improve immediate access to basic dental care, that payment for dentists serving refugees be accelerated, and that pre-authorizing routine dental work not be required. Two witnesses addressed interpretation, one recommending that qualified interpreters be provided for medical appointments during the first year and the other recommending a

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98 CIMM, [Evidence](#), 7 June 2016, 1115 (Leslie Emory).

99 CIMM, [Evidence](#), 31 May 2016, 1105 and 1130 (Randall Croutze, President, Canadian Dental Association).

100 CIMM, [Evidence](#), 2 June 2016, 1140 (El Hafed Ezzabour, Newcomer Outreach Worker, Maison Internationale de la Rive-Sud).

101 CIMM, [Evidence](#), 19 May 2016, 1135 (Sherman Chan).

102 CIMM, [Evidence](#), 31 May 2016, 1105 (Randall Croutze); Centre for Immigrant and Community Services, [Written Submission](#), p. 5.

103 CIMM, [Evidence](#), 19 May 2016, 1120 (Sherman Chan).

104 CIMM, [Evidence](#), 16 June 2016, 1155 (Moy Wong-Tam).

105 *Ibid.*, 1200 (Aleem Syed).

toll-free number be established or interpreters hired in order to improve communication with hospital staff.<sup>106</sup>

Finally, witnesses reminded the Committee that many Syrian refugees “have experienced significant trauma and stress, including physical torture, personal loss, and forced separation from their loved ones, homes, communities, and livelihoods”.<sup>107</sup> Jessica Ferne, of the International Development and Relief Foundation, suggested that Canada’s efforts in the areas of education and employment would be “fundamentally undermined” without adequate and sustained mental health services.<sup>108</sup> Witnesses from the settlement and education sectors mentioned programming already underway, and recommended that additional financial assistance be provided for trauma counselling and support groups.<sup>109</sup>

## 6. Education

Most witnesses reported not having trouble enrolling newly arrived Syrian refugee children in school. However, they explained that the new students face an “adjustment period” during which they learn the skills needed for school, including routines and the conduct expected of children.<sup>110</sup> As Ms. Al Hamdan noted, some refugee parents also need support, as many are illiterate and come from a culture where parent involvement in education is not the norm.<sup>111</sup>

School boards across Canada play a major role in integrating refugee children into Canadian society. Those in urban areas that regularly receive new refugee students have well-developed support programs that extend beyond the children to include the entire family.

For instance, the Peel District School Board has a one-stop shop for newcomer families called “We Welcome the World Centres”. At these centres students are registered, assessed for their English and math skills, and placed at the appropriate academic level. Also at the Centres family members receive a complete settlement needs assessment and orientation to the school system. Settlement workers in schools then follow up as needed.<sup>112</sup> Partnerships with other organizations allow the Centres to offer employment

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106 Centre for Immigrant and Community Services, [Written Submission, p. 5](#); CIMM, [Evidence](#), 2 June 2016, 1140 (El Hafed Ezzabour).

107 CIMM, [Evidence](#), 16 June 2016, 1125 (Aleem Syed).

108 CIMM, [Evidence](#), 7 June 2016, 1220 (Jessica Ferne).

109 CIMM, [Evidence](#), 16 June 2016, 1210 (Adeena Niazi); CIMM, [Evidence](#), 14 June 2016, 1125 (Louise Clayton, Coordinator, We Welcome the World Centres, Peel District School Board).

110 CIMM, [Evidence](#), 14 June 2016, 1215 (Zaiba Beg, Instructional Coordinator, English Language Learners, Peel District School Board); CIMM, [Evidence](#), 16 June 2016, 1120 (Moy Wong-Tam).

111 CIMM, [Evidence](#), 19 May 2016, 1145 (Zena Al Hamdan).

112 The pool of Settlement Workers in Schools (SWIS) in the Peel District School Board includes a formal partnership called the Multicultural Education and Settlement Partnership with 5 agencies in Peel and an additional 40 settlement workers assigned to 118 of 250 schools.



counselling, dental screening, and mental health counselling at various times throughout the year.<sup>113</sup>

The Calgary Board of Education also has strong programming for newcomers, most notably the L.E.A.D. (Literacy, English and Academic Development) program which provides intensive support so that students can more easily transition into mainstream and English as a Second Language courses. According to Superintendent Jeannie Everett, L.E.A.D. classrooms have a teacher as well as an English-language learning assistant, and they are supported by psychologists specialized in dealing with trauma.<sup>114</sup>

Witnesses suggested that the needs of Syrian refugee children are different from other children's needs in that most of the students in grades three and up have large gaps in education. As such, the students need more intensive programs in order to accelerate their learning. Some witnesses also highlighted the needs of older youths from 17 to 21 years old, who may have to balance studies with work to support the family.

Recommendations in this area primarily had to do with increased funding. Due to the way education funding is allocated in Alberta, the Calgary Board of Education had to absorb \$2.6 million in costs associated with welcoming the Syrian refugees without additional resources. These extra costs were covered by reallocating resources, resulting in larger class sizes for other students, delays to building improvements, and not hiring teachers in other areas.<sup>115</sup> Even though funding for the next year will take the Syrian refugees into account, the board is facing a deficit for the upcoming school year and is seeking additional funding from the provincial and federal governments.

The Calgary Catholic School District noted that the increasing presence of immigrant children with complex needs "place[s] a significant strain on and tax[es] the financial resources of the district". Further, representative Cheryl Low noted that, "as these needs are not short term, but often last many years after initial settlement and become more prevalent once sponsorship ends, consistent and sustainable funding is critical".<sup>116</sup>

The Peel District School Board (PDSB) received additional funding from the Ontario government in preparation for the Syrian refugees' arrival. All the same, representatives from the PDSB identified the need for continued funding for the Settlement Workers in the Schools or SWIS program and the World of Welcome orientation program. They also advocated for additional funding for specialty classes and breakfast programs, as well as funding for a strategy targeted to older youth ages 17 to 21.<sup>117</sup>

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113 CIMM, [Evidence](#), 14 June 2016, 1120 (Louise Clayton).

114 Ibid., 1115 (Jeannie Everett, Superintendent, Learning, School District 19, Calgary Board of Education).

115 Ibid., 1210 (Joy Bowen-Eyre, Chair, School District 19, Calgary Board of Education).

116 Ibid., 1115 (Cheryl Low, Chair of the Board of Trustees, Calgary Catholic School District).

117 Ibid., 1125 (Zaiba Beg); and 1125 (Louise Clayton).

## B. Specialized Settlement Programming

In addition to commenting on how the newly arrived refugees were integrating, witnesses also identified the need for specialized services for youth and for women. IRCC's settlement program funding guidelines indicate that the department appreciates the need for women-specific settlement supports and encourages organizations to develop specialized services for youth and refugee youth.<sup>118</sup>

### 1. Youth

Refugee youth (adolescents and young adults) were perceived by some witnesses as being particularly vulnerable. Layered on top of the usual tensions of identity formation and physical development, these youth also have to deal with trauma, culture shock, learning English or French and catching up on lost years in the education system. Witnesses referenced a recent report by Statistics Canada that found refugee "children do well mostly when they're younger, but when they arrive as teenagers they struggle, especially when their parents don't have a good grasp of the official languages."<sup>119</sup>

Following this observation, the Boys and Girls Club recommended that the government provide newcomer youth "with extra support to mitigate the additional challenges they face when integrating into Canadian society".<sup>120</sup> Hyat Said told the committee about her own experience with the organization when she arrived in Canada as a refugee from Syria in 2011, saying that the Boys and Girls Club helped her learn English, improve her grades at school, overcome shyness and develop leadership skills.<sup>121</sup> This "second home" provided her with the opportunity to get established in Canada and provided benefits that extended to the rest of her family.

Other witnesses echoed the call for newcomer youth programming, and contend that it has received inadequate funding to date from the federal government.<sup>122</sup> Khim Tan, of Options Community Services, underscored that youth need timely interventions "before isolation and disconnect set in and vulnerability increases".<sup>123</sup> In terms of specific programs, witnesses noted the importance of youth-only space, and of connecting with peers with similar experiences, who can help them feel that there is a "light at the end of the tunnel" and they are not alone.<sup>124</sup> As Ms. Ferne declared, "peer-to-peer networks are a great way to tap into [culturally appropriate messaging] and also to tap into the powerful

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118 IRCC, [Funding Guidelines: National Call for Proposals 2015](#), pp. 13 and 20.

119 CIMM, [Evidence](#), 19 May 2016, 1145 (Rachel Gouin, Director, Research and Public Policy, Boys and Girls Clubs of Canada).

120 Boys and Girls Club of Canada, [Written Submission](#).

121 CIMM, [Evidence](#), 19 May 2016, 1110 (Hyat Said, Member, Boys and Girls Clubs of Canada).

122 CIMM, [Evidence](#), 7 June 2016, 1215 (Khim Tan); CIMM, [Evidence](#), 30 May 2016, 1705 (Judy Villeneuve, Councillor, Surrey City Council, City of Surrey); CIMM, [Evidence](#), 19 May 2016, 1245 (John Haddock, Chief Executive Officer, YMCAs of Cambridge and Kitchener-Waterloo).

123 CIMM, [Evidence](#), 7 June 2016, 1215 (Khim Tan).

124 CIMM, [Evidence](#), 31 May 2016, 1155 (Carolyn Davis).



volunteer base that we have among Canadian youth and among refugee youth who really want to find a meaningful way to get involved”.<sup>125</sup>

Finally, in relation to youth, Ms. Al Hamdan shared that her organization encountered a new clientele in this Syrian refugee population: very young parents, between 18 and 24 years of age. She stated that “these parents will need extra support as newcomers, as parents, and as youth, and potentially as part of the workforce”.<sup>126</sup>

## **2. Mothers with Young Children**

A number of witnesses remarked that the Syrian refugee mothers have unique settlement needs. As Ms. Niazi remarked, “These women are socially isolated. Many have a large number of children, and most of them have limited or no formal education. These women need special programs.”<sup>127</sup>

Representatives from the Mount Pleasant Family Centre Society spoke to some of the successes they have had running programs that addressed these unique needs, despite being faced with funding cuts while at the same time experiencing an increase in service demand. Executive Director Gini Bonner stated:

Our services include activities that focus on information and orientation; community connections; and assessment and referrals related to family preservation, parenting, and child development. Our services play a critical role during the initial stages of settlement and have a positive impact on the newcomer child's early experience, recovery from trauma, and preparation for school. The goals of our program include ensuring that newcomer families are not isolated in our community and that they feel welcomed and supported.<sup>128</sup>

Ms. Emory proposed that “what we need to do is introduce programs that work for them and work with their lifestyle to bring them into the community, and offer, for example, alternative language instruction models with child care”.<sup>129</sup> An example of programming that works for mothers with young children is the Afghan Women Organization’s home visits and women-only groups at the library, programs designed to reach people not already coming to the organization for services.

Women-only language classes were also proposed as a means to address women’s psychological and social needs as survivors of violence and trauma.<sup>130</sup> Finally Moy Wong-Tam, of the Centre for Immigrants and Community Services, identified women’s support groups as very helpful and important for mothers, providing a place to

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125 CIMM, [Evidence](#), 7 June 2016, 1235 (Jessica Ferne).

