

SUMMARY

This report documents the settlement experiences of recently arrived Syrian refugees in Albertan cities. It then compares them across the three streams of sponsorship to better understand the perspectives of the refugees, the sponsors, and the social agencies that work with them. These are still early days in the migration and resettlement process, and hence many knowledge gaps exist. This is thus a prime moment to begin to build a systematic knowledge, which informs the ongoing practice of settlement agencies as well as government policy directions in the future. As Canada has had a long history of resettling refugees from across the world, understanding the effectiveness of resettlement programs will have ongoing utility.

Many questions shaped this study:

- How do Syrian refugees navigate the settlement and integration process?
- Who do they turn to for information and services?
- How do faith-based social service agencies or places of worship participate in the settlement and integration process?
- How do private sponsors uniquely affect refugees' settlement experiences?
- What are the missing services that refugees need for a better settlement experience?

Our focus was on two Albertan cities—Edmonton and Lethbridge—as exemplars of a large and a small city. While answering the above questions, we also wanted to assess if the responses differed based on the size of the urban centres.

Using face-to-face, individual interviews with refugees and private sponsors, and key informant interviews with settlement volunteers and agency representatives, we explored how the settlement experiences of refugees vary among the three programs: government-assisted refugees (GARs), privately-sponsored refugees (PSRs), and the blended refugee program (BVORs) in which private sponsors support refugees who are identified and matched with them by the UN Refugee Agency. We were interested in understanding the types of support that are available through the three streams of sponsorships. More importantly, we addressed the need to know two key aspects of the settlement experience: which refugees find the support most relevant and meaningful, and which settlement programs help set refugees up for successful integration and participation in Canadian society.

Our findings suggest that all three government and private sponsorship programs were largely successful in bringing in Syrian refugees, from various asylum countries in the Middle East, to safe places in Canada. However, the settlement experience of refugees varied after they arrived in Canada. PSRs seemed to benefit from the personal attention, care, and networks provided by their sponsors. Still, this experience can vary widely based on how committed and resourceful sponsors are. Challenges in learning English and finding employment were paramount among all three refugee streams, irrespective of the place of settlement. Refugees were not sufficiently prepared to become financially independent after the government support ended at one year—particularly in their proficiency in English or in training in their profession or vocation. We learned that the availability of English classes appropriate to the refugees' diverse learning abilities and vocational training programs is the key factor here.

The question of whether settlement experiences were different due to the size of the urban centre could not be fully answered. Nonetheless, clear signs were present that a relatively small urban centre, like Lethbridge, managed its settlement delivery more efficiently. Being small allowed those community members who were engaged and interested in refugee settlement to come together and mobilize their resources more quickly. The ratio of *newcomer numbers to capacity of service infrastructure* present (regardless of the size of the urban centre) also matters because it largely determines the efficacy

of the settlement services. It is not clear to us if this was a factor in determining how many refugees resettled in each centre of Canada. At the same time, larger urban centres, such as Edmonton, have other advantages. For instance, they have “other” non-denominational and denominational organizations that have stepped in to fill the service gaps and provided more culturally and linguistically appropriate services.

A few policy recommendations emerge from the study. Specifically, the federal government needs to

1. Enhance the quality of *Language Instruction for Newcomers to Canada* (LINC) classes by making them more appropriate to the diversity of learning abilities including pre-existing English skills among the refugees. As well, they could possibly be combined with other settlement-related training sessions to make them worthwhile in proportion to the time commitment.
2. Consider skills training models in use elsewhere, such as in Germany, to craft a country-wide apprenticeship and/or bridge training program. Such a program could seek to match refugees to the most appropriate vocation available and then provide training so they are better prepared to assume these jobs in Canada.
3. Acknowledge that PSRs also require settlement services; they cannot be left entirely to the resources (or lack thereof) of private sponsors, as the settlement experiences among PSRs is quite diverse.
4. Consider the blended sponsorship program as the better way forward—with both government and private sponsors helping the refugee, each for a given period of time. This composite approach would offset the deficits inherent in each single approach.

1. *PROJECT DESCRIPTION AND OBJECTIVES*

This research documented the settlement experiences of recent Syrian refugees in Albertan cities and compared them across the three streams of sponsorship. It will help us better understand the perspectives of the refugees, the sponsors, and the social agencies that work with them. Although these are early days in the migration and resettlement process, many knowledge gaps exist. This is thus a prime moment to begin to build systematic knowledge, which will inform the ongoing practice of settlement agencies as well as government policy directions in the future. Currently, three sponsorship streams facilitate refugees' arrival in Canada:

- **The government-assisted refugee program (GAR)** is for those no longer in their countries of origin and who, involuntarily, cannot return to their home country due to a fear of persecution. The Government of Canada or Quebec delivers this support through non-governmental agencies.
- **The privately-sponsored refugee program (PSR)** is where a private sponsor agrees to provide refugees with care, lodging, settlement assistance, and support. Nuanced variations exist, such as groups of individuals or church communities who collectively sponsor a refugee family.
- **The blended Visa Office-referral program (BVOR)** is a relatively new program (as of 2013) that matches refugees identified for resettlement by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) with private sponsors in Canada.

Our three research objectives pivoted around the three sponsorship streams. Specifically, we

1. **Explored** the settlement experiences of Syrian refugees in Canada, and how they vary depending on their arrival stream.
2. **Studied** how these differences in experience vary depending on the size of the city, using a large (Edmonton) and small (Lethbridge) city in Alberta.
3. **Identified** the types of support available through the three streams and **make recommendations** about which ones have served and can, in the future, serve refugees better.

Our pilot research work—which involved interviewing several volunteers who have been at the frontlines of helping Syrian refugees in Edmonton as well as social service professionals who are working with the Syrian refugees—revealed considerable disparity in the resettlement experience depending on the program stream that brought refugees to Canada. A good deal of difference exists between the GAR and the PSR streams, while not much has been known about the experiences of BVOR. With private sponsorships, charitable organizations are again different from families. PSRs have had better access to other available social service agencies and connections with the local Arab community, faith-based programs, services, and places of worship—which GARs largely missed out on. On the other hand, some sponsor families have found the experience financially and emotionally onerous, as well as time consuming. In light of this preliminary information, several questions helped us shape this project:

- How do Syrian refugees navigate the integration process?
- Who do they rely on for information—family, the local immigrant population, an ethnic neighbourhood and community, or others?
- What is the role of places of worship and faith-based, social service agencies that are not formally part of the agreement with Immigration, Refugee, and Citizenship Canada.
- In what ways do private sponsors help refugees adapt? What resources do they share or draw on to help refugees?
- What are the missing services that refugees need for a better settlement experience?

2. CONTEXT AND SIGNIFICANCE

It is essential that we understand how well each of the current refugee support programs perform, from the perspectives of all participants in these programs—refugees, sponsors, and the agencies that deliver services to these new Canadians. Such insight is not to be found in the current literature, which is dated and looks only at refugees who came under different circumstances and under varied selection and programmatic criteria. As Canada has had a long history of resettling refugees from across the world, understanding the effectiveness of resettlement programs will have ongoing utility.

Previous large influxes of refugees to Canada are both many and noteworthy: 7,000 Ugandan Asians in the early 1970s, who were exiled by the Ugandan government; 60,000 refugees during the 1980s from Southeast Asia after the Vietnam war; 5,000 Bosnians in the early 1990s, who were fleeing the Yugoslav civil war; 5,000 Kosovar refugees in 1999, who were displaced by the Serb-Albanian civil war; over 5,000 Bhutanese in 2008 and; now, more than 25,000 Syrians fleeing the Syrian civil war—specifically, just over 27,000 refugees since November 2015. The bulk of them came through the GAR and PSR routes (15,355 and 9,494 respectively), most coming from Lebanon. About 4,500 of them have been resettled in the province of Alberta, with Edmonton and Calgary shouldering the resettling task.

This recent refugee effort proceeded from the Syrian conflict that began in early 2011 with mass protests against then President Bashar al-Assad’s government, which called for political reforms and the re-establishment of civil rights. The government cracked down on protestors, escalating the violence and plunging the country into a civil war that has displaced more than 4.5 million people from the country. This is one of the largest humanitarian crises in modern history, with many Syrians taking shelter in neighbouring Lebanon, Jordan, and Turkey.

The UNHCR’s (also known as the UN Refugee Agency) Refugee Status Determination unit has expertise in ascertaining the refugee status of a person seeking international protection, and Canada has relied on this expertise. In this case, the UNHCR carried out this work in the countries such as Lebanon, Turkey, Jordan and others, interviewing each qualified asylum seeker and doing an extensive background check. When the person passed the screening, s/he was given the status of a refugee. UNHCR’s refugee settlement unit “matches” the refugee with a resettlement country based on that country’s criteria. Canada chose to prioritize those who are most vulnerable, marginalized, and are in immediate need of resettlement. These included children, women, families, elderly and disabled persons, members of the LGBTQ community and men if they are a part of a family.

3. PRIVATE SPONSORSHIP PROGRAMS

The PSR program is generally considered to be more effective than the GAR in promoting long-term, successful adaptation and integration of refugees, as is shown by the resettlement data on the Southeast Asian refugees admitted to Canada from 1979 to 1981 (Beiser, 2003). However, just what type of support was provided, or how it actually helped with integration was unclear. It is possible that private sponsors may have exposed refugees to a broader range of services than government settlement workers did (Neuwirth & Clark, 1981), such as pointing them to language training classes, schools for their children, and places to live. Sponsoring families may have simply been more flexible and able to dedicate time and money, their knowledge of their community, and networking and personal support in ways that helped refugees succeed (Beiser, 2003; Treviranus, & Casasola, 2003).

Still, private sponsorship can be stressful, indeed onerous, even when the sponsors are not financially responsible for refugees, as a study of Kosovar refugees resettled in Northern Alberta showed (Derwing & Mulder, 2003). Some of the sponsors’ initial cultural, religious, and linguistic expectations of the Kosovars did not mesh with the reality of the refugees they were matched with, just as refugees may

have had unrealistic expectations of the sponsors and of life in Canada. This just serves to highlight that the logistics of settlements are emotional as well as pragmatic (Wood, McGrath, & Young, 2012). Even with private sponsorship arrangements, social agencies can play a crucial role in the settlement of refugees, even though they are generally more involved in the government-sponsored class. Further, personal connections between a refugee and a settlement worker, as well as accessibility to public spaces and institutions, can help create positive emotional attachments between these individuals.

