

Finding Refuge in Canada: A Syrian Resettlement Story



Report of the Standing Senate Committee on Human Rights

The Honourable Jim Munson, Chair
The Honourable Salma Ataullahjan, Deputy Chair

December 2016



SENATE | SÉNAT
CANADA

Ce document est disponible en Français

Available on the Parliamentary Internet:

<http://senate-senat.ca/ridr.asp>

42nd Parliament – 1st Session

TABLE OF CONTENTS

MEMBERS OF THE COMMITTEE	4
ORDER OF REFERENCE	6
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY	8
MAP OF SYRIA.....	10
LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS	11
INTRODUCTION.....	12
CONSEQUENCES OF THE WAR IN SYRIA	15
CANADA’S RESPONSE: THE THREE REFUGEE STREAMS.....	16
A. Government-Assisted Refugee Program	17
B. Privately Sponsored Refugee Program.....	18
C. Blended Visa Office-Referred Refugees	19
DELAYS, BUREAUCRACY AND UNEQUAL TREATMENT.....	20
A. Slow Processing of Applications	20
B. Inadequate Information Sharing, Coordination and Funding	23
C. The Refugees who Start out Behind	26
1. Demographics of the GAR and PSR Syrian refugees	26
2. GARs, PSRs and BVORs: ensuring adequate support for all	27
3. Sponsorship breakdown: PSRs and BVORs left without support.....	27
BARELY SCRAPING BY: HIGH COSTS AND LOW INCOMES	29
A. Income support: The importance of Child Tax Benefits	29
B. The High Cost of Housing	30
C. The Impact of the Immigration Loans Program.....	31
THE KEYS TO SUCCESSFUL INTEGRATION	32
A. Language Training for Adults: Women Must not be Left Behind	33
B. Employment: A Major Challenge but a Must for Integration	34
1. Recognition of foreign education and work experience	35
C. Experience of Children and Youth	35
D. Mental Health and the Need for an Appropriate Response to Refugee Trauma.....	37

E. Violence against Women: The Need for a Specialized Response	39
F. Family Reunification is Essential for Full Integration	40
MONTH 13	42
CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS	43
APPENDIX A: TIMELINE OF KEY DATES IN THE SYRIAN REFUGEE RESETTLEMENT INITIATIVE	47
APPENDIX B: WITNESSES	51

MEMBERS OF THE COMMITTEE

The Honourable Jim Munson, Chair

The Honourable Salma Ataullahjan, Deputy Chair

and

The Honourable Senators:

Raynell Andreychuk

Raymonde Gagné

Elizabeth Hubley

Yonah Martin

Nancy Ruth

Thanh Hai Ngo

Ratna Omidvar

Ex-officio members of the committee:

The Honourable Peter Harder, P.C. (or Diane Bellemare) and Claude Carignan, P.C., (or Yonah Martin)

Other Senators who have participated from time to time in the study:

The Honourable Senators Cordy, Frum, Unger and Poirier

Parliamentary Information and Research Service, Library of Parliament:

Erin Shaw, Julia Nicol and Jean-Philippe Duguay, Analysts

Senate Committees Directorate:

Mark Palmer, Clerk of the Committee

Lori Meldrum, Benjamin Sparkes and Elda Donnelly, Administrative Assistants

Senate Communications Directorate:

Marcy Galipeau, Communications Officer

ORDER OF REFERENCE

Extract from the *Journals of the Senate* of Thursday, April 14, 2016:

The Honourable Senator Munson moved, seconded by the Honourable Senator Hubley:

That the Standing Senate Committee on Human Rights study and report on steps being taken to facilitate the integration of newly-arrived Syrian refugees and to address the challenges they are facing, including by the various levels of government, private sponsors and non-governmental organizations.

That the committee submit its final report no later than October 31, 2016 and that the committee retain all powers necessary to publicize its findings for 180 days after the tabling of the final report.

After debate,

The question being put on the motion, it was adopted.

Charles Robert

Clerk of the Senate

Extract from the *Journals of the Senate* of Thursday, October 20, 2016:

The Honourable Senator Munson moved, seconded by the Honourable Senator Baker, P.C.:

That, notwithstanding the order of the Senate adopted on Thursday, April 14, 2016, the date for the final report of the Standing Senate Committee on Human Rights in relation to its study on steps being taken to facilitate the integration of newly-arrived Syrian refugees and to address the challenges they are facing, including by the various levels of government, private sponsors and non-governmental organizations be extended from October 31, 2016 to December 31, 2016.

After debate,

The question being put on the motion, it was adopted.

Charles Robert

Clerk of the Senate

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The war in Syria has given rise to the largest refugee crisis in recent history. Not only have Syrians been forced to seek safety in neighbouring villages and cities, but many have left their country in the hopes of finding a safe refuge until the war comes to an end. While Turkey, Lebanon, Jordan and Egypt have welcomed their neighbours in their time of crisis, the sheer number of Syrian refugees and the duration of the conflict have overwhelmed their capacity to help.

As refugees lose hope of soon being able to return home, many are looking to start their lives over in an area that can provide safety and stability for their family. For many, Europe is the solution. Reaching European countries, however, does not guarantee safety or stability and getting there can be treacherous.

Last year, Canadians were moved by the stories of Syrian refugees putting everything on the line to escape the Middle East. Many were eager to help and wanted their government to step up. As a result, the Government of Canada endeavoured to resettle 25,000 Syrian refugees between 4 November 2015 and 29 February 2016 through its #WelcomeRefugees initiative. While the program reached its objective, resettlement is only the first step. Getting refugees to safety is an important achievement and should be celebrated, but ensuring that they integrate successfully is a long term goal that will benefit refugees themselves and Canada at large.

On 14 April 2016, the Senate tasked the Standing Senate Committee on Human Rights with studying and reporting on steps being taken to facilitate the integration of newly-arrived Syrian refugees and to address the challenges faced by refugees, the various levels of government, private sponsors and non-governmental organizations. The Committee heard from numerous witnesses including the Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship as well as officials from Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada, a number of resettlement organizations, private sponsors and Syrian refugees.