126 CIMM, [Evidence](#), 19 May 2016, 1145 (Zena Al Hamdan).

127 CIMM, [Evidence](#), 16 June 2016, 1115 (Adeena Niazi).

128 CIMM, [Evidence](#), 2 June 2016, 1220 (Gini Bonner, Executive Director, Mount Pleasant Family Centre Society).

129 CIMM, [Evidence](#), 7 June 2016, 1135 (Leslie Emory).

130 CIMM, [Evidence](#), 16 June 2016, 1210 (Adeena Niazi).

“talk about stress management as well as parenting, budgeting, just how to make ends meet in Canada and how to stretch your dollars”.<sup>131</sup>

### C. Supporting the Private Sponsor Contribution

A little less than 9,000 of the initial 25,000 Syrian refugees resettled under the government’s initiative were privately sponsored.<sup>132</sup> Witnesses were very supportive of the private sponsorship program, explaining that it augments government efforts, engages Canadians, and is “about building a community” rather than simply bringing people from there to here.<sup>133</sup>

Mr. Allos reflected on the private sponsorship program advantages vis-à-vis the government-assisted program, saying:

The PSR program has the following advantages that the GAR lacks: it has extended family unifications; it has mission trips to select the most vulnerable and disadvantaged; it is more economical and less of a financial burden on taxpayers; refugees are integrated and embraced by society, and hence less likely to be financial burdens or radicalized; and it builds bridges and fights against racism, prejudice, and xenophobia.<sup>134</sup>

One lesson learned from the #WelcomeRefugees Initiative is that private sponsors need support. At the height of arrivals, private sponsors turned to settlement agencies and Sponsorship Agreement Holders in unprecedented numbers for help with everything from completing paperwork to questions about specific refugee situations or cultural issues. The need for support remains as privately sponsored refugees arrive and sponsors “begin to deal with the reality of their sponsorship responsibilities”.<sup>135</sup>

At the same time, settlement organizations were also aware that some private sponsors were isolated from support available and unfamiliar with the resources in the community. While they tried to reach out to these groups, settlement agencies had their limits, as expressed by Carl Cadogan, of Reception House Waterloo Region:

We certainly can do a lot more, but that again is a resource-driven focus, because the staff do it, bodies do it. Meeting with families and bringing them together to provide a bit of an orientation to the services in the community takes time. As a small agency, we don’t have resources for that, but more can be done.<sup>136</sup>

Catholic Crosscultural Services is the organization contracted by IRCC to train and support private sponsors. Observing that the special initiative attracted a large number of new sponsors, director Carolyn Davis suggested that they need hands-on, practical

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131 Ibid. (Moy Wong-Tam).

132 Government of Canada, [Syria – by the numbers](#).

133 CIMM, [Evidence](#), 31 May 2016, 1110 (Carolyn Davis); CIMM, [Evidence](#), 7 June 2016, 1125 (Brian Dyck, National Migration and Resettlement Program Coordinator, Mennonite Central Committee Canada).

134 CIMM, [Evidence](#), 30 May 2016, 1540 (Rabea Allos).

135 CIMM, [Evidence](#), 31 May 2016, 1115 (Carolyn Davis).

136 CIMM, [Evidence](#), 19 May 2016, 1250 (Carl Cadogan).

support such as webinars and mentoring from established groups.<sup>137</sup> She indicated that IRCC was seeking input on how to better support the needs of private sponsors and pointed to the need for “increased funds to meet the training, information, and support needs” of private sponsors.<sup>138</sup> The Canadian Council for Refugees also recommended that settlement organizations receive funding to support private sponsors.<sup>139</sup>

Adequate support for private sponsors is essential to lowering the potential for sponsorship breakdown, which occurs when sponsors cannot live up to their commitments. While some witnesses suggested that breakdown occurs infrequently, another explained that it is a hidden problem, as those sponsored tend to try to find other ways to be independent without signalling a breakdown.<sup>140</sup>

A number of witnesses recommended that other private sponsors could provide a source of support.<sup>141</sup> The Committee heard of an initiative underway in Toronto that linked sponsoring groups whose families have arrived with those awaiting families. Ms. Ferne explained that the initiative has “reduced both anxiety and workload, and increased networking and skills sharing as Canadians look for ways to give while they wait”.<sup>142</sup> She felt that given the wealth of experience with private sponsorship among established groups, a peer-to-peer mentoring relationship with new sponsors could be very fruitful.

A relatively new sponsorship group in Collingwood, Ontario recommended that the federal government create an all-inclusive how-to manual for sponsorship groups and that resources be created specifically to assist sponsoring groups in smaller centres or rural areas.<sup>143</sup> Another witness also pointed to the difficulty of helping refugees integrate when they live far from settlement services and government offices.

A second lesson learned about the private sponsor contribution was that the government’s initiative was more popular with private sponsors than anticipated. One expression of this interest was the high demand among private sponsors for co-sponsorship cases, known as Blended Visa-Office Referred (BVOR) cases. Ms. Davis informed the committee of the BVOR’s popularity, saying:

This program has such a high demand that when a new group of cases becomes available, they are claimed within minutes. They’re released by email and are claimed within minutes. In January we matched 500 BVOR cases, which is actually a year’s worth of work, generally.<sup>144</sup>

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137 CIMM, [Evidence](#), 31 May 2016, 1145 (Carolyn Davis).

138 Ibid., 1110.

139 CIMM, [Evidence](#), 19 May 2016, 1115 (Sherman Chan).

140 CIMM, [Evidence](#), 31 May 2016, 1210 (Emily Woods).

141 Ibid., 1220 (Thomas Vincent).

142 CIMM, [Evidence](#), 7 June 2016, 1225 (Jessica Ferne).

143 Collingwood Syrian Sponsorship Committee, [Written Submission](#).

144 CIMM, [Evidence](#), 31 May 2016, 1110 (Carolyn Davis).

This reality was echoed by other witnesses, who noted that there were “not enough” BVORs and they were difficult to get.<sup>145</sup> Some SAHs felt that a better method of allocating BVOR cases should be implemented, calling into question the fairness of the current first come, first served method.<sup>146</sup> Several witnesses suggested that the BVOR program be expanded.<sup>147</sup>

BVOR cases aside, the eagerness to privately sponsor Syrian refugees was expressed in thousands of new applications. The groups submitting these applications had the reasonable expectation that the files would be treated expeditiously and their families would soon arrive.

Applications submitted during the government’s push to resettle 25,000 refugees benefitted from faster processing times due to the presence of additional personnel in the regions and chartered flights for the trip to Canada. Further, the government lifted certain restrictions on private sponsors, only for Syrian refugees: these applications did not count towards the annual cap on new applications Sponsorship Agreement Holders could submit, and Community Sponsors and Groups of Five were freed from the requirement to only sponsor refugees recognized by the UNHCR or another state.

Regular operations were resumed after the government’s commitment to resettle 25,000 was met. This meant that the extra personnel returned to their regular duties and commercial aircraft was used for flights instead of charters. Private sponsors were informed that new applications for Syrian refugees were to be applied against their caps for the year.<sup>148</sup> As a result of these measures, processing times for privately sponsored Syrian refugees slowed.

In the wake of widespread disappointment following the winding down of operations, IRCC sent extra personnel back into the field, and sponsors were informed that all applications received prior to 31 March 2016 would be processed in 2016 or early 2017.<sup>149</sup> These applications would also be exempt from the year’s caps.

Some witnesses were still dissatisfied with the government’s new proposed timeline.<sup>150</sup> Ms. Berman drew attention to the long wait endured by the three families her group was sponsoring, two in Northern Iraq and one in Turkey, awaiting security checks, interviews and medical examinations.<sup>151</sup> As Thomas Vincent of the Collingwood Syrian Sponsorship Committee articulated, “Canadian sponsorship groups have gone from

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145 CIMM, [Evidence](#), 31 May 2016, 1300 (Paul Clarke, Executive Director, Action Réfugiés Montréal); CIMM, [Evidence](#), 7 June 2016, 1105 (Brian Dyck).

146 CIMM, [Evidence](#), 31 May 2016, 1115 (Mirza Hakeem Baig).

147 CIMM, [Evidence](#), 30 May 2016, 1535 (Hon. Peter Kent); Canada4Refugees, [Written Submission](#).

148 The global cap on new applications from Sponsorship Agreement Holders is 10,500 as of 1 March 2016. IRCC’s response to a request for information made by the Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration on 18 July 2016.

149 IRCC, [Notice – #WelcomeRefugees: Processing privately sponsored Syrian refugee applications](#).

150 See, for example, Syrian Refugees Gravenhurst, [Written Submission](#).

151 CIMM, [Evidence](#), 2 June 2016, 1100 (Sandy Berman).

excitement to frustration to anger at the absence of consistent or any communication, the lack of transparency, and the excessive wait times for the arrival of Syrian families”.<sup>152</sup>

Witnesses felt that long wait times placed the families in jeopardy and eroded the goodwill of sponsors, while the money fundraised sat idle. The Honourable Peter Kent gave voice to the feeling of unmet expectations: “The government should complete the promises they made, and I think those promises are only half fulfilled at the moment, certainly with regard to the privately sponsored refugees and the SAHs”.<sup>153</sup>

To remedy the situation, witnesses offered simply that the application process be restored and sped up.<sup>154</sup> John Sewell of Canada4Refugees suggested that the government commit to sponsored families arriving within three months, while the Levant Settlement Centre felt that four months was an adequate processing time for sponsorship.<sup>155</sup>

Another suggestion made was to resume using chartered planes to bring over privately sponsored refugees waiting in Lebanon and Jordan. According to witnesses, “these refugees have successfully completed the process and are waiting for their airline tickets” but “airline bookings are very tight and the embassy has had trouble finding flights”.<sup>156</sup>

Finally, one witness suggested that the Syrian private sponsorships should operate outside of the regular program.<sup>157</sup> Mr. Sewell suggested that for the remaining part of 2016, only privately sponsored refugees be admitted, rather than GARs, even if that meant converting some GARs to PSRs.<sup>158</sup> Mr. Vincent called for a strategy to “provide the thousands of waiting sponsorship groups with Syrian families”.<sup>159</sup>

## D. Funding

Funding was a cross-cutting theme running throughout the Committee’s study, with witnesses calling for more funding for specific areas of existing programming, as well as advocating for funding for new programs. It was also recognized that the Syrian refugee resettlement had ripple effects on many aspects of society. John Haddock of the YMCA explained:

We're getting many stresses not just on the settlement sector but on all of the other required elements, such as education, mental health, health, and housing, in order to help a large group of people become settled. I would ask for consideration to be given to

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152 CIMM, [Evidence](#), 31 May 2016, 1215 (Thomas Vincent).

153 CIMM, [Evidence](#), 30 May 2016, 1610 (Hon. Peter Kent).

154 Central Muskoka Community Syrian Relief, [Written Submission](#).

155 Canada4Refugees, [Written Submission](#); Levant Settlement Centre, [Written Submission, p. 5](#).

156 Levant Settlement Centre, [Written Submission, p. 5](#); CIMM, [Evidence](#), 30 May 2016, 1530 (Hon. Peter Kent).

157 Levant Settlement Centre, [Written Submission, p. 5](#).

158 Canada4Refugees, [Written Submission](#).

159 CIMM, [Evidence](#), 31 May 2016, 1235 (Thomas Vincent).

investment in some of the settlement requirements as well as in the broader community sectors that will require support.<sup>160</sup>

## 1. More Funding

As indicated in the preceding sections, witnesses recommended additional funding for language training, employment services, programs for professionals, offsetting housing costs, supporting school boards and associated programming, mental health, as well as youth programming. Increased funding to support private sponsors was also raised.

More generally, witnesses also drew attention to what they described as a “disconnect” between the downward trend in settlement funding for their organization and the increase in clients received. This was a concern raised particularly by Ontario-based organizations, which have been adversely affected under the National Settlement Funding Framework as “proportionally more immigrants have moved west.”<sup>161</sup> Ms. Niazi, for example, claimed that “six years of federal funding cuts to settlement services have already had a big impact on the settlement of refugees and on the settlement sector”<sup>162</sup> prior to the Syrians arrival. However, B.C.-based organizations, including Vancouver Community College and Mount Pleasant Family Centre Society, reported funding cuts as well.<sup>163</sup>

Witnesses also expressed concern that they did not want other clients to be adversely affected by the arrival of many new Syrian refugee clients. Ms. Niazi, for one, explained the conundrum of having budget cuts and then some of the money returned through targeted funding for Syrian refugees: “It’s very difficult for us to manage because we cannot kick out refugees and immigrants from that class in order to accommodate Syrians”.<sup>164</sup> Ms. Wong-Tam noted a similar difficulty, reporting that her organization had been authorized to re-profile up to 5% of their settlement budget.

Some witnesses, such as Vancouver Community College, were clearly frustrated by having the capacity to offer needed services, such as language training and specialized employment bridging, but not the funding to do so. Others lamented that their programs would have to close for the summer, exacerbating access pressures at a critical juncture.<sup>165</sup>

Witnesses from the settlement sector recommended increases to settlement funding and that it flow more quickly.<sup>166</sup> Others stressed that multi-year funding would be beneficial, allowing them to provide ongoing stable support.<sup>167</sup> Summing up the sentiment

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160 CIMM, [Evidence](#), 19 May 2016, 1215 (John Haddock).