4. SOCIAL NETWORKS AND SETTLEMENT CHALLENGES

Refugees are highly active agents in their own resettlement process (Lamba & Krahn, 2003), as they may turn to formal and informal social networks, which are extremely helpful to them when they are faced with social and financial issues. Ethnic neighbourhoods are one means by which refugees can consolidate a sense of social support and emotional security, since they can draw on social networks of friends and family for information about housing, employment, and other day-to-day activities. A downside of these contexts, however, may be that refugees' social interactions with the host population remain limited (Lamba 2003; Kazemipur 2008). Given this fact, it is worth noting that—at least in Alberta—many refugees nevertheless take up Canadian citizenship, which can be considered one indicator of political participation and a desire to belong (Abu-Laban et al. 1999).

Certainly, refugees also face structural and systemic barriers in their resettlement process, especially when seeking employment. Unfortunately, resettled refugees often experience a downward mobility when they move to Canada—or specifically, Alberta—and are more likely than other Canadians to find only temporary or part-time jobs. This is perhaps due to their prior training and experience not being recognized by Canadian employers or trade/professional governing bodies, insufficient Canadian references or work experience, English language difficulties, and other discrimination (Krahn, Derwing, Mulder & Wilkinson, 2000). They may even end up living below the poverty line (Devoretz et al., 2004; Hyndman and McLean, 2006).

Language ability is a key to successful settlement and integration, as it is important for social integration as well as facilitating employment. A study (Brunner et al 2010) on Acehese refugees in Vancouver identified the utmost need for refugees to take language classes upon arrival and to avoid dropping out due to employment or family obligations. Beiser and Hou's (2001) study of Southeast Asian refugees found that English language fluency was a significant predictor of depression and employment. This was particularly present among refugee women who were not engaged in the labour market during the earlier years of their resettlement. A study by Canadian Council of Refugees (2011) cited several challenges related to language training, which include long waiting times to access language training programs, lack of job-specific language training, and lack of adaptation of language training for people who are illiterate in their first language or have low levels of education.

Employment opportunities for refugees are severely limited, regardless of their education and qualification levels. Many scholars (Dhital, 2015; Francis, 2009; Krahn et al., 2000) found that refugees experience much higher rates of unemployment and whatever little work they could find is precarious and low paying. The most common barriers they face are limited English language skills, discrimination in the labour market, lack of Canadian work experience, and lack of foreign credential recognition. According to Dhital (2015), GARs demonstrated poorer economic integration than PSRs in the early years. The author explains the difference by suggesting that PSRs may have higher access to social capital in comparison to GARs.

Housing is another challenging area for refugees regardless of their arrival stream. Several studies conducted in Vancouver, Calgary, and Winnipeg (Carter, Polevychok, & John Osborne, 2009; Francis & Hiebert, 2014; Miraftab, 2000; Murdie & Logan, 2011) point to the lack of adequate and suitable

housing for refugees. Refugees are often significantly more dependent upon public housing and non-governmental services than their immigrant counterparts; ironically, such housing demands a degree of trust in authority that many refugees struggle with this may present extra challenges for them since it relies, given the circumstances that led to their refugee status in the first place. The reality is that refugees often live in poor or crowded residential conditions, face high rent-to-income ratios, or even become homeless (Sherrell et al., 2007). Typically, they rely more heavily on informal sources, such as friends and relatives as “the most exhaustive and important source of information and orientation” (George & Chaze, 2009, p. 272), and thus make less use of government reception centres and housing help centres (Murdie, 2008).

Abu-Laban’s (1999) is the only study that systematically examined the settlement experiences of refugees based on the size of the host communities in Alberta. They found that the refugee retention rate was highest in the largest cities of Edmonton and Calgary and lowest in the smallest cities of Grand Prairie and Ft. McMurray. Among the medium-sized cities, Lethbridge had the lowest retention when compared with Red Deer and Medicine Hat. Refugees tended to move to the nearest larger cities in the province. For instance, 25% of refugees destined to Lethbridge eventually moved to Calgary while 33% of refugees destined to Grand Prairie and Ft. McMurray subsequently moved to Edmonton. Among the primary reasons for leaving was the lack of both employment and education.

When asked about their satisfaction with the settlement services provided to them, refugees reported least satisfaction with employment-related services. They stressed the need for more job-related services, more ESL instructions, and more information in general. Because of the high mobility rate and fewer employment and housing opportunities and settlement services, the authors recommended that the refugees should no longer be destined for smaller places like Ft. McMurray and Grand Prairie. At the same time, they also emphasized the need for improvement in the quality of LINC instructions and to implement an employer–government cost sharing program to ensure that refugees have opportunities to gain Canadian work experience and references across the board. Although dated, the study provides interesting insights and an opportunity to compare and contrast against its findings.

5. *METHOD*

This qualitative study entailed semi-structured, face-to-face individual interviews and key informant interviews to gather accounts of settlement experiences. We selected as interviewees Syrian refugees, personnel of social service organizations, and private sponsors in two cities in Alberta:

- **Edmonton:** A relatively large city that, as of May 2016, received 976 GARs, 390 PSRs, and 103 BVORs. As of January 2017, these numbers were 1248, 607, and 138 respectively.
- **Lethbridge:** A relatively small city that, as of May 2016, received 174 GARs, 19 PSRs, and 0 BVORs. As of January 2017, these figures were 243, 24, and less than five, respectively.

Between October 2016 and June 2017, we interviewed 84 refugees in Edmonton and another 17 in Lethbridge across all refugee streams. Families were contacted initially with the help of our own research assistants who themselves are recently arrived Syrian refugees to Canada. We also relied on sponsors and settlement agencies, with the snowball strategy leading us to others.

Key informant interviews were conducted with settlement agency staff in each city that is involved in delivering services to the Syrian refugees, whether formally or informally. We know of at least four agencies in Edmonton which were active: Catholic Social Service, Edmonton Mennonite Centre for

Newcomers (EMCN), Islamic Family and Social Service Association (IFSSA), and Action for Healthy Communities. In Lethbridge, Lethbridge Family Services was our primary contact.

We also conducted interviews with staff at private sponsor organizations, such as the Lethbridge Mennonite Church in Lethbridge, and members of the St. Joseph church in Edmonton. In addition, we interviewed three private sponsors in Edmonton and two in Lethbridge.

We developed two sets of questions (see Appendix 1 and 2)—one for the sponsored families and another for settlement agencies staff and private sponsors.

QUESTIONS FOR SPONSORED FAMILIES

These questions were slightly more structured than those for the sponsoring and settlement agencies and were divided into the following six sections:

1. *Basic demographic information*, like age, gender, family size, and the place in Syria where the interviewee came from.
2. *The settlement trajectory*, specifically their route to Canada and their sponsorship program affiliation.
3. *Reflections on their settlement experience*, and comments on the sponsorship program under which they arrived in the country.
4. *Health conditions*, and how Canada's health and education systems have helped to meet their health needs.
5. *Social and economic integration*, including currently held employment or prospects for employment, level of proficiency in English, and day-to-day interactions with the Canadian-born.
6. *Their future plans* in Canada and their general ideas about adapting to life in Canada.

The interviews with the refugees were held face-to-face, in Arabic. Two research assistants, who as noted are Syrian refugees themselves, led the interviews. Our research collaborator and a co-author of this report, who is fluent in Arabic and is a seasoned researcher, also interviewed some refugee families in Lethbridge. Interviews were digitally taped and transcribed by the two research assistants with assistance from the collaborator. The collaborator ensured that the transcriptions were accurate.

QUESTIONS FOR THE SETTLEMENT AGENCIES OR SPONSORING FAMILIES

These questions were open-ended. The intent behind them was to elicit the agencies' or families' views on the challenges and opportunities that Syrian refugees faced after their arrival in Canada. Both agency personnel and sponsors were also given the opportunity to share the challenges they faced in serving and settling the refugees. The questions for the sponsoring families, in particular, aimed to elicit their experiences in sponsoring a family and to uncover any challenges they might have faced during the sponsoring and settlement process.

The interviews with sponsors and settlement workers were done in English since most of them were native English speakers. Just like the interviews with refugee families, these interviews were taped and transcribed by at least three other research assistants. The transcribed interviews were then analyzed using Nvivo software, for recurring patterns, common themes, and types of support that responded to each of our three objectives. Before analyzing the data, the two other research assistants who were to be involved in the analysis were sent to a full-day professional training in Nvivo led by an expert in this software. Subsequently, they developed sufficient experience with a smaller pilot project before turning to the data analysis of this project.

ETHICS APPROVAL

The study was reviewed and approved by an ethics review panel of the University of Alberta. We followed the ethical guidelines of the Research Ethics Board of the university, which entailed the following steps:

- Before each interview, we orally explained the content of the study and the risks and benefits of participation for the interviewee.
- We promised our interviewees full confidentiality and anonymity in our report.
- They had the right to withdraw from the study as of July 31st of 2017.

Each interviewee had to sign a copy of the consent form (see Appendix 3), which detailed the above information. The consent form was produced in both English and Arabic for their ease of reading.

6. FINDINGS

We interviewed 17 refugees in Lethbridge—15 were GARs and two were PSRs. Also included in our list of interviewees were four members of settlement agencies and two private sponsors. Out of the 84 interviewees in Edmonton, 45 were GARs, 31 were PSRs, and eight were BVORs. We also interviewed seven members of settlement agencies and three private sponsors in Edmonton. Almost all the interviews with refugees were conducted in Arabic while interviews with the settlement workers and sponsoring families were primarily in English. The refugee interviews were then translated into English by Arabic- and English-speaking Syrians and the collaborator. The interview content was put through a rigorous analysis in Nvivo to identify any discernable patterns.

The following paragraphs encapsulate our conversations with refugees and settlement agencies, first in Edmonton, then in Lethbridge. For each city, we begin with the highlights of our interviews with GARs, followed by PSRs and BVORs. Next, we describe settlement agencies and sponsors' views. In the case of Lethbridge, we have only one set of feedback from the members of the settlement agency, which captures their views on both GARs and PSRs. Also, our findings on BVORs are short, partly because we could interview only a few refugees under this class and only in Edmonton. Also, we discovered in our conversations that the lines between government and private assistance were so blurred that refugees and sponsors themselves were often not sure of the program under which the sponsorship occurred. In fact, both refugees and sponsors mistakenly thought that they were PSRs and so did a few settlement workers.