The Committee was moved by the willingness of Canadians to welcome Syrian refugees and the eagerness of Syrian refugees to become contributing members of Canadian society. It was concerned, however, that the Government of Canada is not allocating enough resources to help them integrate:

- Many refugees are welcomed to Canada with monetary debts to the Canadian government, which must be repaid with interest after a certain time. Given the uphill battle of integration that refugees face, the Government of Canada must replace these loans with grants or introduce a debt forgiveness mechanism for those who are unable to repay them. At the very least, the Government of Canada should stop profiting from their hardship and not charge interest.
- Many refugees are struggling to meet their basic needs because they are not receiving certain benefits in a timely manner. It is important that the Canada Revenue Agency maintain timely disbursements of the Canadian Child Benefit. Refugees must be able to support themselves without resorting to food banks.
- The ability to speak English or French is a basic requirement to participate in Canadian society. It is imperative that the Government of Canada fund language classes appropriately and secures spaces for all refugees upon arrival. Coupling more day care spaces with language training classes would remove a significant barrier for many refugees, especially women, who are too often left behind.
- Refugee youth face unique challenges when it comes to integrating. The Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship must provide funding for programs that address their needs.

- Despite surviving the traumas of war and starting their lives over, refugees are tremendously resilient. The Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship, however, should work with provincial, territorial and municipal partners to develop a comprehensive plan that addresses the mental health needs that may arise for a minority of Syrian refugees, such as ongoing trauma and PTSD. Any programming should be culturally appropriate. The Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship should also strive to eliminate any barriers to appropriate treatment services.
- The Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship should intensify coordination with civil society partners to develop ways in which issues of domestic and gender-based violence can be addressed in a culturally sensitive way. Any outreach and information products developed for this purpose should be designed to reach the most vulnerable and isolated members of the refugee population.
- Syrian refugees were relieved to finally arrive in a safe and stable country like Canada, but many were forced to leave their family members behind. Knowing that some of their family members face persecution and other serious risks to their safety is causing refugees here a lot of guilt and anguish, making it difficult for them to fully participate in Canadian society. The Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship should increase efforts to reunite refugees with their family members left behind in a way that is timely and considers extended family members.

With this in mind, the Governments of Canada needs to gear its policies to benefit refugees in the long-term. Refugees are under tremendous pressure to become self-sufficient within the first 12 months of arrival. At the end of those 12 months, often referred to as 'Month 13,' the direct financial obligations to Syrian refugees undertaken by sponsors and the Government of Canada come to an end. From that point on, refugees who are not yet self-sufficient depend on the assistance of the provinces and territories. It is important that refugees are given all of the opportunities necessary to succeed.

MAP OF SYRIA



Source: [CIA World Factbook: Syria](#)

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

BVOR

Blended Visa Office-Referred Refugee

CRA

Canada Revenue Agency

CARI St. Laurent

Centre d'Accueil et de Référence sociale et économique pour Immigrants (Reception and Economic and Social Resource Centre for Immigrants)

COSTI Immigrant Services

The organization's name is derived from one of its two founding partners, the Centro Organizzativo Scuole Tecniche Italiane.

GAR

Government Assisted Refugee

IRCC

Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada

MOSAIC

Multi-lingual Orientation Service Association for Immigrant Communities

OCASI

Ontario Council of Agencies Serving Immigrants

PSR

Privately Sponsored Refugee

RAP

Resettlement Assistance Program

ROMEL

Le Regroupement des organismes du Montréal ethnique pour le logement (Coalition of Ethnic Montreal Agencies for Housing)

UN

United Nations

UNHCR

Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees

INTRODUCTION

The Syrian displacement crisis is larger than any the world has seen since the Second World War. There are 6.5 million people displaced within the country and 4.8 million have sought refuge in other countries. These figures represent more than half of Syria's total pre-war population of 22 million people. Turkey alone hosts over two million Syrian refugees; at least two million more have sought safety in Lebanon, Jordan and Iraq.¹ Hundreds of thousands of Syrians have also made their way to Europe to seek asylum. In 2015, Germany alone received at least 159,000 applications from Syrian asylum-seekers.²

Faced with such staggering numbers and struck by the image of the body of a three-year old refugee, Alan Kurdi, lying lifeless on a Turkish beach, the Canadian people responded to the call to assist refugees just as they did when the Vietnamese boat people needed safe haven in the 1970s and 1980s. Thanks to the extraordinary generosity of Canadians and the quick response of community organizations, religious institutions and the government, 25,000 Syrian refugees were resettled to Canada between 4 November 2015 and 29 February 2016. Thousands more continue to arrive.

Given the large number of Syrian refugees arriving in Canada through the #WelcomeRefugees initiative, the Standing Senate Committee on Human Rights (the Committee) was compelled to examine the resettlement process and the progress of this cohort's integration into Canadian society. The Committee notes that Canada is in a unique position due to its geography. This country does not have to deal with large-scale irregular migrant and refugee flows. Canada is, to a large extent, able to control the number of refugees admitted. As a result, the Committee considers that the bar for success in refugee integration should be high.

The Committee's study and fact finding mission

The Committee held four meetings in Ottawa in May and October to hear from witnesses. The Committee also travelled to Toronto and Montreal, two of the cities that received the largest numbers of Syrian refugees. In Toronto, Committee members heard from government and privately sponsored refugees, a private sponsor involved in 15 refugee sponsorships, settlement and refugee serving agencies and a doctor whose clinic provides medical services to refugees. In addition to hearings, the Committee visited a site operated by COSTI Immigrant Services where refugees are housed when they first arrive in Canada. Committee members received a tour of the site and spoke with staff and refugees about their experiences to date and the services offered. The Committee then went to Montreal on a fact finding mission where it heard from more refugees, as well as settlement and refugee serving agencies, and school board officials, about their experiences. Members also visited the offices of the Centre d'Accueil et de Référence sociale et économique pour Immigrants (CARI St. Laurent) to learn about their programming, which includes language classes, employment support and a daycare. The Committee found it valuable to hear from witnesses in different cities who highlighted both common issues and regional disparities in resettlement experiences. The Committee wishes to stress, however, that this report represents a snapshot of key issues. It does not attempt a

¹ Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), "[Syria Refugee Response, Regional Overview](#)."