161 CIMM, [Evidence](#), 2 June 2016, 1245 (Mario Calla).

162 CIMM, [Evidence](#), 16 June 2016, 1110 (Adeena Niazi).

163 CIMM, [Evidence](#), 2 June 2016, 1220 (Karen Shortt); 1235 (Gini Bonner).

164 CIMM, [Evidence](#), 16 June 2016, 1220 (Adeena Niazi).

165 CIMM, [Evidence](#), 2 June 2016, 1235 (Mario Calla); CIMM, [Evidence](#), 16 June 2016, 1155 (Adeena Niazi).

166 CIMM, [Evidence](#), 7 June 2016, 1115 (Leslie Emory).

167 CIMM, [Evidence](#), 16 June 2016, 1110 (Adeena Niazi); CIMM, [Evidence](#), 2 June 2016, 1240 (Gini Bonner and Sanja Sladojevic).



of many witnesses, Ms. Davis explained: “We don’t need to reinvent or recreate the sponsorship or settlement sector to meet the needs of Syrian refugees, but the government does need to fully fund the existing services so they can ramp up enough to meet the needs of this group, which is unprecedentedly large”.<sup>168</sup>

At the same time, a couple of witnesses from the settlement sector indicated that it was sometimes difficult for agencies to take full advantage of new funding, as they encountered space limitations in trying to expand, for instance.<sup>169</sup>

## 2. Funding to New Programs

In terms of new areas for settlement funding, sector representatives regretted that they could not take better advantage of the offers of help that came pouring in, and that as a result, volunteers were discouraged. Mr. Ezzabour indicated that for his organization not having the “expertise or capacity to manage the stock ... of national solidarity” was a “major problem”.<sup>170</sup> Similarly another witness stated, “managing this goodwill proved to be challenging for small organizations like ours in attempting to mobilize the large influx of offers of support and donations while continuing to carry out our jobs”.<sup>171</sup> As a result, the recommendation was made that IRCC acknowledge and “fund settlement service providers to harness volunteers’ capacity so that they may play a meaningful role in the resettlement of Syrian newcomers”.<sup>172</sup>

One witness offered a different perspective in suggesting that settlement funding was adequate, but not well invested.<sup>173</sup> He cited problems with settlement services in his area, saying that refugees were left alone, translation was not effective, and volunteers like him were picking up the slack. Funding for community-based volunteers was an idea he raised. This was echoed by Nouri Haidar Al Hassani, of Child Aid International, who said “if we were to get help to cover some expenses, that would be very good. We could better help the Syrian refugee families and improve our volunteer work in this part of the job”.<sup>174</sup> Similarly, the Islamic Foundation of Toronto thought that there should be funding for SAHs to help in the settlement effort and cover expenses for specialized services, such as counselling.<sup>175</sup>

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168 CIMM, [Evidence](#), 31 May 2016, 1115 (Carolyn Davis).

169 CIMM, [Evidence](#), 27 September 2016, 1555 (Benhaz Azad).

170 CIMM, [Evidence](#), 2 June 2016, 1105 (El Hafed Ezzabour).

171 CIMM, [Evidence](#), 31 May 2016, 1210 (Emily Woods).

172 CIMM, [Evidence](#), 7 June 2016, 1215 (Khim Tan).

173 CIMM, [Evidence](#), 14 June 2016, 1105 (Imadeddin Sawaf).

174 CIMM, [Evidence](#), 31 May 2016, 1250 (Nouri Haidar Al Hassani, Founder, Child Aid International).

175 Ibid., 1140 (Mirza Hakeem Baig).

Another area recommended for new funding was local transportation, in municipal jurisdiction. Witnesses asserted that public transportation is expensive and that one year of free public transportation would “remove a huge financial burden from the refugees”.<sup>176</sup>

## **FUTURE OF CANADA’S RESETTLEMENT PROGRAM**

While the focus of the Committee’s study was on refugee integration under the special initiative for Syrians, witnesses also commented on broader issues related to the future of Canada’s resettlement program. These comments focused on the scope of the private sponsorship program, the selection of refugees for resettlement and on fairness and equitable treatment of all refugees given the great need for resettlement across the world.

### **A. Scope of the Private Sponsorship Program**

The Syrian refugee resettlement initiative exacerbated the pre-existing gap between the number of refugees the Canadian public is prepared to support through private sponsorship and the number the government plans to admit to Canada each year. Over time, sponsoring groups have submitted so many more applications than the government targeted in the Immigration Levels Plan that backlogs accumulated.

As explained by Mr. Allos, the government implemented caps<sup>177</sup> on new applications from SAHs is a way to address the problem:

The cap was introduced back in 2011-2012 by then Minister Kenney. I believe it was a good thing, because the PSR program was mostly used for sponsoring families, and you have a lot of SAHs that go into the system and submit as many applications as possible—in the thousands. If one or two succeed, that’s fine. In the meantime you’re creating a huge backlog in the visa offices. In Africa right now you have a five- to seven-year wait in visa offices.<sup>178</sup>

One reason for the large surge in private sponsorship applications for Syrian refugees was the government’s decision in 2015 to exempt these cases from SAHs’ annual caps. There were no limits placed on SAHs wishing to sponsor Syrian refugees until new caps for 2016 were announced.

Witnesses raised the issue of caps on private sponsorships as a short-term issue directly connected to the Syrian resettlement, as those recently resettled will want to work with private sponsors to bring family members to Canada. As stated by Brian Dyck of the Mennonite Central Committee, “[W]e anticipate that Syrian refugees, like other populations, will have sponsorship needs themselves. They will look to us to help them find ways to get their family members here.”<sup>179</sup>

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176 Levant Settlement Centre, [Written Submission](#).

177 Note that in Quebec, “each group has an allocation of spots based on assets and not on the number of files that IRCC is ready to open.” CIMM, [Evidence](#), 31 May 2016, 1230 (Paul Clarke).

178 CIMM, [Evidence](#), 30 May 2016, 1615 (Rabea Allos).

179 CIMM, [Evidence](#), 7 June 2016, 1105 (Brian Dyck).



The testimony of other witnesses confirmed that private sponsors have already reached their capacity to help these families. Speaking for Action Réfugiés Montréal, Ms. Woods reported that the “demand for family-linked sponsorship far exceeds available spaces” and that their wait list for sponsorships increased from 150 names at the end of 2014 to over 600 at the end of 2015. Similarly Mirza Hakeem Baig of the Islamic Foundation of Toronto reported:

We got an allocation from IRCC for six people only. We have more than 67 families in line now and we have stopped taking in applications. We have already in line 67 families who we sponsored, and now we cannot. The applications are being returned to us. Today we got a communication that six of the applications will be returned to us. We already had the funding in place. We have to go back to the congregation and tell them that we cannot help, and that they have to take back the money.<sup>180</sup>

Whether there should be caps on private sponsorships at all was a more general question raised by the witnesses. As lawyer Chantal Desloges stated, “I disagree with quotas.... Let all the people who want to privately sponsor refugees do so”.<sup>181</sup> Similarly, Mr. Vincent suggested that the capacity of sponsorship groups should determine the number of refugees to be resettled.

Others felt that the caps were an important means for the government to reduce processing times and were an improvement over the backlog problem that existed previously. As Dr. Daud explained:

If you tighten the cap, then the processing is fast, but very few people come in. If you remove the cap and make it open, there will be a lot more applications and the processing will be slow. We have the band-aid solution of increasing the cap, which I do want to do, but the permanent solution lies in increasing the capacity of the immigration department in the visa offices.<sup>182</sup>

Others shared Dr. Daud’s sentiment that the best solution lies in adding more resources to visa posts so that they can process more applications.

If caps are retained, Ms. Desloges argued that they be managed better, in a system more predictable and transparent, ideally with multi-year allocations. Another suggested that the number of sponsorships allocated to a particular group be determined in part by the approval rate of their previous applications. Several groups were disappointed with the cap assigned to them for 2016–17, calling into question the allocation process.

Finally, some people suggested that the momentum generated by the government should be carried forward into the Immigration Levels Plan for 2017 and even beyond. Mr. Dyck recommended that the government “build a sustainable program, one that doesn’t just move 25,000 in a short period of time, but goes forward from this moment to put in resources to continue to build refugee resettlement. Humanitarian immigration is an

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180 CIMM, [Evidence](#), 31 May 2016, 1150 (Mirza Hakeem Baig).

181 CIMM, [Evidence](#), 30 May 2016, 1720 (Chantal Desloges, Lawyer, Desloges Law Group, as an Individual).

182 CIMM, [Evidence](#), 7 June 2016, 1255 (Dr. Aslam Daud).

important part of the Canadian immigration plan.”<sup>183</sup> Similarly, Canada4Refugees called for planning for 2017 and beyond that “capitalizes on the extraordinary new interest of sponsorship groups”, to be conducted in consultation with stakeholders through a summit with IRCC.

## **B. Identifying refugees for resettlement**

Witnesses also shared some reflections on how refugees should be identified for resettlement to Canada. Some stipulated that Canada should help the most vulnerable. Ms. Desloges defined this group as “people who are not safe in camps who will never be able to return home ... groups with ... a specific campaign against them based on the inalienable identify of who they are”.<sup>184</sup> Similarly, Mr. Allos focused on those “who will be hard to repatriate: the minorities of the conflict area, such as ethnic and religious minorities, political activists, women at risk, and homosexual and transgender groups”.<sup>185</sup>

In order to identify the most vulnerable, some witnesses recommended that Canada look for assistance beyond the UNHCR.<sup>186</sup> They suggested that Canada work with other organizations on the ground, such as the International Catholic Migration Commission. According to Mr. Allos, this organization is the second largest in the world after the UNHCR, and deals “mostly with refugees who do not go to refugee camps but live in the rundown areas in different parts of the world”.<sup>187</sup> Mr. Allos also suggested that the Canadian government work with private groups who could identify refugees in crisis areas and ensure that the most vulnerable are selected.

Jennifer Miedema, of Compass Community Church, offered a different perspective, stating that she was unsure about the government’s basis for prioritizing refugee groups and cautioned that decisions should not be based on media coverage.<sup>188</sup> Instead, she continued,

It’s extremely important for the government to have a long-term plan really for refugee resettlement and obviously prioritizing the most oppressed and vulnerable people, and the long-term plan should have some capacity to be flexible to respond to current crises in the world but maintaining focus on yearly goals for refugees from countries where there is longstanding and ongoing oppression needs to happen.<sup>189</sup>

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183 Ibid., 1200 (Brian Dyck).

184 CIMM, [Evidence](#), 30 May 2016, 1655 (Chantal Desloges).

185 Ibid., 1535 (Rabea Allos).

186 CIMM, [Evidence](#), 7 June 2016, 1115 (Majed El Shafie, Founder and President, One Free World International).

187 CIMM, [Evidence](#), 30 May 2016, 1555 (Rabea Allos).

188 CIMM, [Evidence](#), 27 September 2017, 1600 (Jennifer Miedema, Refugee Sponsorship Chair, Compass Community Church).

189 Ibid.

## C. Equity

The Syrian refugee resettlement initiative prompted a number of witnesses to comment on the importance of equal treatment of refugees in Canada's resettlement program. Concern for equity was expressed in relation to application processing times and the immigration travel loan.

While the Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship stated that other refugee applications had not been adversely affected by the Syrian resettlement,<sup>190</sup> Ms. Niazi and Ms. Miedema contended that expediting Syrian cases caused delays for other cases.<sup>191</sup> On the other hand, Mr. Dyck found that "there have been a lot of arrivals from African missions."<sup>192</sup> He also mentioned that non-Syrian refugees had benefitted from the significant interest in sponsoring.

More broadly, witnesses urged the government to be mindful of the needs of other refugees and to bring them timely protection as well.<sup>193</sup> Ms. Niazi asked that the government "treat processing of all refugees equally", drawing attention to long processing times for refugees from other source countries:

The Pretoria, Nairobi, Cairo, and Islamabad visa posts have been capped for the past few years, since 2012, and Islamabad had zero allocation in 2014. We understand that over 6,000 people in Africa, and many Afghans, including persecuted women, have been waiting for five to six years to hear an answer from Canada. There are 4,000 vulnerable Christians in Thailand who have four-year waiting times.<sup>194</sup>

Ms. Miedema's testimony drew attention to the need to improve the processing time for applications to sponsor people in Israel. She also asked that the cap for private sponsorship applications at the Israeli mission be increased, and that Groups of Five and Community Sponsors applying to sponsor Eritreans be exempt from the requirement to sponsor only UNHCR or state-designated refugees.