I. EDMONTON

GOVERNMENT-ASSISTED REFUGEES (GARs)

A. Feedback from refugees

Refugee sample profile

Most of the interviewees were married (the typical age was about 40), with a family size of about six individuals. Not all refugees had lived in refugee camps; however, in the asylum countries they received assistance in the form of cash, food, food coupons, and/or blankets from various local and international agencies, such as the Red Cross, the UN, and a Denmark-based aid organization, possibly DanChurchAid. Those who fled to Turkey initially particularly benefited by free access to Turkey's medical care. The situation however changed for the worse as more and more refugees poured into the country.

Most of the refugees fled Syria in 2011 and 2012, making their way to adjoining countries, like Lebanon, Jordan, Turkey, Egypt and Saudi Arabia, and eventually arriving in Canada towards the end of 2015 and throughout 2016. Many in our sample did not live in the refugee camps. Some found

temporary, illegal employment, but they were grossly underpaid and were frequently harassed and exploited.

Refugees' general impressions and reflections

We asked our interviewees about their satisfaction with the government-assisted refugee program under which they came to Canada and whether they noticed any difference between theirs and the privately-sponsored program. A few did not know enough about the difference. Those who did know [barring a couple] said that the PSRs were much better off. They received more money, had access to more resources, and were much better taken care of. One GAR summed it up in the following quote:

I feel that they [PSRs] have more attention, and the sponsors take good care of them, maybe because they knew them before or just because they are responsible to those people.

Another piece of conversation revealed that the GARs thought that PSRs had more opportunities to get to know Canada:

Wife: I think the private sponsorship is better because they [sponsors] invite them [refugees] to parties and they introduce them [to people].

Husband: They [sponsors] help them in the mixing process with Canadian society. For example, now I have everything, but the thing they have more of is that the three or four sponsoring families take them to restaurants, to shops. They talk to them, they visit them—so you see their English is better and they know more things about Canada than we know.

Another one attributed further advantages to PSRs. He said that PSRs got everything much faster and were considerably ahead of them in tapping into the services available:

Yes, some families came after me to Edmonton, and they had their kids registered in school before us; they got the recreational facility card before us.

One interviewee however had a mixed feeling about PSRs:

With one family, their sponsors offered them everything they need. On the other hand, there is another family who were not happy with their sponsors. They say that they don't give them what the government is giving the families.

Going further, one interviewee thought that PSRs were worse off than GSRs:

No, they have the same services in terms of health care or other services, but they are having hard time finding a job, and they don't have a monthly allowance from the government. The sponsor barely covers the rent and the necessary stuff. They have other needs, but they don't ask for additional favours because they don't want to add another burden on the sponsor.

We asked the GARs about the services they received after they arrived in Canada and how satisfied they were with the quality of those services. In response to this question, almost all of them said that they were very well taken care of, once they were approved to resettle in Canada. They were transported to various locations in Canada in planes hired by the Canadian government. The settlement agencies looked after them upon their arrival at the final destination. The local settlement agency welcomed them at the airport, arranged necessary accommodations, and helped them with obtaining

social insurance numbers and health cards, registering adults in LINC (Language Instruction for Newcomers to Canada) classes and children in the school, opening bank accounts, and so on in the days that followed. They had interpreters and counsellors at hand to help them. The settlement workers arranged for doctors to help those who needed medical attention. They took care of even small things, like giving them a ride to grocery stores, furnishing their homes, and arranging children's admission in the schools.

The following quote sums up their sentiments:

We are here, thank God! Everything was offered to us. Our kids were registered in schools, just like the Canadian kids. We are going to school to learn English. For four years in Jordan I was trying to get a driver's licence but I couldn't. But here, I got it easily because I have a Syrian driver's licence....Everything is good. Thank God!

The GARs were also grateful to other local settlement agencies like Islamic Family and Social Services Association (IFSSA) and Action for Healthy Communities. One interviewee said:

When we arrived at the hotel there was an Islamic organization—IFSSA, I think. It had people from Pakistan and Lebanon [and] they offered kitchen stuff. The government gives you furniture, but one still needs some stuff and tools, so they [IFSSA] will give you what you need. That was it.

Another said:

When we first arrived, I registered there and they [IFSSA] gave us a cellphone and a computer, and they gave us food aid each month.

We asked for GARs' suggestions about improving the quality of the services provided or if anything was missing. The most frequent comments were about the lack of opportunity to mix with the Canadian-born and to try out English they had learned in the classes with English speakers, and the scarcity of jobs.

The following quotes from several interviewees describe how eager they were to work, but their lack of English, training programs, and local certification held them back:

We are Syrians. Our priority is our job. We like to work. I miss working more than anything else honestly, me and all the guys. I used to work, for example, for seven or eight hours. Now it has been a year [that] I am at home. Regardless of the financial situation, we just want to work. When we work, we help ourselves and at the same time we help the government.

First, you have to be very good at English so as to find a job, and it has been five months for us without going to school, so the time frame to find a job has been shifted for another six months. I have lots of experience, but you have to get certificate in everything. Like, if I want to work at electrical welding they will ask for a certificate, but I don't have certificates in welding because it is a trade. Also, [this applies to] carpenter[s] and blacksmith[s]. These are all trades in Syria and you don't need certificates [there], so if I want to work in electrical welding—and that would be desirable here—I need a certificate. How am I to get it?

Some were frustrated with the slow process of learning English while others could not get into a LINC class, so they attended English classes offered by another settlement agency on an ad hoc basis.

In other words, we haven't learned any English until now. It is because of the long waiting time to enter the school. How can I justify this that after six month? I am still in level 2 or 3! How can I justify to the government that I couldn't learn English? In short, the English learning until now is zero.

Dissatisfaction with both the government and the settlement agency was palpable among a few GARs:

Our [government] sponsor didn't connect us with Canadian families, to meet with them and also to practise the language. And, they didn't provide us with training programs or orientation programs or volunteer programs.

One other person expressed frustration with services, or lack thereof, by settlement agencies:

Our priority is to practise and use the English language, not just to do the LINC [classes]. And just for us, I know lots of Syrians with experience—they know trades and artisan skills, and they should be taken care of when they arrive.... You know, studying language in class does not provide you with much practice to be able to use it with people, so this causes laziness among these people. And it wouldn't happen if they [settlement agencies] provided us with the right programs from the beginning. And we talked about that so many times and talked with Mariam¹ 20 times and presented proposals regarding this. We also met with them several times and we told them that the Syrians need volunteer programs. We don't want you to teach us, but to put us in programs in companies so that we can practise the language and a trade at the same time. After that, one is able to do a language test or to apply for a trade certificate, but they didn't listen to that and didn't like it, so we are very unhappy.

As for me, they (the government) took good care of me when I was in the reception [section], but not after that. Maybe they just [did that] to get rid of me (laughing). Everyone stays in the reception house for 14 days, and during this time the supervisor should find a place for that person to settle in. I felt like they help you to move fast and find a house and [then] forget about you.

The issue of foreign credential recognition and lack of information on university education was also brought up. Access to a counsellor and interpreter was another issue.

The counsellor has 70 families. Our counsellor has 50 families, so if she gets five sensitive cases, like two or three women who are giving birth, she will probably take care of them and postpone us because our case doesn't have priority—[specifically], which is "how to get accepted into the university." And, they will forget about us for another 5 months.

One interviewee who had some experience with a settlement agency in a smaller urban centre in southern Alberta thought that the services provided there were better and efficient. They opined that it was partly because there were fewer Syrians there and hence less pressure on the settlement workers.

Experiences with settlement agencies

In addition to the help received from Catholic Social Services, the interviewees repeatedly mentioned other settlement organizations—specifically, IFSSA and Action for Healthy Communities. IFSSA regularly provided them with culturally appropriate *halal* food and provided some of them with

¹ This is a pseudonym, to protect the identity of the settlement worker.

cell phones and computers. The refugees also mentioned several religious organizations, such as Al Rahma, Al Omari, Al Rashid, and Dar Al Sunnah mosques, which not only provided places for worship and community gathering but also helped them with day-to-day needs like food, blankets, pillows, house furnishings, and specialized services (such as filling out tax forms). One GAR pointed to the other forms of services that the religious institutions provided them:

Sometimes the Imam of the mosque gives a speech to raise awareness, and after that people talk about their problems. Sometimes we have engineers with us. They have been here for a long time, so they give advice to people about scams and how to avoid it. We stand together if someone has a problem or sickness and we help each other.

Health

Most of the GARs in our sample were suffering from some form of health issue. Their health problems varied, but included conditions such as kidney disease, high blood pressure, dental problems, hearing and vision issues, heart conditions, seizures, and diabetes. A few had complications or were still suffering from the harmful effects of botched surgeries in their asylum countries. One said he had been tortured in Syria and continued to suffer from some unknown internal injuries to his back. Despite these prolonged and untreated health problems, overall, they were satisfied with the care they received in Canada. In the case of life threatening emergencies, they were looked after right away. However, they complained about the long wait-times to see their family doctors and specialists for any non-emergency care. Like other Canadians, they were critical of long wait-times to see a doctor in the emergency department of hospitals.

Economic integration

All the GARs were still unemployed at the time of our interviews, except for two. One of these individuals worked as a part-time lunch supervisor in an elementary school and the other one was self-employed—going through the steps of establishing a small company to import oriental handicraft items from Lebanon. A third GAR was looking for an investor in his new venture and had found some leads through a settlement worker.

An interesting consideration for a GAR is that if they find employment while on government support, their earnings will be deducted from their public allowance. So, in effect, they have little incentive to pursue a job in the first year of their arrival here. One said, “So, it’s better for me to volunteer instead of taking money from one pocket and putting it in the other.” Many others however planned to finish English classes, attain a level 8 or higher, and then pursue a trade certificate—depending upon their prior skills, such as welding, painting, plumbing, or hairstyling. The reality is that most of the trade jobs require some form of certificate or licence to work in Canada. A few planned to pursue higher education at a university.

Social integration

To get to the heart of social integration, we asked the following more pointed questions:

- How many Canadians (English speakers) do you know?
- And how do you communicate with them?
- Which language/type of communication do you use?
- If you take the bus or go for groceries, how do you communicate?

Barring a handful of individuals, all had challenges in communicating in English. Further, they had few contacts with English-speaking Canadians. Some said they did not feel the need to speak in English because they had Arabic-speaking friends, family members, counsellor, and/or doctor, and went to Arab stores for groceries. Some sought the help of their compatriot friends or neighbours who know

English better than themselves. A few were a bit more adventurous and creative. They used mobile apps for translation when they needed help in reading signs in a grocery or clothing store, or needed directions on the street. Some alluded to the availability of interpreters over a medical hotline or called their settlement agency and asked for an interpreter for certain purposes.