² Eurostat, "[Asylum Statistics](#)," 2016.

comprehensive review of the situation of Syrian refugees in each city and province.

The Committee would like to recognize the important contribution that the testimony of Syrian refugees themselves made to the findings and observations contained in this report. Members were humbled by their extraordinary stories of strength and survival. The Committee heard from refugees who were grateful to experience the multiculturalism and religious freedom of Canadian society. Members of the Committee were inspired by a refugee who overcame tremendous obstacles even before the war in Syria. She was married at a very young age and had children in her teenage years. When the war broke out, some of her family members were killed and she was forced to flee from one place to the next until she had exhausted all of her options. Now that she can live freely in Canada, she speaks publicly about her experiences and inspires university students with her story of hope and survival.

The Committee also heard stories of great frustration and immense suffering. Some refugees were being taken advantage of by landlords, while others were forced to access food banks because the government was requiring them to repay travel loans at a time when the little income they had was already stretched to the limit. It also heard of confusion in the post-secondary education system as some students were unable to get a clear answer about how to continue their education in Canada.

The Committee is grateful to the refugees who candidly shared information about the challenges they face in Canada and for the compelling testimony they provided. To protect the security and privacy of these individuals and their family members who remain in Syria, this report does not quote the evidence of many of these refugees directly. The Committee wishes to stress that the thoughts, opinions and priorities of the refugees themselves must play a key role in guiding Canada's response to the challenges posed by resettling such a large number of individuals in such a short time.

As part of the study, the Committee heard from approximately 30 Syrian refugees. They testified about their experiences both before and since their arrival in Canada, as well as their concerns for the future. They spoke of anxiety over whether they would be able to learn one of Canada's official languages, find a job, pay back their transportation loans and find affordable housing. The Committee also heard from numerous refugee service agencies which are responsible for implementing the settlement initiative on the ground. Repeatedly, the Committee was advised that the federal government must do more to ensure the successful integration of Syrian refugees. Delays in processing refugee applications must be reduced. Child tax benefits need to be issued quickly when refugees arrive in Canada, so that families are able to pay for basics, such as food, for their children. The government must stop billing refugees living in poverty for their transportation to Canada. Culturally-appropriate mental health services are required to assist the many refugees affected by the trauma of war and displacement. Family reunification is also critical, as refugees cannot be fully at peace in Canada when their families remain in danger in war-torn Syria or living precariously inside or outside refugee camps in neighbouring countries. The federal government has the power to make concrete changes in all of these areas.

Canadians can be proud of this country's generous response to the Syrian refugee crisis. The Committee was told that the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, Filippo Grandi, was "amazed with the level of activity and receptiveness toward Syrian refugees" when he visited Canada in

March 2016.³ John McCallum, Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship (the Minister) emphasized to the Committee “the degree to which Canadians have come on side and the degree to which this is not just a federal government project or even a government project. It has truly become a national project as reflected in all of those people who want to sponsor refugees.”⁴ The Committee believes that the Syrian refugee resettlement initiative is a historic, nation-building moment that will continue to resonate in our country, just as the sponsorship of Indo-Chinese refugees following the Vietnam War has done.

The new arrivals will be tremendous assets to us if we do right by them now when they need us most.

— Louisa Taylor, Director, Refugee 613

Yet, many individuals involved in the private sponsorship of refugees, who have spent countless hours preparing and raising funds for the arrival of their sponsored refugees, are growing frustrated. As a result of delays in processing applications, apartments they rented remain empty and funds they raised still sit in the bank. Volunteers who have poured their hearts and souls into preparing to welcome Syrian refugees have become discouraged. The invaluable enthusiasm that the government was able to capitalize upon when it launched this initiative is now wavering.

The initial joy and relief felt by refugees upon arriving in a safe country is starting to wear off. Bringing the refugees to Canada was only a first step; ensuring their integration into the fabric of Canadian life is essential for their long-term success and prosperity. The Committee is aware that challenges are to be expected in the integration process, particularly with so many refugees arriving at once. However, it was with disappointment that the Committee heard refugees and settlement agencies describe what they perceived to be inadequate support from the Government of Canada. Unfortunately, integration assistance and programs are chronically under-funded. While the Committee is encouraged by the efforts of Syrian refugees to integrate into Canadian society and their eagerness to become productive citizens, much work remains to be done to ensure their prosperity.

This refugee resettlement exercise is not a sprint or a marathon. It's a multi-year, generational-long, ultra-marathon in nation-building. I believe it will be a positive impact for years to come if we invest in innovation and learn from past mistakes.

— Louisa Taylor, Director, Refugee 613

³ Standing Senate Committee on Human Rights, [Evidence](#), 1st Session, 42nd Parliament, 18 May 2016 (Michael Casasola, Resettlement Officer, UNHCR).

⁴ Standing Senate Committee on Human Rights, [Evidence](#), 1st Session, 42nd Parliament, 18 May 2016 (The Honourable John McCallum, P.C., M.P., Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship).

Despite many frustrations and challenges, refugees almost unanimously expressed their gratitude for being in Canada. One refugee said that the happiness he felt to be somewhere safe and where freedom of religion is respected could not be expressed. For him, the permanent status offered immediately to refugees was also an advantage incomparable to other resettlement countries.⁵ Refugee service agencies spoke about how inspiring it was to see the perception of refugees change as a result of the campaign to bring Syrian refugees to Canada. Thousands of people from across the country wanted to help in whatever way they could; from a truck driver offering the use of his truck, to a hair stylist offering free haircuts, and so many more.⁶

Canadians have opened their hearts, minds, their homes, their communities to create a space for so many people to be involved in refugee resettlement. This should be supported by government.