In light of differing backlogs and processing times for privately sponsored refugee applications, Mr. Sewell recommended that IRCC conduct a backlog-clearance measure, "perhaps employing a flying squad which clears refugee applications in a particular location in a three or four week period".<sup>195</sup> Other witnesses recommended that IRCC allocate more resources for processing, specifically at visa posts, and to "alleviate the

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190 CIMM, [Evidence](#), 12 May 2016, 1115 (Hon. John McCallum, Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship).

191 CIMM, [Evidence](#), 16 June 2016, 1205 (Adeena Niazi); CIMM, [Evidence](#), 27 September 2017, 1545 (Jennifer Miedema).

192 CIMM, [Evidence](#), 7 June 2016, 1135 (Brian Dyck).

193 Ibid., 1115 (Leslie Emory).

194 CIMM, [Evidence](#), 16 June 2016, 1110 (Adeena Niazi).

195 Canada4Refugees, [Written Submission](#).

pressure on visa offices by transferring some of the overseas processing of visas to an office in Canada”.<sup>196</sup>

#### D. Immigration Loans

Resettled refugees normally contribute to the cost of resettlement through an interest-bearing loan for the medical exam and travel to Canada. Loan amounts vary, but may not exceed \$10,000, and have a somewhat flexible repayment schedule.

IRCC waived the loans for all Syrian refugees who arrived after 4 November 2015 as well as for those interviewed by visa officers prior to 1 March 2016. Because many of these refugees arrived on chartered flights, it was deemed unreasonable to pass on the travel costs, which would have been much higher than usual.

Witnesses argued that it was unfair to exempt some people from the travel loan and not others – pointing to examples where members of the same family had very different financial burdens upon arriving in Canada.

That financial burden was the main issue for many witnesses, who described the negative impact of loans on newly arrived refugee families. They stated that loans place a strain on refugee families, who often work multiple jobs to try and meet their financial obligations. Another stated that the loans create stress and conflict in families because many are still not working. The loans exacerbate financial problems and lead to difficulties at the end of the month, including food bank use. Mr. Calla stated unequivocally that the loans have a “crushing impact on the ability of refugees to make ends meet” and the “debt load is incompatible” with the humanitarian principles at the heart of Canada’s refugee program.<sup>197</sup>

Witnesses called for refugees to be treated equally with respect to the travel loan. One witness argued that the loan should be waived for all Syrian refugees regardless of arrival date,<sup>198</sup> another that loans should be waived for all government-assisted refugees resettled to Canada,<sup>199</sup> while others felt that all resettled refugees should not have to repay their travel expenses and the loan program should be ended.<sup>200</sup>

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196 CIMM, [Evidence](#), 16 June 2016, 1110 (Adeena Niazi); CIMM, [Evidence](#), 7 June 2016, 1115 (Leslie Emory).

197 CIMM, [Evidence](#), 2 June 2016, 1215 (Mario Calla).

198 CIMM, [Evidence](#), 30 May 2016, 1530 and 1600 (Hon. Peter Kent); 1640 (Judy Villeneuve); Levant Settlement Centre, [Written Submission](#); Collingwood Syrian Sponsorship Committee [written submission](#), p.7.

199 CIMM, [Evidence](#), 2 June 2016, 1215 (Mario Calla).

200 CIMM, [Evidence](#), 7 June 2016, 1120 (Leslie Emory); Collingwood Syrian Sponsorship Committee, [written submission](#), p.7.

## COMMITTEE CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The Committee wants to start by thanking and congratulating all of the people who have made the Syrian refugee resettlement a success to date – volunteers, settlement workers, IRCC staff, private sponsors, educators, doctors and nurses, landlords – the list could go on. People have clearly been motivated by compassion and the desire to do the right thing.

However, as the Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship has said, getting the refugees here is the easy part in comparison to helping them integrate successfully in Canadian society. We need to continue to support the new arrivals, so that we can help them realize dreams – as Mr. Hajmusa stated, “I hope that I will one day become a beneficial member of the Canadian community, and reciprocate by giving something useful to the country and Government of Canada”.<sup>201</sup>

Ensuring the Syrian refugees succeed is going to require investments by all of us, not just the federal government. These investments, made now, will bear fruit as the refugee families and their children will contribute and give back. As witnesses have suggested, however, investment needs to be timely before the new arrivals – be they youth or unemployed adults – become disengaged, isolated and harder to reach.

The Committee’s recommendations focus primarily on aspects of integration where we feel greater attention is warranted, both in the short term for the remaining refugee arrivals in 2016 and beyond. We also address the issue of opportunities for family reunification and private sponsorship in the immediate future.

### SUCCESSFUL INTEGRATION

Income adequacy is of great concern to the Committee, intertwined as it is with access to employment and language acquisition. We suspect that it is not the government’s intention to move refugees from a dire situation of physical insecurity to a dire situation of financial insecurity. Further, it is possible that the vulnerability of these Syrian refugees – GARs in particular – is more profound than for some other groups, and a longer period of supported integration may be required. To address income inadequacy, the Committee recommends the following:

#### RECOMMENDATION 1

**That Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada conduct an urgent needs-based assessment of government-assisted refugees whose sponsorship period is ending, and ensure they have continued access to language training so that refugees have a reasonable prospect of acquiring language skills that will lead them to employment and financial independence.**

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201 CIMM, [Evidence](#), 27 September 2016, 1535 (Abdulbari Hajmusa).

Finding suitable and affordable permanent housing was also a significant challenge raised by witnesses. To address the housing challenge, the Committee recommends as follows:

## **RECOMMENDATION 2**

**That Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada work with its partners to develop an affordable housing strategy for newcomers, and that the government work with the provinces and settlement agencies to ensure that refugees are aware of their rights with respect to housing in order to protect against abuse.**

The Committee considers language training as an investment. We believe the settlement sector is creative, competent and experienced at stretching its dollars. We are confident the sector can devise ways of responding to the suggestion for more informal language training opportunities. What the Committee wants to emphasize instead is the importance of reducing waiting lists, ensuring equitable access to existing classes, and accelerating refugees' integration into the labour market and Canadian society at large. We believe that the importance of helping refugees speak one of Canada's official languages toward their successful integration cannot be overstated and we regret that some new arrivals could not begin classes right away. The Committee therefore recommends the following:

## **RECOMMENDATION 3**

**That Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada monitor the effect of recent funding increases on language classes and review ways to increase efficiency and decrease wait times.**

In the area of employment, witness testimony showed the importance of connections, as well as the importance of employers who are willing to take a different approach to hiring, one that provides additional short-term supports. There are many examples of employers, settlement organizations, and volunteers working together to help refugees enter the labour market; stories that the Committee believes need to be told. To this end, the Committee applauds IRCC'S partnership with Hire Immigrants Ottawa on the "Employer Award for Refugee Employment". We encourage the partners to build on this initiative, and recommend as follows:

## **RECOMMENDATION 4**

**That Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada look at ways to match donors who are interested in helping Government Assisted Refugees once they arrive in Canada, as they may not have the same access to social and vocational networks as privately sponsored refugees.**

## **RECOMMENDATION 5**

**That Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada promote the winners of the “Employer Award for Refugee Employment” as best practices for other employers to consider.**

## **RECOMMENDATION 6**

**That Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada and Employment and Social Development Canada and settlement agencies be encouraged to include information on hiring refugees on their websites, such as [Onboarding Syrian Refugees: A Toolkit for Employers](#), alongside information on how to hire temporary and permanent residents to fill labour market needs.**

Turning to health, the Committee wishes to address the issues of interpretation and inadequacies and inefficiencies in dental care coverage under the Interim Federal Health Program (IFHP). The Committee heard that the reintroduction of the IFHP was a very important and welcomed decision. Given that poor dental health was prevalent among the Syrian refugees, the Committee is concerned to hear that coverage provided did not meet the standard of care dentists have established. We also heard that care was compromised by the way benefits are administered, especially through the requirement of pre-authorizing certain procedures. The Committee therefore recommends:

## **RECOMMENDATION 7**

**That the federal government examine the need and most appropriate response for providing translation and interpretation services for refugees in Canada while engaging with the healthcare system.**

## **RECOMMENDATION 8**

**That Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada work with the Canadian Dental Association to identify changes required in Interim Federal Health Care coverage so that it is comparable to coverage under provincial assistance plans for low income residents. Further, that the federal government and Medavie Blue Cross work together to make any changes to how benefits are administered so that the program is of maximum benefit to refugees and dentists are encouraged to participate while maintaining the integrity and accountability of the program.**

The Committee also wants to highlight the special integration needs of Syrian refugee youth. These youth have much to offer to Canada, but they need significant support to realize their potential. The Committee heard that programming for youth has typically been supported by funds from private foundations rather than the federal government. In recognition of the youthfulness of the Syrian refugee population and the importance of reaching this group soon after arrival, the Committee recommends the following:

## **RECOMMENDATION 9**

**That a portion of the additional settlement funding for Syrian refugees provided by Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada be set aside for youth programs, particularly to address the unique needs of teenagers, as well as programs to support mothers.**

Finally, the Committee makes the following recommendations, which cut across all areas of integration:

## **RECOMMENDATION 10**

**That Immigration, Refugee and Citizenship Canada implement an ongoing study of the integration of the Syrian refugees who have been or will be resettled in Canada from late 2015 through early 2017, and support, by providing access, funding or other assistance, longitudinal academic studies of the integration of the Syrian refugees. Further, that Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada maintain contact with the Syrian refugees over the long term in order to facilitate the collection of the data required to ensure the successful completion of those studies.**

## **RECOMMENDATION 11**

**That Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada collaborate closely with provincial, territorial, municipal, and civil-society partners, including school boards and other stakeholders, to maximize efficiencies and reduce gaps within the existing framework for education, resettlement, and integration.**

## **RECOMMENDATION 12**

**That Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada consider amending its agreements with settlement services providers to require reporting to the department against metrics for service delivery and client satisfaction, to help ensure settlement funding is being utilized effectively.**

## **CONTINUED IMPROVEMENTS: THE PRIVATE SPONSOR CONTRIBUTION**

The Committee believes that the unprecedented popularity of the private sponsorship program with Syrian refugee sponsorship raises several issues. Resettling a large group of refugees can be expected to generate subsequent demand for private sponsorship in the following years, as those refugees seek help in bringing others, primarily extended family, to safety in Canada. However, under the current caps for private sponsors, these subsequent applications could take years. At the same time, private sponsors have indicated they are willing and interested in doing more. In some cases, their expectations for involvement under the government's initiative to resettle Syrian refugees



still have not been met. In light of these realities, the Committee sees a strong role for private sponsors in the next two or three years and recommends the following:

### **RECOMMENDATION 13**

**That Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada maintain high levels for privately sponsored refugees in future Immigration Levels Plans tied to the ongoing level of interest.**

### **RECOMMENDATION 14**

**That communication be facilitated between sponsorship groups in order to share information, success stories, and challenges.**

## **OBSERVATIONS ON THE FUTURE OF CANADA'S RESETTLEMENT PROGRAM**

With respect to the future of Canada's resettlement program, the Committee offers the following observations. We observe that Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada is already conducting a review of the immigration loans program to evaluate possible amendments that would lessen the burden on new arrivals and we look forward to those results.

On the larger questions of the scope of the private sponsorship program, identifying refugees for resettlement, and equity, we observe that interest in sponsoring refugees is strong, and we feel that this goodwill should be nurtured. At the same time, the Committee's study uncovered the perception that limits on private sponsors are unfair, that the current rationale for identifying priority groups for resettlement is not well communicated or understood, as well as legitimate concerns around equity. We observe that greater transparency surrounding the resettlement program – through for instance, developing a multi-year plan that identifies priorities and rationale for resettlement – would go a long way towards addressing these concerns. The Syrian refugee resettlement initiative has shown that private sponsors and other stakeholders would be eager partners in developing such a plan.

## **CONCLUSION**

Canadians should be proud of what was accomplished together in bringing more than 25,000 Syrian refugees from insecurity and suffering to a new start on life among us. The same dedication and compassion that provided the Syrian refugees with a warm welcome should sustain us as we work together to ensure that they succeed.