Future plans

When we asked refugees about their future plans and whether they planned to stay in Canada, we received mixed reactions. Some thought that they would not return to Syria ever, because of the bad situation there, which has little hope for improvement. Some others planned to stay in Canada because they thought Canada provided a better future for their children. The remainder, however, wished to go back to Syria as soon as the situation improved. The reasons to return varied from nostalgia for their homeland and difficulty finding jobs in Canada and learning English, to reuniting with their family members left behind, to refusal to adapt to Canadian culture. These reasons are captured in the following quotes:

We might stay or go back. If the situation gets better in Syria I might go back—maybe after three or five years when there are no troubles in Syria. It is my country. I was born and raised in Syria. I am comfortable and happy here, but not as [much as] in my country.

No, I am not going to get out of here, whatever happens. I'm not leaving Edmonton, I am not moving out of Edmonton, neither Canada. I'm not leaving. I'm not going back [to Syria] whatever happens. I don't know about my wife, but for me I'm not going back ever. It is miserable there, there is nothing I want to go back for, nothing.... We have nothing left—we lost our house, our neighbours, and it is not just me—all the others too.

First of all, we have no other option, and second, it honestly is a good country.

Our kids may not want to leave if they have gone to schools here, and they get used to living here.

We cannot decide now. We will always miss our homeland, but we wish what is best for the kids, and we will wait to see if they will integrate with the system here.

Honestly, no, we don't have a plan. I'm thinking if God wanted it, we will go back to our country, because this country is not ours....The environment is different—for us as adults or even for the kids—it is not our lifestyle. Girls here, they want to go to school and she wants a cellphone, and she wants to wear makeup... and things like that....This is not how we have been raised as Arabs, and the rest, you know....We are finding it difficult to raise our kids here. You can't beat your child here, they make it a big deal here....too much. [Here] you should always do what the kid wants, but it is not right because if you give your child everything, you will lose control. But here, it is normal, they don't careAnd I'm not willing to adapt to a society like this.

B. Feedback from settlement agencies

The agency staff agreed with a widely-held view that most adult refugees are unable to complete all English class levels in one year. They also agreed that Syrian refugees have problems finding jobs, even after completing English classes. The result is that most of them end up on government-funded

social assistance and rely heavily on the child tax benefit at the end of the first year. A couple with five children could receive up to \$2,000 a month.

One settlement worker suggested that perhaps the sharing of Canadian cultural information and ideas that is part of settlement processes—such topics as parenting, health care, social ethics, and citizenship—be included in the LINC curriculum, instead of separating this content out from the LINC content. This way, LINC could be made more worthwhile and meaningful to the refugees. They also suggested restructuring the government’s overseas orientation programs; in their view, the programs tend to mislead refugees about realities on the ground in Canada.

Like the refugees, the settlement workers felt that the government needs to introduce short training programs for the refugees, with more attention paid to refugees’ entrepreneurial skills. Even though the government programs lacked job-related training, local organizations such as IFSSA offered an unpaid internship program to the refugees. This program connected them with local businesses and aimed to help them acquire some Canadian experience to add to their resumes.

While the refugees in our sample complained about the lack of connection with English-speaking Canadians, the local settlement agencies informed us that they regularly arranged picnics and camping programs for refugees to help them to mix with Canadian families. Perhaps these events were not enough or perhaps the connections there were short-lived and did not yield long-lasting friendships and relationships. One settlement worker said that many refugees were reluctant to mix with non-Syrians and were particularly opposed to gender integration; they strictly believed in a complete separation of youngsters based on gender. The settlement workers also raised concerns about Syrian women who could not attend English classes because they were left behind at home to take care of children. They suggested having childcare facilities at LINC facilities to allow women to learn English freely, as their male counterparts could do.

PRIVATELY-SPONSORED REFUGEES (PSRS)

Refugee sample profile

Most of the PSR interviewees (with an average age of about 36, so slightly younger than GARs in our sample) were married, with a mean family size of just over four individuals. Thus, these families are smaller than the GAR families. Many of them had fled Syria between 2012 and 2016 and arrived in Canada between October 2015 and September 2016 via asylum countries in the immediate geographical vicinity, such as Lebanon, the United Arab Emirates, Saudi Arabia, and Jordan.

They spoke at length about the hardship they endured in their respective asylum countries. They lacked some of the very basics of life, like food, shelter, and jobs. Some were lucky enough to find precarious, menial jobs—despite having been skilled, professional, or business people in their home country. However, since it was illegal to work in the countries to which they had fled without a valid work permit, they were grossly underpaid and were constantly susceptible to losing their jobs. They complained about not receiving any assistance from the UNHCR or from the government of the asylum country. However, they thanked individual families and religious organizations in Canada who stepped up to resettle them in Canada.

A. Feedback from refugees

Refugees’ general impressions

We asked our interviewees about their satisfaction with the privately-sponsored refugee program and whether they noticed any difference between the privately-sponsored program and the government-sponsored program. As with the GARs, some did not know enough about the difference. With one exception, the others, however, thought that the government-sponsored refugees had more resources at

their disposal and had counsellors to support them—all paid for by the government. They highlighted the fact that the GARs could readily access daycare for their children, find spots in English language courses, and easily access health services and local transportation. Most importantly, they valued the fact that GARs were greeted at the airport with warm clothes and a meal by the members of the agencies responsible for their settlement. GARs were thought to have been receiving a guaranteed monthly stipend from the government, along with a fully-furnished house. Many also pointed out that GARs were flush with money:

I felt the difference when I was at the airport. There was a Muslim family, you know, they had seven or eight children; they were drinking bottled water, and each bottle costs \$5. So, I wondered how those poor people can afford it! At the last transit stop, all the people going to Calgary went to catch their plane. Only we and that family stayed there. One man [from that family] offered me coffee and a piece of cake. I said, "No thank you, I don't want cake." He said, "It is okay; we already brought this for you." So, probably they spent about \$25 on each one of them!

A few were critical of GARs, in particular about their intention to remain on government welfare and subsidies for the rest of their lives. They thought GARs received more money from the government because they have more children and continue to produce more, so that they keep reaping the benefits from the government programs. One of them said the following:

Honestly, I think that the families sponsored by the government have no intentions to study, to work, or to build skills. They are completely dependent on the government—maybe not all of them, but this is what I have seen. Plus, I think, I don't know because I never asked, but I think that their numbers [that is, the monthly government allowance] are much higher [than PSRs].

In response to our question about how they found out about Canada and the sponsorship program, they mentioned the World University Service of Canada, and their friends and acquaintances who had contacts in Canada. They were grateful to their sponsors—families and organizations—who took care of them and helped them resettle in the new country. They profusely thanked their sponsors, individual families in particular, who brought them to Canada on humanitarian and compassionate grounds from a war-torn country—even though their sponsors did not have financial or other means to support them.

Some said that they were well taken care of by their sponsors, while others expressed serious concerns. The inability of some sponsors to financially support them has led to a few families being stranded. Many had to line up to get food from the food bank, visits organized by local agencies such as IFSSA and the EMCN. A few refugees cryptically revealed that they were not getting the monthly allowance that was promised to them and that they were entitled to under the sponsorship agreement. Some sponsors instead took them to local Islamic organization(s) and asked the organization(s) to support the refugees. Those who did receive the financial support from their sponsors complained that one year was too short a period of time to find a job and become independent. Clearly, they were getting shortchanged by their sponsors, but they did not want to come out and state this. They did not want to get their sponsors into trouble because they felt indebted to their sponsors, who were instrumental in getting them to Canada safely.

Those PSRs who had professional degrees expressed frustration with the standards and the content of English language classes and the lack of any vocational training programs or any information on where and how to seek any other work. First, it was challenging for them to find a spot in the LINC classes and second, the LINC classes were not up to their standard. It was partly because the class

grouped everyone together—those who had very little basic literacy with those who had university degrees. So, the pace of learning in the class was very slow as was the level of learning. They also found that many in the class had no or minimal interest in learning; they came to just pass the time, with little apparent motivation to eventually find a job.

The perennial problem of foreign credential recognition and the “lack of Canadian experience” came to light again. The interviewees complained that despite good education and experience in their respective professions, they could not find a job commensurate with their skills and abilities—what is often called “deskilling.” This catch-22 situation—where immigrants remain at a lower skill, professional, or income level, caught in a cycle that is hard to break out of when they have the urgent need to support themselves and their families by whatever means necessary—is very familiar to previously arrived immigrants and refugees in Canada. Lack of training programs further inhibit their full participation in the Canadian labour market.

A few felt that their sponsors, especially the large churches, provided them with everything needed on a day-to-day basis but still failed to provide them opportunities to work in their professions. The few employment options sponsors offered them were jobs cleaning carpets, removing garbage, or handling recycling:

The important thing for them [the sponsors] was that we have enough food and clothes and money to pay the rent. Ok, it is very important to have those because we are new to Canada. But instead of giving me money to buy food, give me a job so I can have money to buy food, even if it was the minimum wage—as long as it is relevant to my profession.

They [the sponsors] are treating us like newly arrived persons—who don't have English [language] skills, experiences, or degrees, and who need someone to give them money and to study the language. We want more than that; we are prepared [for] more.

I think that we have to integrate with [Canadian] society and that is a fair thing. But they, the Canadian society, have and must understand that we are people with experiences—so, make use of those experiences. You ask me how? But I don't know how. If I have 15 years of experience, you cannot eliminate that.

The interviewees also suggested that the sponsors need to be prepared for who they are sponsoring, in addition to learning about the historical, cultural, and societal information of the place the refugees have come from. In their experience, the sponsors were not well-informed or well-prepared, and whatever they knew was flawed or misinformation. As a result, for instance, the interviewees felt that the sponsors thought that Syria was a stone-age country, which probably reflected in how they viewed and treated the people they sponsored. The interviewees believed that the sponsors doubted their capability and skills, and therefore did not offer them enough opportunity to become independent.

Health

Health-wise, they seemed to be generally in good health, certainly better than the GARs. They seemed satisfied with the care they received in Canada, and had an interim healthcare card from the federal government, which was valid for one year. The coverage included basic and supplementary health services, similar to coverage for a social assistance recipient. It also included prescription drugs and most dental care services, except root canals, orthodontics, or scaling. A few complained about the time it took for them to see a doctor in the emergency unit of a hospital. They were also unhappy about the wait-time to see a specialist. They were obviously unaware that Canadians experience these same conditions and have similar long waits to receive emergency or specialist care.