— Alexander Vadala, Senior Coordinator,
Policy & Research, Ontario Council of Agencies Serving Immigrants

The Committee chose to study the resettlement process of Syrian refugees because it is the population that the government has targeted for additional resettlement to Canada. As part of this initiative, some of the Syrian refugees benefitted from faster application processing, the waiving of travel costs during the resettlement process and certain other advantages. Witnesses stressed repeatedly that these advantages have not been offered to other groups of refugees who may be equally in need. This differential treatment appears fundamentally unfair to the Committee. Our refugee system must not provide preferential treatment for those affected by high-profile conflicts. Given that non-Syrian refugees face similar and sometimes more difficult situations than Syrian refugees, many of the Committee's recommendations are relevant with respect to refugees more generally. Welcoming so many Syrian refugees has highlighted the acute needs of those fleeing war and persecution all around the world, and the urgent need to act.

CONSEQUENCES OF THE WAR IN SYRIA

Most of the 4.8 million Syrian refugees – those who have left the country – are concentrated in neighboring states: Turkey (approximately 2.75 million), Lebanon (approximately 1 million), Jordan (approximately 655,000), Iraq (approximately 225,000) and Egypt (approximately 117,000). Another 1.1 million have claimed asylum in different European countries since 2011.⁷

Although they have escaped the horrors of the war, the situation of refugee families remains precarious. They are subject to high levels of economic vulnerability and food insecurity. Many refugees are forced

⁵ Standing Senate Committee on Human Rights, Site visit to COSTI Immigrant Services, Toronto, 1st Session, 42nd Parliament, 30 May 2016.

⁶ Standing Senate Committee on Human Rights, Fact-finding mission, 1st Session, 42nd Parliament, 31 May 2016 (Sylvain Thibault, Project Coordinator, Table de concertation des organismes au service des personnes réfugiées et immigrantes).

⁷ UNHCR, "[Syria Refugee Response, Regional Overview](#)".

to resort to negative coping strategies such as child labour, child marriage and survival sex. Children and adults are at risk of human trafficking and other forms of exploitation, including forced labour.⁸ An entire generation of children faces a future marred by violence, displacement, an inability to access education, and a lack of opportunities.⁹ As of October 2016, just over half of the US\$4.5 billion dollars that the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) estimated would be required to support these refugees in 2016 had been received.¹⁰

With the humanitarian situation in Syria worsening and the conflict intensifying, there is no end in sight. The international community has not been able to agree on a robust response to the situation and no lasting ceasefire has been achieved. The prospect of a political solution that would bring peace to Syria in the near term looks increasingly remote. With no durable solution in sight, and with the resources of host communities already overstretched, refugees and internally displaced Syrians will face a bleak future without sustained support from the international community and countries like Canada.

CANADA'S RESPONSE: THE THREE REFUGEE STREAMS

Canada and Canadians have responded to the massive humanitarian crisis caused by the Syrian civil war and opened their doors to tens of thousands of Syrians fleeing the violence. Since the beginning of November 2015, this country has welcomed over 30,000 Syrian refugees, 25,000 of whom arrived between early November 2015 and the end of February 2016. An additional 20,000 applications are currently being processed.¹¹ The resettlement of so many refugees in such a short time has become a major national project.

These refugees arrive in Canada under three different programs: the government-assisted refugee program (GAR), the private sponsorship of refugees program (PSR), and the blended visa officer-referred program (BVOR). To see the difference between the programs at a glance, refer to Table 1 on page 20. Note that Quebec administers its own refugee settlement program, funded in part through a transfer payment from the federal government under the Canada-Quebec Accord, resulting in some variations of the streams in that province.

Most of the more than 25,000 refugees that arrived during the peak period of resettlement, between 4 November 2015 and 29 February 2016, came to Canada under the GAR and PSR programs (57% were GARs, while 34% were PSRs).¹² According to officials from Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship

⁸ See, e.g. UNHCR, [The fight for survival by Syria's refugee women](#), 2014, p. 37; [Report of the Special Rapporteur on trafficking in persons, especially women and children](#), UN Human Rights Council, 3 May 2016, UN Doc. A/HRC/32/41, paras. 21, 22, 33. Survival sex refers to the practice of exchanging sex for food, shelter, protection or other basic necessities, or the sale of sex in order to survive.

⁹ For more information, see: UNICEF, ["No Lost Generation, About."](#)

¹⁰ Regional Refugee Resilience Plan, Syria Regional Refugee Response Inter-agency Information Sharing Portal, ["Regional Overview."](#) The Committee has previously studied the challenges faced by Syrian refugees in the region, reporting its findings and recommendations in its July 2015 report: Standing Senate Committee on Human Rights, [Protecting a Generation: Are UNICEF and UNHCR Mandates Meeting the Needs of Syrian Children?](#), Fourteenth Report, 41st Parliament, 2nd Session, July 2015.

¹¹ Standing Senate Committee on Human Rights, [Evidence](#), 1st Session, 42nd Parliament, 19 October 2016 (Dawn Edlund, Associate Assistant Deputy Minister, Operations, Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada).

¹² Government of Canada, [#WelcomeRefugees: The Journey to Canada](#).

Canada (IRCC), they are on track to bring 25,000 government supported refugees to Canada by the end of 2016 (a combination of GARs and BVORs).¹³

A. Government-Assisted Refugee Program

Government-assisted refugees (GARs) are supported by the federal government for a period of one year after they arrive in Canada. Those arriving under this stream are recommended for resettlement by UNHCR based on their status as the most vulnerable amongst the Syrian refugee population. Michael Casasola, Resettlement Officer, UNHCR, explained to the Committee that UNHCR “identifies those refugees in need of resettlement based on criteria agreed upon among all resettlement countries, through which UNHCR prioritizes refugees with acute protection needs and vulnerabilities.”¹⁴ Approximately 10% of the 4.8 million Syrian refugees are classified as being the most vulnerable by UNHCR.¹⁵

From this pool of the most vulnerable refugees, UNHCR identified 23,000 who were willing to come to Canada.¹⁶ Their information was subsequently transferred to a Canadian mission in Jordan, Lebanon, Turkey or Egypt to be considered for an interview and, potentially, selection for resettlement in Canada. The majority of the refugees that Canada accepted came as part of family groups. The Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada (the Minister) told the Committee that Canada also prioritized refugees from the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer and intersex community for resettlement because of their particular vulnerability to persecution in the region.¹⁷ Between 4 November 2015 and 30 October 2016, 17,627 Syrians arrived in Canada as GARs.¹⁸

Once in Canada, eligible GARs receive income support from the federal government for their first year in Canada. The amount of support is approximately equivalent to that provided by provincial social assistance programs.¹⁹ In addition, the federal government contracts with various settlement agencies through the Resettlement Assistance Program (RAP) to provide certain services, such as pick-up at the airport, temporary accommodation upon arrival, initial orientation to Canada, assistance in finding accommodation and essential household items. GARs also benefit from settlement services offered to all newcomers, such as language training and assistance in seeking employment.