# LIST OF RECOMMENDATIONS

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## RECOMMENDATION 1

That Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada conduct an urgent needs-based assessment of government-assisted refugees whose sponsorship period is ending, and ensure they have continued access to language training so that refugees have a reasonable prospect of acquiring language skills that will lead them to employment and financial independence. .... 35

## RECOMMENDATION 2

That Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada work with its partners to develop an affordable housing strategy for newcomers, and that the government work with the provinces and settlement agencies to ensure that refugees are aware of their rights with respect to housing in order to protect against abuse. .... 36

## RECOMMENDATION 3

That Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada monitor the effect of recent funding increases on language classes and review ways to increase efficiency and decrease wait times. .... 36

## RECOMMENDATION 4

That Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada look at ways to match donors who are interested in helping Government Assisted Refugees once they arrive in Canada, as they may not have the same access to social and vocational networks as privately sponsored refugees. .... 36

## RECOMMENDATION 5

That Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada promote the winners of the “Employer Award for Refugee Employment” as best practices for other employers to consider. .... 37

**RECOMMENDATION 6**

**That Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada and Employment and Social Development Canada and settlement agencies be encouraged to include information on hiring refugees on their websites, such as [Onboarding Syrian Refugees: A Toolkit for Employers](#), alongside information on how to hire temporary and permanent residents to fill labour market needs..... 37**

**RECOMMENDATION 7**

**That the federal government examine the need and most appropriate response for providing translation and interpretation services for refugees in Canada while engaging with the healthcare system. .... 37**

**RECOMMENDATION 8**

**That Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada work with the Canadian Dental Association to identify changes required in Interim Federal Health Care coverage so that it is comparable to coverage under provincial assistance plans for low income residents. Further, that the federal government and Medavie Blue Cross work together to make any changes to how benefits are administered so that the program is of maximum benefit to refugees and dentists are encouraged to participate while maintaining the integrity and accountability of the program. .... 37**

**RECOMMENDATION 9**

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**RECOMMENDATION 10**

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**RECOMMENDATION 14**

**That communication be facilitated between sponsorship groups in order to share information, success stories, and challenges. .... 39**



## APPENDIX A LIST OF WITNESSES

Organizations and Individuals	Date	Meeting
<p><b>House of Commons</b></p> <p>Hon. John McCallum, P.C., M.P., Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship</p>	2016/05/12	13
<p><b>Department of Citizenship and Immigration</b></p> <p>Dawn Edlund, Associate Assistant Deputy Minister Operations</p> <p>David Manicom, Associate Assistant Deputy Minister Strategic and Program Policy</p> <p>Catrina Tapley, Assistant Deputy Minister Strategic and Program Policy</p>		
<p><b>Arab Community Centre of Toronto</b></p> <p>Zena Al Hamdan, Programs Manager</p> <p>Huda Bukhari, Executive Director</p>	2016/05/19	14
<p><b>Boys and Girls Clubs of Canada</b></p> <p>Rachel Gouin, Director Research and Public Policy</p> <p>Hayat Said, Member</p>		
<p><b>Canadian Council for Refugees</b></p> <p>Sherman Chan, Executive Committee Member</p>		
<p><b>Kitchener-Waterloo Multicultural Centre</b></p> <p>Lucia Harrison, Chief Executive Officer</p>		
<p><b>Reception House Waterloo Region</b></p> <p>Carl Cadogan, Executive Director</p>		
<p><b>Region of Waterloo</b></p> <p>Tara Bedard, Manager Immigration Partnership</p> <p>Mike Murray, Chief Administrative Officer</p> <p>Ken Seiling, Regional Chair</p>		
<p><b>YMCAs of Cambridge and Kitchener-Waterloo</b></p> <p>John Haddock, Chief Executive Officer</p>		
<p><b>As an individual</b></p> <p>Hon. Peter Kent</p> <p>Chantal Desloges, Lawyer Desloges Law Group</p>	2016/05/30	15

<b>Organizations and Individuals</b>	<b>Date</b>	<b>Meeting</b>
<b>Catholic Refugee Sponsors Council</b> Rabea Allos, Director	2016/05/30	15
<b>City of Surrey</b> Aileen Murphy, Senior Social Planner Judy Villeneuve, Councillor Surrey City Council		
<b>Action Réfugiés Montréal</b> Paul Clarke, Executive Director Emily Woods, Sponsorship Program Officer	2016/05/31	16
<b>As an individual</b> Amer Alhendawi		
<b>Canadian Dental Association</b> Randall Croutze, President Kevin Desjardins, Director Public Affairs		
<b>Catholic Crosscultural Services</b> Carolyn Davis, Executive Director		
<b>Child Aid International</b> Nouri Haidar Al Hassani, Founder		
<b>Collingwood Syrian Sponsorship Committee</b> Thomas Vincent, Founder and Co-Chair		
<b>Islamic Foundation of Toronto</b> Mirza Hakeem Baig, Joint Secretary Salahudin Khan, Vice-President		
<b>Armenian Community Centre SAH</b> Shahen Mirakian, Government Relations Coordinator	2016/06/02	17
<b>COSTI Immigrant Services</b> Mario Calla, Executive Director		
<b>Levant Settlement Centre</b> Aris Babikian, Chair		
<b>Maison Internationale de la Rive-Sud</b> El Hafed Ezzabour, Newcomer Outreach Worker		
<b>Mount Pleasant Family Centre Society</b> Gini Bonner, Executive Director Sanja Sladojevic, Early Years Refugee Program Manager		



<b>Organizations and Individuals</b>	<b>Date</b>	<b>Meeting</b>
<b>Or Shalom Synagogue</b> Sandy Berman, Steering Committee Member	2016/06/02	17
<b>Vancouver Community College Faculty Association</b> Karen Shortt, President		
<b>Humanity First</b> Aslam Daud, Chairman	2016/06/07	18
<b>International Development and Relief Foundation</b> Jessica Ferne, Director of Programs		
<b>Mennonite Central Committee Canada</b> Brian Dyck, National Migration and Resettlement Program Coordinator		
<b>One Free World International</b> Majed El Shafie, Founder and President		
<b>Ontario Council of Agencies Serving Immigrants</b> Leslie Emory, Board Director		
<b>Options Community Services</b> Khim Tan, Senior Program Manager, Immigrant Service Program		
<b>As an individual</b> Eman Allhalaq Imadeddin Sawaf	2016/06/14	20
<b>Calgary Board of Education</b> Joy Bowen-Eyre, Chair School District 19 Jeannie Everett, Superintendent Learning, School District 19		
<b>Calgary Catholic School District</b> Anne-Marie Hagel, Supervisor Diverse Learning Cheryl Low, Chair of the Board of Trustees		
<b>Peel District School Board</b> Zaiba Beg, Instructional Coordinator English Language Learners Louise Clayton, Coordinator We Welcome the World Centres		
<b>Afghan Women's Counselling and Integration            Community Support Organization</b> Adeena Niazi, Executive Director	2016/06/16	21

<b>Organizations and Individuals</b>	<b>Date</b>	<b>Meeting</b>
<b>Centre for Immigrants and Community Services</b> Moy Wong-Tam, Executive Director	2016/06/16	21
<b>Greater Toronto Area Mosques</b> Zaib Mirza, Representative iTrust Foundation Aleem Syed, Representative Scarborough Muslim Association		
<b>LiUNA Canadian Tri-Fund</b> John Mandarino, Executive Director		
<b>As an individual</b> Mustafa Hajji Mousa Abdulbari Hajmusa	2016/09/27	29
<b>Compass Community Church</b> Jennifer Miedema, Refugee Sponsorship Chair		
<b>University Settlement</b> Benhaz Azad, Director Language, Settlement and Social Services		

# **APPENDIX B LIST OF BRIEFS**

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## **Organizations and Individuals**

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**Agincourt Community Services Association**

**Boys and Girls Clubs of Canada**

**Calgary Catholic School District**

**Canada4Refugees**

**Central Muskoka Community Syrian Relief**

**Centre for Immigrants and Community Services**

**Collingwood Syrian Sponsorship Committee**

**Levant Settlement Centre**

**One Free World International**

**Options Community Services**

**Syrian Refugees Gravenhurst**



# REQUEST FOR GOVERNMENT RESPONSE

Pursuant to Standing Order 109, the Committee requests that the government table a comprehensive response to this Report.

A copy of the relevant Minutes of Proceedings ([Meetings Nos. 13 to 18, 20, 21, 29 and 32](#)) is tabled.

Respectfully submitted,

Borys Wrzesnewskyj  
Chair



**Supplementary Report of Her Majesty's Official Opposition  
The Conservative Party of Canada**

**Syrian Refugee Resettlement Study**

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*David Tilson, Member of Parliament for Dufferin – Caledon*  
*Michelle Rempel, Member of Parliament for Calgary Nose Hill*  
*Bob Saroya, Member of Parliament for Markham – Unionville*

Over the last several months, the Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration conducted a thorough study on the federal government's initiative to resettle refugees from the Syrian conflict to Canada. The testimonies of over 60 witnesses were used to critique the effectiveness of the Syrian refugee initiative, and the strengths and weaknesses of the program were analyzed in an attempt to improve Canada's resettlement efforts in the future.

It is the opinion of the Conservative members that the report tabled by this Committee was insufficient in achieving the goals of the study. The recommendations in the main report neglect to respond many of the concerns that were revealed. The recommendations provide no mention of government accountability and lack specificity in their resolutions. We are also concerned in regards to mismanagement within Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada (IRCC) which has caused undue stress on refugees and private sponsors. We also note the disregard for keeping within the set budget for the Syrian refugee initiative.

Due to these factors, we offer the following supplementary recommendations to the Committee's report *After the Warm Welcome: Ensuring That Syrian Refugees Succeed*.

**Consultations with stakeholders and other levels of government**

Several organizations shared with the Committee that they were not consulted throughout the process of increased refugee resettlement, which resulted in a significant strain on their existing resources and services. For example, the Calgary Board of Education expressed that their operating expenses this year have skyrocketed due to the influx of new students, without receiving additional government assistance to compensate. Their district has taken in 414 Syrian students since January 2016, and several dozen teachers, translators, and psychologists have been hired to meet the new needs of the schools.<sup>1</sup> However, under current funding frameworks, they do not receive any additional compensation for students enrolled after September 30, 2015; therefore

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<sup>1</sup> CIMM, *Evidence*, 14 June 2016, 1115 (Joy Bowen-Eyre).

the school board is left to absorb the new costs.<sup>2</sup> Furthermore, School Board Chair Joy Bower-Eyre informed the Committee that the board was not consulted by the government, or even asked if they were capable of taking in the influx of new students resulting in a \$2.6 million budget adjustment.<sup>3</sup>

It is not just school boards who are suffering from the lack of consultation. Speaking on behalf of the Region of Waterloo, John Haddock, CEO of the regional YMCA branches, stated that while the region saw a drastic increase of new refugees over a short period of time, the investment in resettlement services has declined.<sup>4</sup> With this lack of foresight and poor communication between the government and the communities affected, it makes it much harder for communities to absorb the unexpected costs. The witnesses made clear that for future changes to immigration levels, IRCC must conduct more extensive consultations with the provinces, territories, and municipalities affected by the changes.

Given that it takes the coordination of many stakeholders to effectively resettle new refugees, and given the financial strain that many organizations have faced in keeping up with the influx of new refugees, we recommend:

- 1. That the government commit to broad consultation with all affected stakeholders before another massive change to the immigration levels plan takes place, regardless of the stream, so that appropriate allocation of resources can be arranged.**

### **Transparent Funding**

The government needs to provide a comprehensive financial plan that is accessible to Canadians, outlining the budget that will be used to sustainably, responsibly and sufficiently cover the needs of the Syrian refugees that are already in Canada, and those that will be arriving in the future. While refugee intake has risen by nearly 400%, funding for resettlement has only increased by about 16%.<sup>5</sup>

Given the testimony shared in Committee providing evidence that resettlement funding has not risen proportionally with the increase of refugees sponsored to come to Canada, we recommend:

- 2. That the government table within 45 days a fully elucidated financial plan for future refugee intake for the fiscal years 2016-2017 and 2017-2018.**

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<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., 1140 (Joy Bowen-Eyre).

<sup>4</sup> CIMM, *Evidence*, 19 May 2016, 1215 (John Haddock).

<sup>5</sup> CIMM, *Evidence*, 8 June 2016, 1120 (Catrina Tapley).