Economic integration

Most of the PSRs, with a few exceptions, were professionals back in their home country. They had worked in various sectors in various roles, such as engineer, teacher, pharmacist, medical technician, accountant, hotel manager, and so on. Interestingly, out of 17 families (or 31 individuals) we interviewed, only two have found jobs in their fields—specifically, hairstyling, and teaching. Three—an accountant, a medical technician, and a hotel manager—now work as settlement workers. The others (7 out of 12 who are of working age and are looking for job) are still either unemployed or volunteering in their industry. Some wish to go back to university for further studies or continue to hone their proficiency in English. Many of them still struggle with English, with most of them in level 5 or 6 (out of a total 7) in the LINC class. A few have transferred into the English as a Second Language class, which is an intermediate level and better suited their needs.

When we asked the PSRs about how they were adapting to the life in Canada, almost all of them were appreciative of Canadians' pleasant nature and helpfulness. Despite the language barrier, Canadians, whether neighbours or strangers, were willing to help and respect them for who they are. One female interviewee said:

My teacher is very nice with Muslims; she even compliments you and says that you are lovely. One day she wore scarf. Also, my Canadian friend brought me a scarf as a present even though she is not Muslim. It is nice. These people are not Muslim, but still they give you Muslim stuff, like a scarf or a hijab.

Others talked about the challenges related to long distances to work, lack of transit options, and, of course, the cold winters in Edmonton. The women, however, were appreciative of the openness of Canadian society, where men and women are treated equally. They thought that women are actively involved in building the society and are considered productive members of the society.

Wife: Being a woman here is easier.... For example, if I want to work in the UAE [United Arab Emirates] they ask for my husband's permission before hiring me—but here, no.... I feel responsible for myself.

Husband: Also, here they have more activities for women; they have activities to include and involve women in Canadian society, more than any other countries.

Social integration

To gauge how socially integrated these Syrian refugees are, we asked this group the same question as we asked the GARs (see page 11 for this list of questions). We found out that most of their interactions with Canadian-born individuals were limited to their sponsors or settlement workers. A few did befriend their English-speaking neighbours. The language barrier is paramount for some, which inhibits them from getting groceries or visiting a doctor on their own.

B. Feedback from sponsoring families

We had long conversations with three private sponsor groups affiliated with a local church in Edmonton and the workers of several settlement agencies that have been helping GARs and PSRs. What we heard did not entirely match what we had heard about how the PSRs viewed their situation. However, one consistent impression was shared across all groups: that the sponsors stepped up to help the refugees out of the goodness of their heart. They were moved by the plight of the refugees as it was unfolding and wanted to contribute their resources. This motivation transcended religious lines—the sponsors were open to helping any refugees, regardless of their religious affiliation or denomination. Almost of all of them did acknowledge, though, that they did not know what they were really taking on

by participating in this sponsorship process, or who they were sponsoring. One of them made this realization very clear in the following words:

The problem is, it is a crap-shoot when you sponsor somebody. You don't know anything about these people when they are come.

The sponsors prepared as much as they could and adapted well to responding to the refugees' needs. They showered the newcomers with a significant amount of financial, medical, and other resources, well beyond the government's financial guidelines. For instance, the government estimates a settlement cost of \$28,200 for a family of 4, which included a startup of \$7,000 and 12 months of income support of \$21,200. This is the amount sponsors must commit to. One of them supported their sponsored family beyond one year. Another sponsor, however, expressed disappointment when the refugees' responses did not match their cultural expectations for punctuality and other things. This person complained that because the refugees are so well taken care of, it inadvertently partly disincentivizes them to become independent. It was clear that providing for the refugees, mostly related to the daily minutiae of life—taking them to the doctor, English classes and grocery, doing paperwork, finding/hiring an interpreter, and so on—exhausted them. Although they pulled through, they did acknowledge that it became unsustainable at times.

I don't think volunteers are in a position to provide support for five years. Even with all of us, we are exhausted with 20 hours a week, on top of what our [own] life is. That's what [time commitment] many of us on the executive have done."

The sponsors identified several issues in the settlement process and possible lessons that we can learn. They thought that to expect the refugees would become fluent in English within a year was unrealistic. A more realistic timeframe is about five years. There were a number of unforeseen expenditures associated with the settlement as well. For instance, it was hard to get into LINC classes. So, instead of waiting around for several months, they collectively pooled extra funds to hire their own English tutors so that the newcomers could use their time effectively in the first year. The cost of dental care was another surprise, which ran into tens of thousands of dollars in one case. The advice from the sponsors is that the overall support could cost much more than the minimum required by the government.

They all suggested that the federal government should monitor the refugees' progress in learning English. As well, they recommended that the government should provide training and prepare refugees to find employment. It must do everything possible so that the refugees do not fall into the vicious cycle of the social welfare net once the support expires. Concomitantly, sponsors vetoed the refugees' idea to work or live closer to where their compatriots lived. They wanted the refugees to become proficient in English before finding a job. To do this, they believed that the refugees had to be surrounded by English speakers so that they would be forced to speak in English, and thus improve their language skills.

It is also true that the sponsoring groups themselves had unrealistic expectations of the refugees. They were driven by their own ideology about how and how much to help and what would make the refugees independent. Sometimes, these were at odds with the newcomers' wishes and expectations. An extraordinary emphasis on learning English in a short amount of time, in the hope that it would lead to a high paying job, seems impractical. One settlement worker summed it up by stating, "They [sponsors] presume[d] that they could treat newcomers like children."

C. Feedback from settlement agencies

When asked if there were any differences between GARs and PSRs, settlement agency workers responded that there was not much difference between these refugee categories. However, the staff from one agency believed that PSRs do have more opportunities than GARs in that they are more exposed to Canadian society, develop better social networks, and learn English more quickly. Most PSRs also receive more material benefits than GARs. For instance, some sponsoring families extended their sponsorship up to 18 months. Therefore, month 13—when the government and private sponsorship officially ends—is not as crucial to PSRs as it is to GARs. The agency staff acknowledged that in some instances, their sponsors take excessive care of their refugee families.

One settlement worker proposed that the demographics under the various refugee categories are not so different because of the pace of the refugee aid effort:

I would say in general when you look at the government-sponsored refugees [in the past] that would be the case [that is, they are rural, unskilled, and uneducated]. But I think with the Syrian refugees it is little bit different, because I think the application is moving so quickly. From the same family, you see people that are government sponsored and privately sponsored.... I [also] see lots of people that have professional backgrounds among government-sponsored refugees.”

This settlement worker also proposed another reason why not much demographic differences exist across the GAR group and the PSR group. According to her, Syrians in general have a higher level of education when compared to other refugees. Unlike other displaced people across the world, Syrians became refugees in a relatively short time: the civil war escalated and there was a sudden exodus from the country. In other words, the Syrian refugees were not born in refugee camps, which would have severely limited their access to education.

There will be some people who have less education and some people not. You know that everyone [Syrians] seems to have a pretty basic [education, even though some]...are illiterate. Even within the government-sponsored refugees, very few are illiterate. Almost none. Maybe a low level of English, but almost everyone can read [in their mother tongue].

Data from UNICEF does, in fact, substantiate the above claim. UNICEF estimates that the literacy rate in Syria was about 84% prior to the civil war, which began in 2011.

Settlement workers expressed the view that private sponsors also need training before they get engaged in the process of sponsoring. Lack of training and proper information at times resulted in sponsors passing along misinformation to the refugee families. For instance, one sponsor erroneously told some refugees they did not need to file tax returns in the year they arrived in the country. Because of this, the refugee family lost the applicable tax refund they might have been entitled to.

One settlement worker mentioned that Syrian Muslims and Syrian Christians do not associate with each other. This was confirmed by at least one Syrian refugee:

In the end, the [Canadian] government is sponsoring people who are living in [refugee] camps, and the people in camps are mainly Sunni [Sunni Muslims]. In Syria, we were living all together before the war, but after the war it became a religious problem. The war uncovered all the bad things in people. We, as Christians, cannot live in camps, so when we moved to Turkey, Jordan, or Lebanon, we didn't live in [refugee] camps because we were not welcomed in the camps. So, there were divisions, and the people in camps are Sunni.

This animosity between the two groups seems to have been carried over to Canada as well.

BLENDED VISA OFFICE-REFERRALS (BVORS)

Feedback from refugees

Refugee sample profile

We interviewed eight individuals from four families sponsored under this program. As its name suggests, the program is a mixture of private and government sponsorship. Private and government sponsors each support the refugees for 6 months, under similar financial and service commitments to those of the private sponsorship and government sponsorship streams.

In our sample of refugee families, the mean number of family members was 5.5. The interviewees were experienced or skilled in a variety of trades—farming, tailoring, construction, and fabric printing. When compared with PSRs, this group had less education—only a Grade 6 or 9 level of schooling—which suggests they may find it harder to learn English. Indeed, they were still in level 1 or 2 of the LINC classes at the time of the interviews, whereas the PSRs were at higher levels. They had also endured considerably more hardship in various UNHCR camps in Jordan and Turkey, when compared to the PSRs. On average, they had stayed two to three years in the asylum countries before coming to Canada. They had been provided with some financial assistance and food by the UN and donor agencies, but it was not enough to fulfill even basic needs, such as buying milk for their children. In the words of the one of the interviewees:

Living in the camp was very difficult. There wasn't any health service; it was in the middle of the desert [and] the wind and the dust made our life difficult.

For these families, life outside of the camp was not good either. Some had left the camp because few means existed to support themselves and because of the serious lack of medical care. Deceit, discrimination, exploitation, and price gouging were rampant. Another interviewee described her plight in the absence of proper health care: she was going to die without money, health facilities, and a proper diagnosis. At the time of our interviews, she still suffered from the consequences of a badly executed surgery on her hand, stomach problems, a broken nose, and dental issues.

Refugees' general impressions

The refugees' decisions to select Canada as a country in which to settle was based on the belief that it would be better and safer here than the place they were in. They did not have much knowledge of the country itself, but whatever they had heard was positive. One of them said:

First of all, Canada is not an anti-Islam country. This is number one. Plus, the children's future is better [here] than in other countries and the kids are all we have. I don't want them to be hurt.

Another one said:

We used to think that the hijab would be a problem, but when we got here I found that people here accepted everything and that they believe in religious freedom. They treat us very well. I have not faced any situation in which I felt uncomfortable, except for the language difficulties. For example, wherever I go now the smile on their face is enough. They offer help even if they do not understand what you need, but they try to help as much as they can...they make you feel safe. I don't know how, in Lebanon, I used to be afraid of just walking in the street, but here I feel that I can go wherever by myself. In Lebanon, I did not dare to leave the house.