¹³ Standing Senate Committee on Human Rights, [Evidence](#), 1st Session, 42nd Parliament, 19 October 2016 (Dawn Edlund, Associate Assistant Deputy Minister, Operations, Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada).

¹⁴ Standing Senate Committee on Human Rights, [Evidence](#), 1st Session, 42nd Parliament, 18 May 2016 (Michael Casasola, Resettlement Officer, UNHCR).

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Standing Senate Committee on Human Rights, [Evidence](#), 1st Session, 42nd Parliament, 18 May 2016 (The Honourable John McCallum, P.C., M.P., Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada).

¹⁸ Government of Canada, [#WelcomeRefugees: Key Figures](#).

¹⁹ Standing Senate Committee on Human Rights, [Evidence](#), 1st Session, 42nd Parliament, 18 May 2016 (The Honourable John McCallum, P.C., M.P., Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada).

B. Privately Sponsored Refugee Program

Canada's private sponsorship program for refugees, globally recognized for its unique approach to refugee resettlement, engages private citizens and organizations to provide financial and social support for refugees. UNHCR uses the program as a model for other nations to follow.²⁰ Between 4 November 2015 and 30 October 2016, more than 12,000 PSRs from Syria arrived in Canada.²¹ Private sponsors "are expected to provide the refugees with both financial and settlement support for a period of up to 12 months."²² IRCC indicates that as a "rule of thumb... sponsors are expected to provide a level of support that is at least equal to that of the prevailing rates for social assistance in the expected community of settlement."²³ However, the support that the sponsoring group must provide can be off-set by in-kind donations, as well as the financial resources that refugees bring to Canada.²⁴ Moreover, since these are minimum standards, sponsorship groups with greater means may provide more support. In practice, the level of support provided to refugees by different private sponsorship groups varies considerably.²⁵

Sponsors are also responsible for immediate assistance on arrival, like picking up the refugee at the airport, as well as other support aimed at facilitating the refugee's integration in Canada, such as helping parents to enroll children in school and adults in language classes, assisting with applications for provincial health care coverage, finding a family doctor, and aiding refugees in searching for employment.²⁶

In addition to the integration support they receive from their sponsors, PSRs also have access to certain services from settlement agencies, such as language training and assistance in finding employment.

There are different ways that a private sponsorship may be undertaken. Certain organizations, such as churches and settlement agencies, have sponsorship agreements with the federal government that allow them to sponsor a given number of refugees in a year. These sponsorship agreement holders may sponsor a refugee directly, or they may partner with others (known as "constituent groups") to sponsor refugees under their agreement. It is up to the sponsorship agreement holder to determine who may act as a constituent group under its agreement. Sponsorship agreement holders must also assess the financial support plans of their constituent groups and approve their applications before the applications can be forwarded to IRCC for processing. Where a sponsorship agreement holder authorizes a

²⁰ Standing Senate Committee on Human Rights, [Evidence](#), 1st Session, 42nd Parliament, 18 May 2016 (Michael Casasola, Resettlement Officer, UNHCR).

²¹ Government of Canada, [#WelcomeRefugees: Key Figures](#).

²² Government of Canada, [Private Sponsorship of Refugees \(PSR\) Application Guide \(IMM 5413\)](#), Appendix A – Financial Guidelines.

²³ IRCC, [Guide to the Private Sponsorship of Refugees Program](#), para. 2.7.

²⁴ Ibid.; Government of Canada, [Private Sponsorship of Refugees \(PSR\) Application Guide \(IMM 5413\)](#), Appendix A – Financial Guidelines.

²⁵ Standing Senate Committee on Human Rights, Fact-finding mission to Montreal, 1st Session, 42nd Parliament, 31 May 2016 (Jennet Dench, Executive Director, Canadian Council for Refugees and Jean Rodin, Coordinator of Educational Services, Laval School Board). For an example, see: IRCC, [Evaluation of the Resettlement Programs \(GAR, PSR, BVOR and RAP\)](#), July 2016, p. 31.

²⁶ IRCC, [Guide to the Private Sponsorship of Refugees Program](#); Government of Canada, para. 2.6.

constituent group to act as a sponsor, the refugee becomes the responsibility of the agreement holder if the constituent group cannot fulfill its commitments.²⁷

Groups of five or more individuals (or, in Quebec, two or more individuals) and community organizations may also act as private sponsors without a sponsorship agreement holder. Some of these groups may use their own resources to meet the needs of the refugees they are sponsoring, while others may meet their financial obligations through fundraising. The financial support plans of groups of five are assessed by IRCC.

Many refugees are privately sponsored by family members who already live in Canada.²⁸ Family members may choose to sponsor as part of a group of five (or two in Quebec) or as a constituent group of a sponsorship agreement holder. Some family members may approach an existing constituent group, such as a local religious congregation, or a community organization, to act as a private sponsor for their relatives.