## Engagement with Private Sponsors

Private sponsors have been frustrated by the government's lack of open engagement and with the inaction in processing their sponsored families. Collingwood Syrian Sponsorship Committee shared with the Committee that the government has failed to provide open communication with them as they wait for the families that they sponsored. Thomas Vincent, the founder and co-chair of the group, informed the Committee that his community had raised \$90,000 to support two refugee families, but even after receiving approval they were given no indication of when the refugees would arrive.<sup>6</sup> He expressed that their sponsorship committee went from "excitement to frustration to anger at the absence of consistent or any communication, the lack of transparency, and the excessive wait times."<sup>7</sup> And time was not the only thing going to waste; Collingwood, like many other private sponsors, was forced to continue paying for a housing lease that was not being put to use, as there was no indication of when their sponsored families would arrive.<sup>8</sup> Sandy Berman of Or Shalom Syrian Refugee Initiative echoed this frustration, sharing that their organization's money is sitting idle, and that they "have also been receiving conflicting information from [their] inquiries about the status of [their refugee] families."<sup>9</sup>

In addition to the poor communication between the government and Sponsorship Agreement Holders (SAHs), there is no clear avenue for private sponsors to share knowledge and resources with each other in learning to affectively deal with the challenges that arise in sponsoring refugees. Brian Dyck spoke to the Committee on behalf of the Mennonite Central Committee. Despite the organization's wealth of experience, he expressed that the heightened interest in refugee sponsorship has resulted in "a steep learning curve for many of these groups," something which greater collaboration between SAHs could improve.<sup>10</sup> The Collingwood Syrian Sponsorship Committee also noted that it would be greatly beneficial to private sponsors, especially those from smaller communities across Canada, to be able to communicate directly with one another.<sup>11</sup>

The government needs to place a much greater priority on uniting private sponsorship groups with the families that they have sponsored. Since private sponsors are responsible for the first year of expenses, this serves the dual purpose of allowing more arrivals from Syria as well as keeping costs low for the government.

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<sup>6</sup> CIMM, *Evidence*, 31 May 2016, 1215 (Thomas Vincent).

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 1240 (Thomas Vincent).

<sup>9</sup> CIMM, *Evidence*, 2 June 2016, 1100 (Sandy Berman).

<sup>10</sup> CIMM, *Evidence*, 7 June 2016, 1105 (Brian Dyck).

<sup>11</sup> CIMM, *Evidence*, 31 May 2016, 1215 (Thomas Vincent).

Given that private sponsors are greatly underutilized, with countless resources being sacrificed by generous Canadians who desire to make a difference, and given the lack of communication between the government and private sponsors, as well as insufficient avenues for collaboration between sponsors, we recommend:

- 3. That Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada create mechanisms to provide clear communication to private sponsors, ensuring that they will not waste efforts on renting housing for incoming refugees that will not arrive for several months.**

### **Commercial Flights for Privately Sponsored Refugees**

It was brought to the Committee's attention that flights could only be procured through the International Organization for Migration (IOM), which caused problems for private sponsors whose refugee families had procured visas long before official flight arrangements could be made. In some cases, it appeared that the only cause for delay was that the refugees were waiting to be booked on a flight to Canada. The Central Muskoka Community Syrian Relief group stated that they had "enquired [to see if they] could arrange and pay for commercial flights since our families have their visas," but the government maintained that all refugees had to arrange their flights through the IOM regardless of backlog or the private sponsor's willingness to pay for a more efficient alternative.<sup>12</sup>

Given the inefficiencies of the IOM, lagging far behind visa issuance, and the willingness of private sponsors to cover the cost of commercial flights for their refugee families, we recommend:

- 4. That Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada allow for private sponsorship groups to pay for commercial flights for their approved refugee families who have received visas should they choose, instead of being forced to go through the International Organization for Migration's backlogged flight arrangement process.**

### **Availability of Services Influencing Resettlement**

It was made evident by the testimonies of several witnesses that some urban centres do not have the capacity to continue providing certain services to additional refugees. Resettlement agencies in the Greater Toronto Area in particular struggled to keep up with the demand for services. Moy Wong-Tam, the Executive Director for Immigrant and

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<sup>12</sup> Central Muskoka Community Syrian Relief, Written Submission.

Community Services, stated that “[t]he majority of refugees, especially the government-sponsored ones, do not have any capacity in either official language,” but despite this desperate need for language training, many “are actually on wait-lists for language classes funded by the federal government.”<sup>13</sup>

Given that some cities do not have the capacity to expand their services, and that refugees in those cities are stuck on waitlists for essential training for months on end as a result, we recommend:

- 5. That Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada consider availability of services, such as language classes and childcare, when selecting the settlement location of Government Assisted Refugees.**

### **Settlement Services**

Moy Wong-Tam, the Executive Director for Immigrant and Community Services in Toronto, highlighted to the Committee that Syrian children are in need of better services which will help them integrate into their schools.<sup>14</sup> Large public institutions cannot always provide sufficient support for the extracurricular needs of Syrian children, particularly in dealing with trauma, providing extra language training, and assisting in the transportation needs of students who are unable to access transit to and from education programs.<sup>15</sup> Although there are community organizations willing to address these needs, they are not always promoted adequately, leaving families and children uninformed as to what support is available to them.

Just as refugees need to be made aware of the services available to them, Settlement Program Providers must also know the profiles of refugees that will be requiring their services. Options Community Services stated that “there is a lack of information dissemination of Syrian Refugee profiles...from Resettlement Assistance Program Providers to Settlement Program Providers.”<sup>16</sup> Organizations wishing to assist incoming refugees would benefit greatly from basic profile information such as the number of family members, the ages of children, medical conditions, etc.

Given the willingness of organizations to help Syrian refugees without a means to communicate the services they offer we recommend:

- 6. That Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada compile a list of reputable community organizations, which offer programs that assist**

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<sup>13</sup> CIMM, *Evidence*, 16 June 2016, 1120 (Moy Wong-Tam).

<sup>14</sup> CIMM, *Evidence*, 16 June 2016, 1120 (Moy Wong-Tam).

<sup>15</sup> Centre for Immigrant and Community Services, Written Submission.

<sup>16</sup> Options Community Services, Written Submission.

**refugees, and compile a booklet of best practices and helpful tips for refugees and sponsors.**

### **Special Protection for LGBTQ Refugees**

Majed El Shafie, the President of One Free World International, questioned whether the government was properly prioritizing based on vulnerability. In his testimony, he stated that “it’s not about fulfilling [the government’s] promise [to bring in 25,000 refugees]...It’s about saving the most vulnerable,” something which Canada has neglected to do in its selection process.<sup>17</sup> Additionally, since persecuted minority groups are frequently unwilling to go to the United Nations for help for fear of further discrimination, LGBTQ and other minority groups are not gaining refugee status. Sandy Berman, a committee member from Or Shalom Syrian Refugee Initiative, highlighted the case of an LGBTQ couple that her organization is working to sponsor, stating that they are currently living “under immediate threat of persecution.”<sup>18</sup>

When government officials were asked how many refugees from this vulnerable group have come to Canada, they could not provide an answer as there is no tracking in place. Rabea Allos, Director of the Catholic Refugee Sponsors Council, also emphasized the urgent need to prioritize the especially vulnerable LGBTQ refugees.<sup>19</sup>

Given that there is evidence pointing towards the discrimination of and persecution against LGBTQ members, and given the fact that this persecuted minority is often afraid of approaching the UN due to this discrimination, we recommend:

- 6. That the government develops better tracking systems to identify vulnerable minorities, ensuring that LGBTQ-friendly private sponsors can be matched with LGBTQ individuals so that affected refugees will know that they are safe; and that initiatives with previous success such as the Rainbow Refugee Assistance Program be utilized in this process.**

### **Expediting Victims of Genocide**

Many witnesses highlighted that there are minority groups in Syria deserving of special attention due to their particular marginalization they are facing. Rabea Allos told the Committee that he believes that the most vulnerable refugees must be identified, and

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<sup>17</sup> CIMM, *Evidence*, 7 June 2016, 1110 (Majed El Shafie).

<sup>18</sup> CIMM, *Evidence*, 2 June 2016, 1100 (Sandy Berman).

<sup>19</sup> CIMM, *Evidence*, 30 May 2016, 1535 (Rabea Allos).

highlighted that minority groups tend to be persecuted even within refugee camps.<sup>20</sup> He stated that because of this, the UNHCR fails to refer many of these refugees as they are often forced outside of the camps, and recommends that other referral agencies be used to identify Yazidis and other minorities.<sup>21</sup>

The Yazidi people were emphasized by several witnesses to the Committee, as they are victims of genocide, endemic rape, and extreme persecution. This group is even more vulnerable than others because they lack an active diaspora community, and thus are not receiving priority under private sponsorship. Majed El Shafie highlighted the fact that the Yazidis are an exceptionally urgent case, and stated that “girls as young as nine years old [are] being raped 20 times a day.”<sup>22</sup> Additionally, even though his organization has personally rescued and identified 400 Yazidi girls out of sex slavery, the government is still failing to act in making an effort to rescue victims of discrimination, religiously-motivated violence, and genocide.<sup>23</sup>

Chantal Desloges, a lawyer at Desloges Law Group, recommended that the government “target groups who are victims of genocide,” adding that “there is a very serious situation happening with religious and ethnic minorities in the Middle East.”<sup>24</sup>

Given that the Yazidi people are experiencing horrific violence, and are victims of genocide, and given the fact that they are often unable to gain refugee status through the UNHCR due to discrimination in refugee camps, we recommend:

- 7. That the government work with NGOs and other groups to identify the extremely vulnerable minorities who are being inadvertently overlooked by the UNHCR, identifying and aiding groups facing genocide such as the Yazidis; and that Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada develop better tracking systems to ensure that the most vulnerable groups come to Canada.**

## **Removing Private Sponsorship Caps**

Several witnesses expressed frustration to the Committee in regards to the caps on privately sponsored refugees from Syria and Iraq. Their generosity was inhibited by the pre-set quotas that the government has put in place; leaving many SAHs unable to utilize the funds they have collected to sponsor refugees. Dr. Aslam Daud, chairman of Humanity First, expressed that Canadian communities are very receptive to assisting Syrian refugees, but told the Committee that the caps on private sponsorship held their

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<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., 1200 (Majed El Shafie).

<sup>24</sup> CIMM, *Evidence*, 30 May 2016, 1655 (Chantal Desloges).

organization back. “Our capacity is only limited by the quota restrictions that are put in place by the government,” he said, adding that their organization “[has] the capacity to sponsor and resettle many more refugees.”<sup>25</sup> Thomas Vincent, Founder and Co-Chair of Collingwood Syrian Sponsorship Committee, also expressed frustration regarding the wait times that SAHs experience due to the limited number of privately sponsored refugees arriving. He recommended polling sponsorship groups to gauge interest instead of creating restrictive caps that are disproportional to the number of SAHs wishing to sponsor refugees.<sup>26</sup>

Chantal Desloges, from Desloges Law Group, emphasized that “geographic regional quotas...may not be the best way to approach the situation,” particularly in regards to private sponsorship of refugees.<sup>27</sup> She highlighted for the Committee that it is illogical to place restrictions on private sponsorship since all costs are covered independently, and as such, groups should be able to choose who they sponsor without regional caps.<sup>28</sup>

Given the outpouring of support from the Canadian public in their desire to privately sponsor refugees from Syria and Iraq, and given the substantial amount of money that private groups have risen which is wasted under a quota system, we recommend:

- 8. That Immigration, Refugees, and Citizenship Canada remove Iraq and Syria from the current Sponsorship Agreement Holders cap, utilizing the generosity of Canadians to bring more refugees to Canada in a fiscally responsible manner.**

## **CONCLUSION**

The Conservative Party of Canada submits these recommendations with the objective that the concerns and difficulties expressed by the witnesses to the Committee would be honoured and incorporated into improving future refugee initiatives. It is clear that the Government’s Syrian Refugee Initiative had inefficiencies and weaknesses that should be improved for future initiatives.

The recommendations put forward in this report, which range from better communications with private sponsorship groups to better tracking systems to identify vulnerable minorities, will having meaningful impact on the lives of refugees living here and abroad. If the government does not implement the recommendations in this report, then they must consider the implications that flaws in their program have had and will continue to have, on the Syrian refugee community.

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<sup>25</sup> CIMM, *Evidence*, 7 June 2016, 1210 (Aslam Daud).

<sup>26</sup> CIMM, *Evidence*, 31 May 2016, 1215 (Thomas Vincent).

<sup>27</sup> CIMM, *Evidence*, 30 May 2016, 1655 (Chantal Desloges).