They felt positive about their kids' future. Their children are quickly learning English and are making friends with Syrian and non-Syrian peers. The parents are eager to make friends with English speakers, but the language issue is their biggest barrier.

None of them had found a job at the time of our interview. It seemed that lack of functional English was a primary impediment to their securing employment. One person said this about the work situation:

I got a job offer with a company, but they wanted me to work full time. I tried to get them to agree to shifts before school or after school but they did not accept this. It was either full time or nothing and I want to get to level 4 [of the LINC classes] for the citizenship.... When I first arrived, I had a job opportunity working in my profession but they [the sponsors] did not want me to work. They said, "Your English education is a red line. Take as much money as you want, [but] just continue your education."

Generally, they seemed quite satisfied with their lives in Canada. Their previous life in the asylum country was so bad that they appreciated and were thankful for everything that Canada offered to them. They seemed more resilient and more positive about job opportunities and life in general in their new country.

II. LETHBRIDGE

Refugee sample profile

10 households were interviewed in Lethbridge, constituting a total of 17 individuals, of which 10 were women. The mean number of people to make up a household was 4.3 individuals, with an average of 2.1 children per family. Out of the 17 individuals interviewed, two were single, two were widows, and the remainder were married. The average age of the interviewees was 31 years. 15 came as GARs while two arrived through the PSR stream. Most of the interviews were held with all the family members; it is important to indicate that male family members dominated the conversation in almost every interview we had with the Syrian families.

III. GOVERNMENT-ASSISTED REFUGEES (GARs)

A. Feedback from refugees

Refugees' general impressions

When we asked interviewees about their expectations before arriving in Canada, most of them said that they had heard that Canada is a nice country. However, it turned out to be more than simply nice. They were overwhelmed by Canadians' generosity when they first arrived in the country. Many were content with the freedom of belief and opinion. Everyone expressed their respect and gratitude to the Canadian government for all the effort they had put into bringing them here. Indeed, they wished the government could also resettle their relatives or other people from Syria.

The major obstacle in establishing and maintaining relationships with Canadians was the language barrier, just as was the case with refugees in Edmonton. Some had problems in communicating with their children's teachers, doctors, or even people at grocery stores. However, some have been innovative and are using mobile phone translation applications to communicate with English-speaking Canadians.

When we asked women about any challenges they may have faced when settling in, some felt completely welcomed and, specifically, not judged for the way they dress. Others, as noted above, were unable to understand the language. Single parents (who had been widowed) with children were mostly concerned about what would happen to them when the government assistance expires in a year. This was

especially so because they have no male support, were not used to working outside the home, or did not have a profession when they were back home.

When the women were asked about their future plans, some expressed interest in looking into learning new skills or professions, such as hairdressing or sewing, but none of them had seriously considered starting this career shift.

Regarding month 13 (when the government assistance runs out), some families were optimistic, saying that if they found jobs they would have nothing to worry about. Others, however, were concerned that they would not be able to learn English and thus would not be able to work full time to provide for their families. The following quotes from two different interviews capture the above:

We are optimistic about it. If we find jobs, we won't worry about anything.

I only have three months left to finish my first year, but I am still in level 2. This means that one year isn't enough to have good command of English.

When the men were asked about their future plans, they said they would like to find any job they could get. However, for the most part, the men said they wished to first graduate from the English program before starting to work. Others were trying to find part-time jobs while studying English, and some have plans to start their own businesses. Some of these sentiments are reflected in the following quotes:

I will work in any job. I heard that there are not many jobs in the field of laying ceramic tiles and [also] because the winter is long and you can't work outside in the cold. I am used to working in paving the streets and house flooring. So, I will work in any job until I can find a job in ceramic installation, which is easier for me.

I would like to continue studying English in the school. Right now, I am between level 2 and 3; just one more step and I will be in level 3. I want to do at least level 4. And if I have the chance I want to study in college. Like you said, after a couple more months, the sponsorship will end. If I have to work I will, but if I can continue studying at the college, I will [do that].

Arrival experience

When asked about their views on services received upon arrival in Canada, families in Lethbridge had similar experiences to those of Edmonton families. Settlement workers would pick them up from the airport and drive them to a hotel. They would give them money to buy food and whatever they needed. Then, the settlement agencies would start assisting them with other needs, including housing, health, education, and life in Canada more generally.

Families explained that settlement workers helped them with the majority of the paperwork and providing them with translators whenever needed. They also helped with practical tasks, such as registering them at the English school or their children at the elementary school, showing them the bus routes and how to ride the bus, and so on.

One of the refugee woman had to travel to Canada while she was sick, so a doctor accompanied her all the way from an airport in Jordan to Lethbridge to make sure she arrived safely in Canada. The following quotes from different interviewees capture the heartfelt gratitude refugees feel towards Canadians and the Canadian government:

We arrived at night and they gave us a ride to the hotel. Fortunately, my brother arrived here 11 days before us and we met in the hotel. So, they put us in a hotel for 15 days, me and my wife and daughter, and they gave us some money.... I really don't remember the amount but it was enough for the first period, for food and beverages. Then we found a house and rented it.

We are good, nothing is missing. They do whatever we ask—they are treating us well.

In the airplane I started to cry, but when I saw how they are treating us and that everyone is smiling and welcoming us—thank God, I felt happy.

Because my mother was sick, a doctor came to the airport from Jordan, and he came with us to Lethbridge... And there was a nurse in the airplane; she took care of my mother. Later when we arrived, an immigration employee and [an] interpreter welcomed us in the airport. No other government did what the Canadian government is doing for us.

All the families agreed that their children's education was a top priority for them and that education could help them secure a better future for their kids, better than the one they had. While the kids attended school or were at daycare, their parents attended the LINC classes.

Sponsorship program

When asked about the differences between their own sponsorship and other programs such as PSRs and BVORs, most of the GAR families were not able to identify their own sponsorship type. Families knew more about the services that they were getting and only a little about the services that their Syrian friends were receiving. They also could not definitely specify which sponsorship program their friends had arrived through.

Some Syrians thought that services provided to both PSRs and GARs were good, with a few noticeable differences. Some GARs thought that the PSRs were getting the same services, but in a faster way. They attributed it to sponsoring families, who were personally following up on the PSRs' needs, instead of an agency that has to cater to more people. They also thought that PSRs were establishing more connections and relationships with the non-Syrian community because of the existing network of the sponsoring families.

We don't know the services provided to them (PSRs), but when they want any service I feel like they can get it faster. If they want some medical service, it is arranged faster by a person than by an office. And you feel that they have more friends and relations so that is why their services always go faster, especially in medical services or other. But in general, both are good.

On the other hand, the GARs had access to interpreters, which PSRs did not necessarily have, especially when none of the sponsoring family members spoke Arabic.

Missing services

When asked if they felt any services were missing, most of the families stated that one year of government support is not enough for them. Others suggested that the amount provided by the government barely covers their rent, insurance, bus passes, phone, and so forth.

Others suggested that there should be a more extensive English training program to help them better communicate in English. They also need to run classes at more convenient time for parents. Others spoke about the need for improved quality of teaching techniques and teaching material at the language school.

Honestly, I expected the financial assistance for small families like mine to be more because the rent is expensive....For example, \$810 for the rent, \$65-\$60 for electricity, insurance, etc....Where is the \$1550 [the allowance]?! Gone. Do we live on water?!

If you want to work, you can find an eight-hour job, but my school is in the morning. It's impossible for me to find a part-time job. No one will hire me part time.

Health

When asked about their general health, the refugee families thought they were largely in good condition. About half of them, however, underwent various forms of surgery or were on medication for chronic illnesses such as epilepsy, iron deficiency, allergies, blood pressure issues, and so on.

A few had dental health issues, which required extensive work. Most of extensive dental work was not covered under the federal healthcare plan and a couple of refugee families ended up bearing the entire cost and were obviously not happy about it.

When asked about health services in Canada, the families stated that the quality of health services is better than back home in Syria and that the doctor will do all needed tests, even if you just have a flu.

Health services [in Canada] are very good. I know many Syrians underwent surgeries here in Canada without paying anything. Thank God! I did not need any surgery in Canada, because I did [that] in Lebanon. The UN paid \$6,000 and I paid \$3,000 for the surgery.

Nobody can say anything bad about the health services [here]. Canada is well known internationally for that, and it is really clear, without the testimony of the Syrians.

Economic integration

The GARs in Lethbridge came from a variety of different occupations. Many in our sample were women with no or very little work experience outside the home prior to coming Canada. Some men in our sample were business owners of a supermarket and a food distribution company. Occupations among the others included work as a driver, an electrician, in an outdoor clothing store, in a footwear factory, and selling restaurant equipment. In Canada, all of them are unemployed except one, who works in a poultry farm. Almost all of them were eager to work and wished to work in the areas in which they have some experience and skills from their home country. But, they also thought this was wishful thinking. Most likely, they would have to learn English first, or get further education or vocational training in Canada.

Social integration

Language was a significant barrier in integrating with the rest of the society. Despite the interpreters provided by the settlement agencies, our interviewees had difficulties in communicating. The interpreters were available only during working hours, and thus, many of the Syrians sought assistance from their English-speaking friends or relatives.

As expected, the recently arrived Syrians were mostly dependent on the settlement workers, volunteers, or friends to help them navigate the system and access services. However, Syrian families who have been in Canada longer seem to gradually become more independent. Eventually they no longer need assistance from the settlement workers.

Interestingly, the children of the Syrian families help their parents communicate with others and learn the language. The following quotes clearly tell us that refugee children are learning English faster than their parents and helping their parents by being their interpreters:

His English is better than mine. Sometimes he says, “Mom, they are saying that” [that is, a specific word or meaning].

When we go to the supermarket he can understand what they are saying better than me. He is our interpreter, the family interpreter.

When we asked about their relationships with other families or associations, we noticed they still have limited connections with the community, apart from the sponsoring families or volunteers. Some of them have established relationships with other Syrian families at the school or have met families from several backgrounds at the mosques, churches, or parks.

There is a small worship place, which is very small usually. Of course, in the city we go there on Fridays. I feel better when I see the others.

There is this volunteer, but our relationship is superficial. We went to her house once only, as it was her daughter’s birthday. And she used to visit us, but she wasn’t useful at all. She used to stare to her cellphone. She didn’t do anything for us.