The federal government has committed to complete the processing, by early 2017, of all PSR applications for Syrian refugees submitted before the end of March 2016. The PSR applications received before the end of March 2015 involve a total of 12,200 individuals.²⁹ By mid-October 2016, 3,100 of these individuals had landed in Canada and another 1,400 had their visas, had gone through overseas orientation and were waiting for the International Organization for Migration to schedule their travel, which takes four to six weeks. Approximately 5,400 had completed their medical and security screening and in 900 cases, a negative decision was made, or the application was withdrawn or not pursued. The remaining applications have yet to be processed.³⁰

C. Blended Visa Office-Referred Refugees

The BVOR program was introduced in 2012. This program matches vulnerable persons referred to Canadian officials by UNHCR with private sponsors. Since refugees under the BVOR program have already been approved, private sponsors do not face processing delays that are as lengthy as those encountered under the PSR program.³¹ Under the BVOR program, the federal government and the private sponsors share financial obligations equally, with each being responsible for covering refugees' costs for six months of the first year in Canada. As under the PSR program, private sponsors may provide additional funds, above the required minimum.³²

²⁷ Ibid., Chapter 2.

²⁸ Standing Senate Committee on Human Rights, [Evidence](#), 1st Session, 42nd Parliament, 18 May 2016 (Michael Casasola, Resettlement Officer, UNHCR).

²⁹ Standing Senate Committee on Human Rights, [Evidence](#), 1st Session, 42nd Parliament, 19 October 2016 (Dawn Edlund, Associate Assistant Deputy Minister, Operations, Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada).

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Standing Senate Committee on Human Rights, [Evidence](#), 1st Session, 42nd Parliament, 18 May 2016 (David Manicom, Associate Assistant Deputy Minister, Strategic and Program Policy Sector, Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada and Michael Casasola, Resettlement Officer, UNHCR).

³² Standing Senate Committee on Human Rights, [Evidence](#), 1st Session, 42nd Parliament, 19 October 2016 (Reverend Brian Cornelius, Chair of the Finance Committee, First United Church, United Church of Canada).

The BVOR program was used in only a minority of Syrian refugee cases, with 3,445 people resettled to Canada between 4 November 2015 and 30 October 2016.³³ David Manicom, Associate Assistant Deputy Minister, Strategic and Program Policy Sector at IRCC, explained that:

[i]t would have been extremely challenging to have set up a new system to do a matching service during the middle of the airlift, with hundreds of people arriv[ing] every day.³⁴

A 2016 IRCC evaluation report on resettlement programs indicates that the BVOR matching process has been improved as a result of the Syrian refugee initiative, but that demand for BVOR refugees “now significantly exceeds supply”.³⁵ This surge in demand for BVOR refugee sponsorships may explain the concern voiced by Reverend Brian Cornelius, Chair of the Finance Committee of the First United Church, in October 2016 that the BVOR program has become more difficult to access.³⁶

Table 1 – Federal Refugee Resettlement Programs at a Glance

	Private Sponsorship of Refugees	Government Assisted Refugees	Blended Visa-Officer Referred
Referred to IRCC by	Private sponsors	UNHCR	UNHCR
Funded by	Private sponsors	IRCC, through the Resettlement Assistance Program	IRCC and private sponsor each responsible for six months of income support; Private sponsor covers start-up costs
Initial Settlement support by	Private sponsors	Resettlement Assistance Program funds settlement organizations	Private sponsors
Settlement support by	Settlement agencies	Settlement agencies	Settlement agencies
Destinations in Canada	Where the private sponsors live	The cities where the Resettlement Assistance Program is delivered	Where the private sponsors live

DELAYS, BUREAUCRACY AND UNEQUAL TREATMENT

A. Slow Processing of Applications

At the height of the resettlement of Syrian refugees in January and February 2016, the Canadian government processed applications for resettlement on a greatly expedited basis. For example, the part

³³ Government of Canada, [#WelcomeRefugees: Key Figures](#).

³⁴ Standing Senate Committee on Human Rights, [Evidence](#), 1st Session, 42nd Parliament, 18 May 2016 (David Manicom, Associate Assistant Deputy Minister, Strategic and Program Policy Sector, Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada).

³⁵ IRCC, [Evaluation of the Resettlement Programs \(GAR, PSR, BVOR and RAP\)](#), July 2016, p. viii.

³⁶ Standing Senate Committee on Human Rights, [Evidence](#), 1st Session, 42nd Parliament, 19 October 2016 (Reverend Brian Cornelius, Chair of the Finance Committee, First United Church, United Church of Canada).

of the sponsorship application to be completed by the sponsors was turned around in as little as 24 hours for some refugees under the BVOR stream.³⁷ For six weeks in May and June 2016, there was another “processing blitz” in Beirut, Lebanon in order to meet the Government of Canada’s commitment to process, by early 2017, all applications received for privately sponsored Syrian refugees before 31 March 2016. Forty additional employees were redeployed temporarily to interview candidates for resettlement. These employees have since been withdrawn, but additional personnel continue to be sent to Beirut on a temporary basis in lower numbers. As of the end of October 2016, a total of 22,157 Syrian refugee applications under all streams were in progress. Another 3,072 applications had been finalized and the refugees were awaiting travel to Canada.³⁸

Officials indicated that the expedited processing times for Syrian refugees were always intended to be temporary, and that additional resources were withdrawn or re-deployed once the targets were met or on track to be met. For example, the staffing surge in the spring of 2016 allowed IRCC to process several thousand applications very quickly, thereby keeping overall processing times on pace to meet applicable targets. After this surge, processing times slowed down again. The Committee was told that the backlog of applications was not a relevant consideration in the allocation of resources. In fact, officials explained that the additional employees were withdrawn even though “[t]here are still lots of applications. Many applications have come in for privately sponsored refugees after March 31 [2016], but those [are not] part of a processing commitment”.³⁹

The Committee wishes to underscore that this focus on targets and the related slowdowns in processing times can have very real, negative impacts on refugees and on the Canadians who sponsor them. For example, Andrew Harvey of the Ottawa Centre Refugee Settlement Group, informed the Committee that his group formed in January 2016 and completed the applications to sponsor two related Syrian refugee families in April 2016, only days after the end of March cut-off date for expedited processing. The two families currently live in Saudi Arabia, but their visas run out at the end of 2016 and they are not sure where else they can go. The sponsors received notice in October from IRCC that the application for one family had been accepted, but they have not been able to obtain any information about the status of the second family’s application. The estimated processing time for refugee applicants currently in Saudi Arabia is 48 months. Even though one family’s application has been accepted, Mr. Harvey is not convinced that it will be processed before their Saudi Arabian visa runs out. Both families are becoming increasingly anxious about their future and are starting to lose hope.⁴⁰ The Committee heard that Mr. Harvey’s experience is not unique – other Syrian refugee families are also left waiting in uncertain situations, with their residence permits in host countries set to expire.⁴¹

³⁷ Standing Senate Committee on Human Rights, [Evidence](#), 1st Session, 42nd Parliament, 19 October 2016 (Angela Keller-Herzog, Core Organizer, Ottawa Centre Refugee Action).