<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

## **Dissenting Report of the New Democratic Party**

### **Introduction:**

With global events and record levels of forced migration, it is imperative that the Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration to conduct an extensive study of the resettlement efforts for Syrian refugees once they arrive in Canada. As the Syrian refugee crisis does not appear to be the last humanitarian crisis resulting in mass displacement, understanding what went well and most importantly, what went wrong will help future government's best respond to humanitarian needs and put in the place the best policies and practices to ensure that refugees are able to rebuild their lives successfully once they arrive in Canada through resettlement.

Unfortunately, it is the opinion of the New Democratic Party (NDP) that the committee report fails to adequately note and address the gaps and problems associated with the government's resettlement efforts. It is really important that we adequately and honestly reflect on these missteps so that we can make the changes needed to ensure that we offer the best resettlement effort for new arrivals so that they could maximize the opportunity for success.

The purpose of this dissenting report is to make sure that we do not cast aside the key areas where witnesses appearing before the committee noted significant issues were present and need to be addressed. These issues included, but were not limited to:

- The Transportation Loans
- Housing
- Access to Language Training
- Access to Health Services
- Inadequate Information Provided to Both Sponsors and Refugees

### **The Transportation Loans:**

Refugees abroad that are accepted to Canada often must acquire a loan from the federal government in order to actually come to Canada. The loan, through the Immigration Loans Program, covers the costs of medical examinations abroad, obtaining travel documents, and transportation to Canada. According to Citizenship and Immigration Canada (CIC) the average loan is about \$3,000, and refugees must begin paying off the loan 30 days after arriving in Canada.

Currently, Canada is one of the only countries that require refugees take out loans with interest to be given resettlement.

On 29 November 2015, it was reported that the Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship announced a decision was made that Syrian refugees who arrived after 4 November 2015 to those interviewed before 28 February 2016, both publicly and privately sponsored would have their loans waived. Critics contended it created a two-tiered and possibly even three-tiered system of refugee resettlement: Syrian refugees arriving in that window, Syrian refugees who arrived prior to 4 November 2015 and already have loans, and refugees from other countries.

In an exchange with CIC officials at committee on 12 May 2016, I asked why the government had decided on what appeared to be an arbitrary window for waiving the loans of only Syrian

refugees. It was made clear that when the government was satisfied that it has reached its political objective of reaching their stated goal of resettling 25,000 Syrian refugees, the stopped the policy of waiving the transportation for Syrian Refugees. It was explained that:

“Through the course of February we were continuing to interview cases to make sure that we hit the goal of having 25,000 people arrived by the end of February. We weren’t entirely sure, of the people we were interviewing, who exactly was going to be in a position to travel by the end of February, so we continued to interview more people. There were about 2,374 people who had been interviewed by the end of February but who had not yet travelled at the end of February.”<sup>i</sup>

While the NDP supports the outright elimination of the Immigration Loans Program, we do not support waiving it for selected individuals in order to meet politically motivated targets. It is our opinion that this decision is deeply unfair to refugees arriving in Canada from other nations as well as Syrian refugees who arrived in Canada before the loans were waived.

The committee had the opportunity to hear from a Syrian refugee who had a transportation loan, and the impact it was having on his family as they tried to make ends meet. Mr. Amer Alhendawi arrived with his family in Vancouver with transportation loans totaling \$7,040. With the limited resources from income assistance, his family is unable to pay the minimum amount of \$720 per month on their loan. Instead, he was only able to afford to repay \$103 per month. Even at that level, the transportation loan was a major financial burden for the family. His family’s loan entered into arrears as he is supposed to be paying \$720 per month. In his testimony, his second request was for the Canadian government to waive or exempt the travel loans.<sup>ii</sup>

Surrey, BC city councilor and co-chair of the Surrey local immigration partnership Judy Villeneuve spoke at length to the negative impacts of travel loans on the resettlement efforts. Connecting the high debt and its accumulating interest to government sponsored refugees (GARs) receiving the prevailing social assistance rates in the province of their resettlement - which Ms. Villeneuve characterized as inadequate – she spoke to issues faced by Syrian refugees and other refugee groups she has worked with in the past.

“It hinders their ability to resettle because they have debt on their backs.” She went on to say, “We are seeing that most people are not able to make ends meet by the end of the month. We’ve seen an increase of over 600 new refugees going to the food bank in our city, which is funded not by government but by people in the community. They’re having a difficult time feeding their families. You can imagine trying to make ends meet in BC or in Surrey, where you live, on \$1,100 a month. You have to pay your rent, your food, your hydro, your phone, your education costs, and your clothing costs. On top of all that, having to pay back a government debt would probably leave you with no assets.”<sup>iii</sup>

Councilor Villeneuve informed the committee that she has collected over 1,000 names on a petition calling on the government to terminate the requirement for refugees to repay the transportation loans, and informed the Committee that the Member for Surrey-Centre would be presenting their petition to the House of Commons.

### **Recommendation 1:**

**As all refugees, not just the Syrian refugees who were interviewed between 4 November 2015 and 28 February 2016, by definition, have undergone significant difficulties and**



**trauma, in order to provide all refugees arriving in Canada with the greatest and most equitable opportunity to resettle and rebuild their lives, that the Government of Canada eliminate the Immigration Loans Program.**

**Recommendation 2:**

**That, in order to best address the acute needs of refugees arriving in Canada, while also providing additional support to lower-income Canadians, the federal government convene a roundtable discussion with Provincial and Territorial Ministers to advance a National Poverty Strategy and a National Housing Strategy.**

**Housing:**

The federal government made ambitious commitments to resettle Syrian refugees. Originally, as part of their campaign platform, 25,000 GARs were to be resettled by the end of 2015. While the government originally maintained that they could meet this timeline after the election, soon it was evident that they were not going to be able to deliver on that promise. The government changed its targeted timeline and later further altered it again for the 25,000 target to include a combined total of public and privately sponsored Syrian refugees. Despite relaxing the targets, this was still an ambitious goal and required large ‘waves’ of refugees to arrive within short periods of time. While the federal government had originally planned and spent money renovating military barracks to temporarily house newly arrived Syrian refugees, this plan was ultimately scrapped and the newcomers were placed in hotels as temporary lodging until permanent housing could be found. As a result, many Syrian refugees were stuck in limbo for weeks on end. For some, this wait was over three months.

At the outset, it was highlighted that housing would be a major challenge in the resettlement effort due to the high cost of housing and low vacancy rates for rentals, especially in the major cities and urban centres in Canada. Additionally, the make-up of Syrian families tended to be much larger than Canadian families. With little to no assets upon arrival and GARs receiving only the prevailing social assistance rates, finding suitable, safe, and affordable housing was a major challenge.

When examining housing delays, it is important to recognize that refugees coming to Canada are ‘on the clock’ as soon as they arrive. Refugees, whether publicly or privately sponsored, are provided supports for 12 months. The delay in acquiring permanent housing not only places additional stress on the refugee families who are trying to adjust to a new country while living in a hotel, but it delays their ability to get access essential programs and services to get them on their feet before the 12 months is up.

Mr. Mustafa Hajji Mousa, a Syrian refugee who was eventually resettled in the Kitchener-Waterloo area described the length of time and delays he and his family encountered as they resettled in Canada.

“When I first came to Canada I was in Toronto International Plaza Hotel for about 20 days. After that I moved from Toronto to Kitchener, the city that I am currently living. I was at the Reception House. From the Reception House where we stayed for 70 days we finally found permanent residence. The first problem we encountered was the high rents. Secondly, when we make an application we don’t readily get an approval because our young children, the neighbours are no

comfortable. So, for 70 days we kept looking until we finally found suitable accommodations that would be within our income boundary.”<sup>iv</sup>

Prior to acquiring permanent housing, it can be difficult or not possible at all to access essential services for resettlement and integration. Children cannot register for school. It can be difficult for adults to register for language training courses without a permanent address; and if registration is possible, moving to their permanent housing can make the services inaccessible due to travel constraints. This means that in the case of Mr. Mousa and his family, 90 days - almost one-third of their resettlement time - was used up prior to finding a permanent home. Many witnesses at committee explained how difficult it can be for a refugee family to get back on their feet in a new country in one year. Delays are forcing some families to attempt this feat in nine months or less.

The committee also heard that some landlords were attempting to take advantage of Syrian refugees. Mr. Aleem Syed, a representative from the Scarborough Muslim Association touched on the issue of affordable housing as well as illegal behavior of some landlords.

“Affordable housing definitely is an issues and it is much larger than the Syrian refugee resettlement process. It is the same for anybody else who wants to come to stay in the city. With regard to exploitation, yes, through our colleagues we have heard of cases where the landlord would ask for the whole years’ worth of rent as a deposit.”<sup>v</sup>

The issue of housing was not limited only to GARs. Resettlement organizations and sponsorship agreement holders (SAHs) spoke to the difficulty in finding affordable housing for Syrian refugees, especially on short notice due to the large waves of arrivals. The Hon. Peter Kent appeared before the Committee, as he is private sponsor. On the issue of housing, he said:

“They had to find temporary accommodation, permanent housing, furniture, schooling, documentation, and so forth. While government-sponsored refugees were provided paid hotel accommodation and per diems for weeks – and, in some cases, months – before being settled, privately sponsored refugees were covered for one hotel night only, and the costs then went on the private sponsor’s tab. This was not a problem before November, but it became a serious financial burden for some private sponsors in December and January.”<sup>vi</sup>

Finding adequate and affordable permanent housing is the first and one of the most important steps in the resettlement process. Delays in finding permanent housing can significantly strain the remaining resettlement period, adding stress and uncertainty to an already uncertain situation for refugee newcomers.

### **Recommendation 3:**

**That the federal government, understanding that many steps in the resettlement process require refugees to first be in permanent housing, in addition to providing support while finding permanent housing, officially begins the one-year of support once a family is in permanent housing.**

### **Access to Language Training Courses:**

After obtaining permanent housing, it is essential for refugee newcomers to obtain language training in order to be able to integrate into Canadian society and successfully rebuild their lives. Unfortunately, after years of funding cuts for Language Instruction for Newcomers to Canada (LINC) made by the previous federal government, organizations that provided LINC programs lacked the resources to meet the significant increase in demand for services due to the volume and rapid arrival of Syrian refugees.

The backlogs and wait lists for language training programs extend across the country. This was succinctly described by Ms. Sandy Berman, a member of the Or Shalom Syrian Refugee Initiative sponsorship group explained that, “Access is very limited to Language Instruction for Newcomers to Canada (LINC) classes at the lower levels, and in particular those that include child care. This is a huge barrier to settlement and integration.”<sup>vii</sup>

While the federal government made additional funding available through the Syrian refugee initiative, this did not fully make up for the cuts or the increased demand. Vancouver Community College (VCC) for example has a long and successful history of providing language training which connects to skills training and employment counselling for newcomers. Ms. Karen Shortt of VCC appeared before the committee and spoke to an example of a group of engineer newcomers to Canada who completed VCC courses which has led to 93 percent of them now working in Canada in their field. After explaining this success story, she lamented that,

“However, we are not fulfilling our promise to immigrants and refugees. We currently have over 800 students on the wait list for English language courses. Because of funding cuts this year to our LINC program, we had to cancel classes for 220 ESL students who would have started in April of 2016.”<sup>viii</sup>

Ms. Shortt expressed frustration that VCC could, and should be doing more. They have the space, they have the track record, they have the instructors; they only lack the funding to provide service. This frustration was echoed by representatives from the Mount Pleasant Family Centre Society who spoke to how the federal government funding cut of six percent had impacted their capacity, both in terms of service provision and staffing.

Mount Pleasant Family Centre Society offers a unique program to support refugee families. The Circles of Care and Connection - Early Years Refugee Program provides early childhood development, family support and settlement services to refugee families with children from birth to six years of age. Despite the increase in demand, Mount Pleasant Family Society was not provided with additional funding. When they were unable to continue to overextend their services, they had no choice but to cut services: “We’ve reduced our full-time employee[s]. We’ve laid off staff. We’ve reduced the number of hours we can provide for interpretation. We’ve reduced program hours.”<sup>ix</sup> This despite the fact that research shows that mental health of refugee children is often affected by pre-migration and post-migration stressors and the Circle of Care and Connection programs and services create supportive relationships and safe environments that can improve outcomes for refugee children and their families.

Acquiring language skills is an incredibly important aspect of integration. Without language skills, it can be incredibly difficult for a newcomer to integrate, obtain employment, and avoid becoming socially isolated. For Syrian refugees, these problems have been more pronounced for women, due in part to the lack of language courses that also include child-minding. Ms. Eman Allhalaq, a

Syrian refugee who appeared at committee spoke to the difficulties in getting a language course spot that also had childcare services, and acknowledged that sometimes she has to miss classes because of the lack of childcare.