PRIVATELY-SPONSORED REFUGEES (PSRS)

Sample profile and feedback from refugees

We interviewed two Syrian refugee families in Lethbridge who were privately sponsored by a local church. The female in one family was a teacher in Syria and the male in the other had multiple jobs including farming and running a restaurant business. We found that these families had established excellent relationships with the sponsoring families. Both families could not really tell the difference between the services their sponsoring families provided to them from the ones the government provided to other families. They were fully satisfied with the services they received from their sponsors.

Even though family members were enrolled at the LINC English classes, and they attended regularly, language remained the major obstacle for these families—just as with the Edmonton families. Still, despite the language barrier, members of one of these families had obtained employment in construction. We also interviewed an older, retired individual, whose daughter (who had been in the country for some time and works as a teacher) had sponsored him with the help of a local church. This man’s two sons had also both found employment. One of these PSR families commented that the church was helping them sponsor their daughter and her family, to bring them to Canada. Obviously, this type of assistance was not available to GARs.

Feedback from settlement agencies and private sponsors

When we asked the sponsors and settlement agencies about their thoughts on the educational background or skills of the Syrian refugees, they reported that most of the Syrians did not have a university degree and were sometimes low-skilled. They thought that refugees coming to Lethbridge were mostly from rural areas in Syria and did not speak English.

When asked about the efficacy of the English classes in Lethbridge, the settlement workers reported that they did not have LINC class, but the available classes were somewhat flexible in that they accepted mothers who attended with children under the age of six. The classes also used different teaching styles to accommodate people with different learning abilities, such as both visual or tactile. They did report that Lethbridge needed more English as a Second Language teachers to meet the needs of all the newcomers, along with sustained funding for English classes, and especially those for people with learning disabilities. Further, the programs must be designed to encourage more women to learn English and to keep children occupied in other activities.

The settlement workers identified several needs when asked about refugees' health in general. They reported that some refugees arrived in Canada with significant chronic health issues, and most of the children and their parents had serious dental problems that were not covered under the Interim Federal Health Program basic dental plan. They also reported that more female doctors are needed in Lethbridge, as is proper dental coverage for the refugees, and special programming for kids and parents who may have mental or physical disabilities. They also recommended expanding funding for the primary care network—to conduct awareness and informative sessions on safety, domestic violence, child abuse, parenting, driving, rules and regulations, and public health in general.

One of the major accomplishments of Lethbridge in settling Syrian refugees is the collaboration between Alberta Health (Chief Medical Officer of the South Zone) and the Lethbridge Family Services. The collaboration led to the creation of a multidisciplinary healthcare clinic, which facilitated refugee access to a family physician and other immediate medical needs within the first 48 hours of their arrival in Lethbridge.

When the settlement agencies and sponsoring families were asked about how Syrian families were adapting to life in Canada, they reported some issues and challenges. For instance, some Muslim Syrian families could not tolerate eating non-halal products or even working in a poultry/meat industry—which are some of the few jobs available in Lethbridge. Most refugees who came from rural areas were happy to settle in a small town like Lethbridge, instead of other big Canadian cities.

Additionally, the settlement workers reported that refugees were grieving over the family members they had left back home. For the first six months after their arrival, they were more focused on how everything was exotic and fabulous, but as they acclimate to their new surroundings, they may suddenly experience sorrow and feelings of great loss. This was the experience of almost all the refugees.

In response to our question about whether refugees are prepared for month 13, the agency predicted that refugees with larger families would definitely experience some financial challenges. However, these families might still get some help from the child tax benefits. Although both settlement agencies and private sponsors were trying to help families get established for their long-term stay, overall, most of the families remained inadequately prepared for month 13. The families needed more time to learn English and really be prepared.

The workers took pride in reporting how supportive and welcoming the Lethbridge community was to the Syrian refugee families. Some Canadian kids would play a game called “spot the Syrians” and would stop by and say “hello.” Some business communities expressed their interest in mentoring Syrian refugees who were planning to open their own businesses in Lethbridge. As well, the University of Lethbridge organized classes on weekends to guide refugees as to how to kick-start their own business in Canada.

The settlement agencies made the following recommendations:

- Some children arrived with a development disability (physical or mental), and thus there is a need for closer, efficient follow-up with these children and their families.
- More efficient collaboration is needed between the settlement agencies and other stakeholders engaged in the settlement process. This collaboration should help sponsoring families to receive information about refugees' extended families who are left behind in asylum countries, as well as aiding in the follow-up of the children with developmental disabilities noted above.
- Some domestic violence incidents were reported among the Syrian refugee families. The violence is perpetrated by the male figure in the family against the women or children. The settlement workers

reported that most of the women who are victims of domestic violence are still reluctant to report the abuse, although a small number of women came forward and wanted the police involved. An awareness program is needed to introduce refugees to Canadian laws and regulations, and help them learn how to abide by them.

- The government should consider more programming to extend the financial support for Syrian refugee families beyond the first year of their arrival.
- Increasing funding to promote community awareness about inclusivity and diversity should become a priority. This could help avoid any possible inter- and intra-community conflict among the refugee populations on one side, and the refugees and the Canadian-born community on the other.

7. CONCLUSIONS

We began this study with an interest in exploring the settlement experiences of Syrian refugees in Alberta. Our focus was to assess differences, if any, in how Syrian refugees navigate the settlement and integration process, who they turn to for information and services, and what services are missing that refugees need. All these factors are mediated by both the size of the city in which they settle and the streams within the refugee resettlement program through which they arrived in Canada.

Depending upon the refugee stream, the refugees' main points of contact are settlement workers in the case of GARs and private sponsors in the case of PSRs. Others who help them in their settlement are their own friends and families and the local faith-based organizations. Children of refugees learn English faster and begin to help their parents and others in the same situation as their parents.

In terms of missing or inadequate services, our interviewees pointed to insufficient spots and quality in LINC classes, lack of vocational training programs and long waits in the Canadian health system. They also complained about one year being too short for a family to become financially independent.

When checked against the existing literature on refugee resettlement in Canada, our findings about the challenges refugees faced closely matched those in the literature. For example, language skills and finding employment are the key challenges that Syrian refugees experienced. The cost of housing was expressed as an issue as well. However, housing affordability is directly related to employment. As the refugees were still within the first year of their sponsorship and thus receiving funding, housing as a challenge was superseded by language ability and the pursuit of employment.

While the literature presents PSRs as a more effective and efficient model of resettlement, our findings are slightly different. We exposed nuanced settlement differences within PSRs, which are detailed below.

DIFFERENCES AMONG THE THREE STREAMS

In our interviews with the refugees and settlement workers, the differences across the three streams of the refugee resettlement were not immediately obvious. Our interviewees, depending on the stream they came through, thought that refugees in the other streams—mainly GARs and PSRs—were doing much better than them. We also noted some obvious misconceptions and myths that were held by the interviewees as well. What we gleaned is that GARs thought that PSRs were better taken care of and had more resources available to them. They also thought that through the existing social network, PSRs' sponsors offered them better opportunities to learn English and find employment.

PSRs, on the other hand, felt that the government provided more resources than their private sponsors, such as financial aid, interpreter services, access to LINC classes, and medical services. There was a strong sentiment among PSRs that GARs were well taken care of by the government, so much so

in fact, that GARs did not intend to ever find meaningful employment or improve their English. In addition, PSRs were considerably more dissatisfied with the quality and standard of LINC classes than their GAR counterparts. Refugees from both streams complained about the lack of any vocational training.

As mentioned before, the literature favours PSRs as a more effective model of refugee resettlement program. We were, however, corrected about this view by the settlement agency staff and also, subtly, by a few PSR interviewees. They believed that PSRs faced similar challenges as other refugees did. Their situations largely depended on who their sponsors were and how experienced and committed they were in helping them. Essentially, the settlement experience of PSRs varied considerably based on the sponsors' commitment, experiences, and understanding of what it takes for a refugee to settle in a new country. It is true, though, that PSRs are chosen relatively more carefully by their sponsors and, in many instances, through sponsors' own extended contacts—whether this is their church, family, or friends, and thus there are usually a good match between sponsors and refugees. Many private sponsors, especially the church groups, agreed to sponsor friends and families through their initially sponsored refugees. Some families agreed to become sponsors based on humanitarian and compassionate grounds, but perhaps with a tacit understanding that the refugees would have to fend for themselves once they landed in Canada.

Thus, it would seem that private sponsorship is shaped by *who* the sponsors know, rather than *what* they know. Hence, these refugees tend to be professionals and more educated, and thus come with higher aspirations. They therefore also expect better language training and employment services. GARs, on the other hand, are chosen based on established government criteria, which focus on those who are most affected by the civil war and are most vulnerable, such as women, complete families, and people at risk due to membership in the LGBTI (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex) community. They are all appropriately vetted by government officials and before all the other criteria are accounted for, are shown to pose no security threat. These criteria do not consider the refugee's religion, language ability, or vocational or professional skills. This process of selection is more equitable and just. However, this group of refugees may require prolonged assistance to settle and become independent.

Interestingly, the BVORs we spoke with were unsure of the category of refugees they belonged to. In many instances, they thought they were privately sponsored, partly because the private sponsors were their first point of contact in Canada and were the first to take care of them. Only subsequently did the government play a role. In our interviews, we found them more resilient and much more satisfied with the services they received. They also seemed to have endured much more suffering before they arrived in Canada. We acknowledge however that our sample size for this category was much smaller than the GAR and PSR categories. This fact makes it a bit more challenging to arrive at a deep understanding of their experiences and challenges, and how these may differ from the other two categories of refugees.

DIFFERENCES BETWEEN LETHBRIDGE AND EDMONTON

We sought to also determine any differences in refugees' settlement experiences related to the city size. What we found were more commonalities than differences in the settlement experience, regardless of the size of the urban centre in which they settled. In both cities, the refugees' challenges were partly rooted in their intrinsic qualities, that is, the human capital assets (or lack thereof) they brought with them. For instance, (a) the lack of ability to speak English or to learn it quickly—which may be affected by their educational level, and (b) their professional or employment backgrounds, together created some serious challenges in finding employment in Canada. Both sets of refugees were

not fully prepared for month 13—the point at which they are expected to become financially independent because government or private support will end.

Edmonton and Lethbridge appear to present two unique economic contexts. In Edmonton, the service sector, and oil and gas jobs predominate; in the Lethbridge area, more jobs exist in farming, cattle feedlots, and pork and poultry operations. The refugees were disadvantaged in both locales primarily because of their deficiency in English language skills, even when they might have some relevant occupational skills. Jobs in the agricultural sector in Canada [mostly available in Lethbridge] have become mechanical and technical in nature over the years, so that they require sufficient knowledge of English and perhaps certifications in particular machinist skills. Obviously, lack of English proficiency and Canadian certifications made access to these jobs difficult. Finally, some refugees had issues working on pork farms because of religious reasons (whether due to the handling of the animal products or because pork is not acceptable in a strict Muslim diet).