³⁸ Standing Senate Committee on Human Rights, [Evidence](#), 1st Session, 42nd Parliament, 19 October 2016 (Dawn Edlund, Associate Assistant Deputy Minister, Operations, Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada).

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Standing Senate Committee on Human Rights, [Evidence](#), 1st Session, 42nd Parliament, 19 October 2016 (Andrew Harvey, Ottawa Centre Refugee Settlement Group).

⁴¹ Standing Senate Committee on Human Rights, [Evidence](#), 1st Session, 42nd Parliament, 19 October 2016 (Saleem Spindari, Manager, Refugee Settlement Support Projects, Family and Settlement Services, MOSAIC).

Loss of energy due to slowed processes would be really unfortunate because the energy of engaged sponsorship groups provides a network and even a sense of family for new arrivals.

— Reverend Brian Cornelius, Chair of the Finance Committee,
First United Church, United Church of Canada

Given the rapid processing times when Mr. Harvey and his group began filling out the application for the two families in Saudi Arabia, they and many others were taken by surprise by the long delays in finalizing their applications. The lack of transparency with respect to changes in processing timelines has also caused dismay. Mr. Harvey's evidence serves as a reminder that discussions about processing targets for refugees should not be allowed to overshadow the fact that each refugee application involves real individuals experiencing real hardship.

A number of witnesses were also worried that the slowdown could have a negative effect on interest in private sponsorship in general. Alexander Vadala, Senior Coordinator, Policy & Research, Ontario Council of Agencies Serving Immigrants (OCASI⁴²), argued that removing the additional resources that were provided to reach the initial target of 25,000 while so many others still wanted to sponsor "left a bad taste and threatened the goodwill that had been created among the Canadian public."⁴³

When timelines are long or unclear, it is difficult for community groups and individuals to make the financial, social and logistical commitment expected of sponsors.⁴⁴ Witnesses were concerned that delays are having an impact on the number of individuals and organizations willing to be involved in private sponsorship.⁴⁵ Malaz Sebai, Board Director, Lifeline Syria, an organization that recruits and trains sponsors in Toronto, urged the Government of Canada not to "place a cap on Canadian compassion."⁴⁶

Sadly, the bureaucracy around sponsorship is choking this goodwill from sponsors.

— Louisa Taylor, Director, Refugee 613

A second issue in relation to delays is the unequal treatment of refugees from different parts of the world. The Government of Canada accelerated the processing of applications for private sponsorships of Syrian refugees, but did not do so for refugees from other countries. Processing times for applications received by the end of March 2016 for Syrian refugees are approximately six months to a year, whereas

⁴² OCASI is an umbrella organization of over 200 community-based organizations serving immigrants and refugees in the province of Ontario.

⁴³ Standing Senate Committee on Human Rights, [Evidence](#), 1st Session, 42nd Parliament, 30 May 2016 (Alexander Vadala, Senior Coordinator, Policy & Research, Ontario Council of Agencies Serving Immigrants).

⁴⁴ Standing Senate Committee on Human Rights, [Evidence](#), 1st Session, 42nd Parliament, 19 October 2016 (Saleem Spindari, Manager, Refugee Settlement Support Projects, Family and Settlement Services, MOSAIC).

⁴⁵ See for example, Saleem Spindar, *ibid*.

⁴⁶ Standing Senate Committee on Human Rights, [Evidence](#), 1st Session, 42nd Parliament, 30 May 2016 (Malaz Sebai, Board Director, Lifeline Syria).

the delay for other refugee populations can be five years.⁴⁷ Janet Dench, Executive Director of the Canadian Council for Refugees, an umbrella organization that advocates for refugees and other vulnerable migrants, indicated that this inequality is compounded by the fact that reallocating resources to expedite the processing of Syrian refugee applications slowed processing for African refugees.⁴⁸ Saleem Spindari, Manager, Refugee Settlement Support Projects, Family and Settlement Services, at the B.C. settlement agency MOSAIC, hoped that wait times would be addressed for all refugees, not only Syrians.⁴⁹

Witnesses recommended an increase in human, financial and logistical resources in order to improve processing times. If IRCC has insufficient personnel to process applications in a timely fashion, one witness suggested that this work could be done by the International Organization for Migration, which already processes some temporary resident applications for Canada.⁵⁰ Other suggestions included increasing resources for overseas visa offices, transferring some processing to offices in Canada, and creating a hotline to provide information and assist applicants.⁵¹

The Committee understands that the Government of Canada's resources are not infinite and that Canada cannot offer safe haven to all of the world's refugees. Nevertheless, processing delays have a very real impact on the safety and security of privately sponsored refugees. The Committee stresses that all privately sponsored refugee applications should be processed within a reasonable amount of time.⁵² Moreover, decisions about resource allocation should be transparent and predictable.

The Committee encourages IRCC to consider the suggestions made by witnesses, as well as any other available options to accelerate processing times so that refugees can reach safety in Canada more quickly. Canadians are ready to welcome refugees. The Committee believes that the Government of Canada should encourage their generosity.