“Yes, we waited for three months to have child care services. Finally, we took some steps ourselves. For example, I go in the evening and my husband goes in the afternoon. We try to work it out between ourselves, but my husband is diabetic and he can’t watch my daughter all the time.”<sup>x</sup>

For Mr. Amer Alhendawi and his family, no one in his family was able to get into language training courses after nearly a year in Canada. While at first both he and his wife were on waitlists, he was informed that she shouldn’t bother, as just one of them getting in was ‘good enough’. “No, she didn’t get a chance to go. Her situation is worse than mine. I try my best to learn English on the streets through my friends or through some acquaintances. She doesn’t have that chance, because she mainly stays at home with the kids.”<sup>xi</sup>

Language training courses need to be available for newcomers to Canada. Without them, refugees are going to have an even more difficult time adjusting to their new lives.

In addition to LINC funding cuts by the previous federal government, the current federal government’s allocation of Syrian refugee funding to organizations being limited to only organizations that have previously received IRCC funding has limited the ability for other organizations with the capacity to provide services from doing so. The committee heard from volunteers and organizations that were not receiving funding, but doing valuable work for Syrian refugees that could be expanded, should they be eligible to receive funding. Mr. Nouri Al Hassani of Child Aid International, himself a refugee success story, spoke to the volunteer work he and his organization provided for Syrians arriving in Canada. He noted that his organization was ineligible for government funding. “The short answer is no, we don’t have any access. We don’t receive any funding from the government, neither I nor Child Aid nor other organizations that I’m working with.”<sup>xii</sup>

Many of the organizations that were excluded from access to government funding are organizations that while new, nonetheless have a strong track record for providing excellent programs to community members. Many of the organizations are formed by former refugees who have personally travelled the journey, speak the language and understand the culture. By excluding them from accessing government funding, the government missed the opportunity to fully galvanize the incredible capacity that community organizations have to offer.

#### **Recommendation 4:**

**That, the federal government acts to restore resettlement services funding to levels prior to 2010 and adjusted for inflation.**

#### **Recommendation 5:**

**That, Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada (IRCC) enhances program delivery by funding more adaptable language class programs. Increased funding should be given to programs which also have childcare/child-minding services, offer informal**

**conversation groups, and programs which provide resettlement help within the context of language skill building.**

**Recommendation 6:**

**That, IRCC opens funding eligibility up to organizations that have not received funding in the past, and for funding decisions to be made based on service need and merit, in order to increase capacity and service provision within the settlement community.**

**Access to health:**

Refugees, especially in the case of many Syrian refugees have been victims of violence, have been without adequate medical care for some time, and could be dealing with a number of health issues. Refugees arriving in Canada receive healthcare benefits through the Interim Federal Health Program (IFHP). This programs provided limited, temporary benefits. Representatives from the Canadian Dental Association (CDA) appeared before the committee and explained how insufficient and onerous on service providers the IFHP is.

“That coverage does not always align with the generally accepted standards for care. For instance, large fillings are covered, but stainless steel crowns, which are roughly the same cost, are not. Stainless steel crowns are the standard of care for restoring two or more surfaces on baby teeth in high-risk children.”<sup>xiii</sup>

Mr. Randall Croutze of the CDA went on to explain that as a result, many dentists across the country are providing pro-bono work to bridge the care gap, and later stressed just how serious these issues were

“The situations were face are life and death. These people are coming with incredible loads of disease – things we don’t see in Canada – because of poor nutrition, the poor preventative care they’ve had. They’ve had no fluoridated water. They have rampant cavities that infect nerves and cause abscesses in the tissues around... These are people who, if we don’t treat them, are going to end up in the hospital. People die of dental infection. We don’t realize that in this country, but in the countries these people come from, it’s a common enough occurrence. Absolutely we can’t let these people exit our offices without providing them treatment.”<sup>xiv</sup>

It was explained for the dental coverage, the IFHP provided similar coverage as provincial plans for low-income people and those on social assistance. As Mr. Croutze highlighted, the dramatic differences between these populations’ means this coverage is simply inadequate.

Even when healthcare is accessible, language barriers can result in both delays in treatment, and interactions with the system that can only be deemed as inappropriate and insensitive. Ms. Allhalaq explained the situation she encountered while attempting to receive a medical diagnosis that she would eventually find out meant she had breast cancer.

“Well, the first week I want, I had no interpreter. The second week I was called to go and get the result and again I went and there was interpreter to advise me of the result. There was somebody else from Iraq who was there and I said I could not understand, so that person volunteered to help me. But I needed to have someone with me while I was receiving this kind of

news because it was so traumatic. Again, I was given a ride home. Then I went to the hospital the following day, and for two hours I had lost consciousness.”<sup>xv</sup>

No person should be in a position where they receive a cancer diagnosis, already delayed multiple weeks, from a random stranger.

#### **Recommendation 7:**

**That, the federal government works to improve immediate access to basic dental care for refugees covered by the Interim Federal Health Program (IFHP), to ensure payment for practitioners serving refugees are accelerated, that pre-authorizing routine dental work is no longer required, and that services covered by the IFHP match general standard of care.**

#### **Recommendation 8:**

**That, the federal government examines the need and most appropriate response for providing translation and interpretation services for refugees to Canada while engaging with the healthcare system.**

#### **Inadequate Information Provided to Both Sponsors and Refugees:**

Resettlement agencies, SAHs and other community groups also made it clear that the federal government needs to better communicate to individuals involved in resettlement efforts. SAHs expressed extreme frustration around not knowing when they could expect their sponsored families to arrive. Mr. Berman explained that,

“We are all ready to receive these refugee families; everything is in place. We have made donations in good faith, believing that the donations would help to resettle refugees soon, and now the money is sitting idle. We have also been receiving conflicting information from our inquired about the status of our families.”<sup>xvi</sup>

This frustration was magnified when the government abruptly slowed down the arrival of refugees after reaching their target of 25,000. Sponsors were not well informed of this, and as a result some sponsors felt like they were wasting money paying rent for empty homes and not knowing when they would finally be occupied by their sponsored family. The Hon. Peter Kent spoke to those frustrations,

“However, the abrupt deceleration of refugee processing after February 29 caused new frustrations for SAHs and private sponsors. Many millions of dollars are now sitting idle in SAH escrow accounts. Substantial financial losses have been incurred by some sponsors who leased accommodations – at the government’s urging – for refugees who, they are now told, might not arrive until next year.”<sup>xvii</sup>

As Minister McCallum has jokingly noted on several occasions that he found himself in a unique position in that Canadians were frustrated with not enough refugees arriving to match the outpouring of support from the Canadian public. It is undeniable that Canadians stepped up in a wonderful way to help people fleeing from violence, and wanted to give them a chance to rebuild their lives in the safety of Canada. However, the government cannot take this goodwill for

granted. Poor communication leading to frustration can quickly diminish enthusiasm to get involved.

Many witnesses appearing before the committee recommended that the private sponsorship numbers be increased, with some suggesting the quota on PSRs be eliminated. Immigration lawyer Ms. Chantal Desloges explained,

“I would add that the quota system you’ve heard so much about this morning really needs to be revised. The sponsorship agreement holders are very frustrated with the way that the quotas are being managed. I’m hearing from a number of different SAHs that the system needs to be more predictable and more transparent.” She went on to describe why this was, stating, “Volunteer enthusiasm is not something you can turn on and turn off like a faucet; it’s something that has to be managed over a period of time. The advantage we have right now is that there is unprecedented public enthusiasm over refugee sponsorship. Why would we want to squash that by telling them year after year that we don’t know how many people you’re going to be able to bring, that one year it’s going to be high and one year it’s going to be low and nobody can properly prepare?”<sup>xviii</sup>

As Ms. Desloges makes clear, individuals going above and beyond to get involved with refugee resettlement deserve accurate, timely information about the programs they are involved in. This includes producing timelines that bolster their enthusiasm, not stifle it.

#### **Recommendation 9:**

**That, the federal government address the communication breakdown that occurred with the general public, and most importantly organizations and individuals involved in refugee sponsorship and resettlement with aims to ensuring the timeliness and accuracy of program changes and timelines, among others.**

#### **Recommendation 10:**

**That, based on recommendations from witnesses, Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada examine increasing the target for privately sponsored refugees from 17,800 in the Immigration Levels Plan for 2017 and 2018.**

#### **Conclusion:**

The Canadian government and the Canadian people have ambitiously intervened into a humanitarian crisis to provide refuge to innocent people caught up in a violent civil war. This is to be commended. However, the job is not finished once Syrian, or any other, refugee reaches Canada. Commitments have been made to resettle refugees and provide them with the services and supports required for them to rebuild their lives here, and contribute to Canadian society. If this second stage of the process is not adequately addressed, refugees will find getting back on their feet even more difficult than it is at the best of times.

It was the job of this committee to identify gaps in service provision and make recommendations to improve the system for all refugees that arrive in Canada. It is the opinion of New Democrats that the committee has failed to adequately do this in their report, opting instead to focus on a feel good narrative. Canadians should feel good about what we have achieved, but the

government should not be downplay to the problems within the system that make integration and resettlement even more difficult than it needs to be.

The recommendations contained within this dissenting report, if followed, would greatly improve the resettlement process for refugees in Canada. As we saw at committee and have seen in numerous media reports speaking with Syrian refugees, they are thankful to be here and they want to contribute back to country that has given them the opportunity to rebuild. It is our duty to provide them with the ability to rebuild their lives and reach their full potential here.

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- <sup>i</sup> CIMM, Evidence, 1<sup>st</sup> session, 42<sup>nd</sup> Parliament, 12 May 2016 (1230)
  - <sup>ii</sup> CIMM, Evidence, 1<sup>st</sup> session, 42<sup>nd</sup> Parliament, 31 May 2016 (1235)
  - <sup>iii</sup> CIMM, Evidence, 1<sup>st</sup> session, 42<sup>nd</sup> Parliament, 30 May 2016 (1725)
  - <sup>iv</sup> CIMM, Evidence, 1<sup>st</sup> session, 42<sup>nd</sup> Parliament, 27 September 2016 (1550)
  - <sup>v</sup> CIMM, Evidence, 1<sup>st</sup> session, 42<sup>nd</sup> Parliament, 16 June 2016 (1150)
  - <sup>vi</sup> CIMM, Evidence, 1<sup>st</sup> session, 42<sup>nd</sup> Parliament, 30 May 2016 (1530)
  - <sup>vii</sup> CIMM, Evidence, 1<sup>st</sup> session, 42<sup>nd</sup> Parliament, 2 June 2016 (1105)
  - <sup>viii</sup> CIMM, Evidence, 1<sup>st</sup> session, 42<sup>nd</sup> Parliament, 2 June 2016 (1220)
  - <sup>ix</sup> CIMM, Evidence, 1<sup>st</sup> session, 42<sup>nd</sup> Parliament, 2 June 2016 (1235)
  - <sup>x</sup> CIMM, Evidence, 1<sup>st</sup> session, 42<sup>nd</sup> Parliament, 14 June 2016 (1220)
  - <sup>xi</sup> CIMM, Evidence, 1<sup>st</sup> session, 42<sup>nd</sup> Parliament, 31 May 2016 (1245)
  - <sup>xii</sup> CIMM, Evidence, 1<sup>st</sup> session, 42<sup>nd</sup> Parliament, 31 May 2016 (1250)
  - <sup>xiii</sup> CIMM, Evidence, 1<sup>st</sup> session, 42<sup>nd</sup> Parliament, 31 May 2016 (1105)
  - <sup>xiv</sup> CIMM, Evidence, 1<sup>st</sup> session, 42<sup>nd</sup> Parliament, 31 May 2016 (1130)
  - <sup>xv</sup> CIMM, Evidence, 1<sup>st</sup> session, 42<sup>nd</sup> Parliament, 14 June 2016 (1145)
  - <sup>xvi</sup> CIMM, Evidence, 1<sup>st</sup> session, 42<sup>nd</sup> Parliament, 2 June 2016 (1100)
  - <sup>xvii</sup> CIMM, Evidence, 1<sup>st</sup> session, 42<sup>nd</sup> Parliament, 30 May 2016 (1530)
  - <sup>xviii</sup> CIMM, Evidence, 1<sup>st</sup> session, 42<sup>nd</sup> Parliament, 30 May 2016 (1630)