Canadians in both urban centres were generous and provided a significant volume of donations to help out refugees. In return, refugees were equally grateful for the help they received.

We also noted the following additional differences between the two cities:

1. Settlement services in Lethbridge seemed adequate for the number of refugees who have settled there. Edmonton, on the other hand, faced a serious shortage of spaces in LINC classes, affordable housing, interpreters, and other services. It seems that smaller municipalities, such as Lethbridge, where the refugee numbers are also small were better prepared within the existing or slightly expanded settlement infrastructure. Because it is smaller, when compared to a city like Edmonton, Lethbridge had better connections among the organizations and individuals involved or interested in the settlement sector. Hence, this city could access people and resources on short notice.

Also, we wonder if perhaps there is a threshold number of newcomers that an urban centre can handle. We surmise that limits exist to the scale and efficiency of settlement agencies when there is a sudden surge of newcomers who are largely dependent on the government and settlement services. Our data suggest this is likely true regardless of the size of the municipality. And, of course, the number and types of jobs available are limited; this is an aspect of resettlement that is largely independent of the settlement services themselves.

2. In large centres, such as Edmonton, many service gaps—as well as culturally and linguistically appropriate services—were fulfilled by local denominational and non-denominational organizations, like local mosques, IFSSA, and Action for Healthy Communities. These organizations improvised services and sometimes customized them to suit the immediate needs of the refugees. This included, for instance, providing them with halal food, furnishings for their homes, interpreter services, and much needed vocational training. These services were missing in the smaller municipality of Lethbridge.
3. Lethbridge was exceptional in its medical service model, which created a one-stop medical clinic where all Syrian refugees could go for initial medical check-ups, immunizations, and referrals to specialists. It was made possible by a unique collaboration between the Lethbridge Family Services and the Chief Medical Officer of the South Zone (from Alberta Health), which resulted in a multidisciplinary healthcare clinic. This clinic facilitated the health needs of all Syrian refugees coming to Lethbridge, where every refugee family was assigned a family physician within the first 48 hours of their arrival. This is a model which has the potential to be employed in other jurisdictions.
4. The general impressions from the Lethbridge-destined Syrian refugees and settlement agencies largely contradict Abu-Laban's (1999) findings, which had documented a lukewarm reception to

refugees in Lethbridge. In fact, when compared against Edmonton, Syrian refugees in Lethbridge reported higher satisfaction with the settlement services offered to them, as well as with the community they lived in. Issues such as language and job training, and assistance, however, remain a perennial problem in both Edmonton and Lethbridge as was documented in Abu-Laban et al.'s study from about two decades ago.

5. We have categorized PSRs' settlement experiences into three groups:

1. *Refugees mostly sponsored by wealthy church groups.* These sponsors extensively supported the families in every aspect of their settlement to the point that the care was almost excessive: they extended their sponsorship beyond one year, bought them a car, hired private tutors for them to learn English at home, and spent thousands of dollars on their dental bills. They would also do errands for them, such as buying groceries, taking them to doctors' appointment, or English or other classes.
2. *Refugees with sponsoring families who did the minimum required by law.*
3. *Refugees abandoned by their sponsors.* These sponsors did not have the means and/or the time to adequately support them, circumstances that occurred in two primary ways:
 - Through mutual consent: sometimes this arrangement was agreed on even before the refugees landed in Canada.
 - The sponsors lost the means to look after them because of an unexpected loss of income. Alberta was hit by a sudden economic downturn during 2015 and 2016, which may have led to this outcome.

SOME POLICY AND PROGRAMMATIC SUGGESTIONS

- Edmonton specifically requires more LINC classes, with pedagogical approaches that are more appropriate to different learning abilities. As opposed to a one-size-fits-all approach, this language training needs to be offered such that it caters to refugees' literacy and education levels: someone who is illiterate in their native language will have different English language learning needs than someone who is literate, who may have unique needs again from someone who is both literate and well educated.
- Training programs like Ontario's Bridge Training Program or the federal government's now defunct Bridging Program should be used as models to be followed for Syrian refugees or any newcomers. The new Federal Internship Program is a step in the right direction. It is, however, presently limited both in employment and geographic scope. A few interviewees suggested that Canada look to the training program in Germany as models for what we could do here. The German government along with the German Confederation of Skilled Crafts—the centralized bureaucratic body for trade associations—has created a nationwide program to prepare refugees for their apprenticeship system. This program provides training in trades such as metal and electrical work, but also includes language and integration classes, which makes a rather unique model. However, the success of the program has not yet been fully evaluated.

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APPENDIX I: QUESTIONS FOR REFUGEES

1. Basic information

- Age
- Gender
- Marital status
- List immediate family members and their age.
- How many family members are living in the same household? (List number of immediate family members and/or the extended ones living in the same household.)
- How many immediate members of your family are still in Syria?
- Where are you originally from in Syria? Please name the district.
- What was your last place of residence in Syria?
- When did you flee Syria?
- When did you land in Canada?

2. Settlement trajectory

1. Tell us more about your journey from Syria to Canada? (Probe, to which country did you flee? Where did you live? What kind of assistance were you receiving?)
2. How long was the resettlement process back in the asylum country?
3. Did you have the option to choose among more than one resettlement country? If yes, what attracted you to Canada?

3. Sponsorship program

4. How did you become aware of the Canadian sponsorship programs?
5. Describe your experience with the sponsoring process before and after arriving in Canada?
6. What do you think about your sponsoring agency/family?
7. What services did you receive after you arrived in Canada? Did you expect something different before you arrived in Canada?
8. Do you see differences between the services offered to those who came via the government-assisted program vs those who came through the private sponsorship program?
9. What type of services can the settlement agencies/families offer you and other refugees to help you more?

4. Education and health

10. What is your highest educational achievement?
11. Are your kids enrolled in schools or after-school programs in Canada? What are the main challenges they face at school while acquiring their education?
12. How would you describe the difference between your health condition before and after arriving in Canada?
13. Did you make use of health services in Canada? What type of health services have you accessed so far? What are you planning to access in the future?

5. Social /economic integration

14. How do you plan to find jobs in the city? Do you plan to go for further studies? Or bridging programs/ vocational trainings, English classes, other programs or training?
15. How many Canadians (English Speakers) do you know? And how do you communicate with them? Which language/type of communication do you use?
16. Do you have any connections with local mosques, community associations, and families? Please describe.

6. Adaptation and future plans

17. How are you adapting to the life in Canada?
18. What are your future plans in Canada?

APPENDIX 2: QUESTIONS TO THE SETTLEMENT WORKERS

1. What services has your agency provided to the Syrian refugees after their arrival in Canada?
2. How are these services beneficial to refugees?
3. How do you prepare refugees for a long-term stay in Canada?
4. Explain how do you plan to integrate refugees with Canadian society?
5. What are the major obstacles that you have encountered in the settlement process for Syrian refugees in Canada?
6. What are the needs and demands of refugees which you are still unable to fulfill? Conversely, what are the needs that you think you were able fulfill?

APPENDIX 3: INFORMED CONSENT FORM

NOTE: An Arabic translation of this document is provided to the interviewee

The title of the study

Settlement Experiences of Syrian Refugees in Alberta

The name of the principle investigator

Dr. Sandeep Agrawal (Inaugural Director and Professor of the University of Alberta's Planning program)

The study purpose and rationale

My research team and I are conducting a study funded by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC) on settlement experiences of Syrian refugees in Alberta. This project will document the settlement experiences of recent Syrian refugees in Albertan cities, comparing across the three streams of sponsorship to better understand the perspectives of the refugees, the sponsors, and the social agencies that work with them. In fact, these are early days in the migration and resettlement process and many knowledge gaps exist. This is thus a prime moment to begin to build a systematic knowledge, which will inform the ongoing practice of settlement agencies as well as government policy directions in the future.

Participation procedures and duration

Your participation in this study is voluntary and you are free to withdraw your permission at anytime for any reason without penalty or prejudice from the investigator. Please feel free to ask any questions of the investigator before signing this form and at any time during the study.

- Participation involves being interviewed by the research team.
- The interview will last approximately 30-60 minutes.
- Notes will be handwritten during the interview. If the interviewee prefers it, the session will be audio-recorded and digitally-recorded (in still photos only).
- Most interviewees will find the discussion interesting and thought-provoking. If, however, you feel uncomfortable in any way during the interview session, you have the right to decline to answer any question or to end the interview.

Audio recordings, digital photographs, and field notes

- For purposes of accuracy, the interviews will be audio-taped with the consent of the interviewee.
- The recording will be used as part of the research and to ensure that I accurately transcribe your comments.
- Once transcribed, a pseudonym will be ascribed to the transcript so that no identifiable information will be attached to the comments.

Do I have your permission to tape this interview? YES () NO ()

Do I have your permission to take pictures? YES () NO ()

Data confidentiality

Should you choose to participate, handwritten or digital notes will be taken during these interviews and all information you supply during the interview will be held in confidence. Collected information will be safely stored digitally in a locked facility in which only research staff will have access to.

Storage of data

The data will be retained for 5 years from the day the information was collected as per the University of Alberta policy and thereafter it will destroyed. Your participation will be anonymous and your name will not appear in any report or publication of the research. For any reason, if you wish to withdraw your contribution, you can do so any time before July 31st 2017.

Risks or discomforts

We do not foresee any risks or discomfort from your participation in the research.

Benefits

There are no anticipated benefits for participating in this study.

Ethical guidance

The plan for this study has been reviewed for its adherence to ethical guidelines by a Research Ethics Board at the University of Alberta. For questions regarding participant rights and ethical conduct of research, contact the Research Ethics Office at (780) 492-2615. If you have an additional questions pertaining to the nature of the research, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Consent

If you agree to participate, please sign the following consent statement in your response:

“I have read this form and the research study has been explained to me. I have been given the opportunity to ask questions and my questions have been answered. If I have additional questions, I have been told whom to contact. I agree to participate in the research study described in the description of this study and give my consent to participate. I will provide a signed copy of the consent document or agree to be recorded for an oral consent over the phone, Skype, or Facetime, at the time of the interview. I will receive a copy of this consent form after I sign it.”

Please sign below at the time of your in-person interview.

Participant’s Name (printed) and Signature

Date

Name (printed) and Signature of Person Obtaining Consent

Date