B. Inadequate Information Sharing, Coordination and Funding

Witnesses told the Committee that settlement agencies should be proud of their accomplishment in welcoming such a large number of refugees in a short period of time, despite a lack of sufficient information, coordination and funding from the federal government. Sponsors, settlement agencies, settlement agreement holders, and refugees themselves all expressed frustration at a lack of clear, accurate and timely information from IRCC throughout the resettlement process. At the front end, the Committee heard that it was difficult for groups of individuals to obtain information about private

⁴⁷ Standing Senate Committee on Human Rights, Fact-finding mission to Montreal, 1st Session, 42nd Parliament, 31 May 2016 (Canadian Alliance for Syrian Aid).

⁴⁸ Standing Senate Committee on Human Rights, Fact-finding mission to Montreal, 1st Session, 42nd Parliament, 31 May 2016 (Janet Dench, Executive Director, Canadian Council for Refugees).

⁴⁹ Standing Senate Committee on Human Rights, [Evidence](#), 1st Session, 42nd Parliament, 19 October 2016 (Saleem Spindari, Manager, Refugee Settlement Support Projects, Family and Settlement Services, MOSAIC).

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Standing Senate Committee on Human Rights, [Evidence](#), 1st Session, 42nd Parliament, 30 May 2016 (Alexander Vadala, Senior Coordinator, Policy & Research, Ontario Council of Agencies Serving Immigrants).

⁵² Standing Senate Committee on Human Rights, [Evidence](#), 1st Session, 42nd Parliament, 19 October 2016 (Reverend Brian Cornelius, Chair of the Finance Committee, First United Church, United Church of Canada).

sponsorship and the application process, particularly for Syrians outside the main refugee hosting countries of Turkey, Lebanon and Jordan.

The Committee was also told that it is difficult to obtain information about the ways in which linked applications (such as distinct but related family groups) are processed.⁵³ Reverend Cornelius told the Committee of the fatigue that sponsorship groups feel as result.⁵⁴

As the most well-known and accessible organizations in the refugee resettlement process, these settlement agencies provide the public with information about the system, sponsorship opportunities and other ways to get involved. When government sources do not communicate effectively, settlement agencies often have to pick up the slack. Settlement agencies are having difficulty managing the volume of inquiries in the wake of the Syrian resettlement initiative. Gerry Mills, Director of Operations at Immigrant Services Association of Nova Scotia, stated that in Nova Scotia, “everybody is looking towards the settlement agencies for every piece of information.”⁵⁵ Louisa Taylor, Director of Refugee 613, stressed that settlement agencies are not “funded to screen, train and support the community interest.”⁵⁶

A lack of formal coordinating systems for case management and service delivery was also identified as a key gap by Mr. Vadala.⁵⁷ Likewise, Angela Keller-Herzog, the core organizer for Ottawa Centre Refugee Action, told the Committee that her organization is concerned about “undue delays and widespread processing confusions” in the issuance of permanent resident cards, which are necessary in order for refugees to get other forms of identification.⁵⁸ Both Ms. Taylor and Ms. Mills emphasized the need for the Government of Canada to play a greater role in facilitating communication between settlement agencies and private sponsors to ensure that all private sponsors are able to access available supports – including family-linked sponsorship groups who are the least engaged with services and most at risk.

Ms. Taylor also expressed frustration that settlement partners that were not providing RAP services to GARs “were left out of the loop” as communication regarding arrivals was focused on RAP agencies.⁵⁹ Gerry Mills spoke about the impact that last minute communications can have on settlement partners:

We got an email at the end of last week saying that in order to get the numbers in, people are going to be arriving after 10 pm and on weekends.

⁵³ Standing Senate Committee on Human Rights, [Evidence](#), 1st Session, 42nd Parliament, 19 October 2016 (Andrew Harvey, Ottawa Centre Refugee Settlement Group).

⁵⁴ Standing Senate Committee on Human Rights, [Evidence](#), 1st Session, 42nd Parliament, 19 October 2016 (Reverend Brian Cornelius, Chair of the Finance Committee, First United Church, United Church of Canada).

⁵⁵ Standing Senate Committee on Human Rights, [Evidence](#), 1st Session, 42nd Parliament, 11 May 2016 (Gerry Mills, Director, Operations, Immigrant Services Association of Nova Scotia).

⁵⁶ Standing Senate Committee on Human Rights, [Evidence](#), 1st Session, 42nd Parliament, 11 May 2016 (Louisa Taylor, Director, Refugee 613).

⁵⁷ Standing Senate Committee on Human Rights, [Evidence](#), 1st Session, 42nd Parliament, 30 May 2016 (Alexander Vadala, Senior Coordinator, Policy & Research, Ontario Council of Agencies Serving Immigrants).

⁵⁸ Standing Senate Committee on Human Rights, [Evidence](#), 1st Session, 42nd Parliament, 19 October 2016 (Angela Keller-Herzog, Core Organizer, Ottawa Centre Refugee Action).

⁵⁹ Standing Senate Committee on Human Rights, [Evidence](#), 1st Session, 42nd Parliament, 11 May 2016 (Louisa Taylor, Director, Refugee 613). As noted above, RAP services are the initial services provided by settlement agencies under contract to IRCC when a refugee arrives, such as pick up at the airport, temporary housing, etc.

That's just one small email — one small piece of information — but what it means for [a] RAP provider is, “Whoa, we have to rethink this thing,” especially during the summer.⁶⁰

Similarly, Cathy Nguyen of Action Réfugiés Montréal, told the Committee that at times her organization, a sponsorship agreement holder, had only one day's notice from IRCC of an upcoming arrival, even though the airplane ticket had clearly been purchased further in advance.⁶¹ Fortunately, the constituent group sponsoring the refugees was aware of the arrival. In some cases, IRCC also failed to provide refugees themselves with timely information. The Committee also heard of one Syrian refugee family that was given only two days' notice before leaving to come to Canada.

In addition to communication challenges, the Committee was informed that the settlement sector is struggling to meet the needs of Syrian refugees due to underfunding. Ms. Taylor stated that:

Years of cutbacks are coming home to roost... the settlement sector is not funded to do outreach with the community. They have also had to deal with repeated budget cuts, and they compete over scarce resources. This has reduced their ability to step up in a moment of crisis, as they're already stepping up on a chronically underfunded basis.⁶²

Likewise, Ms. Dench explained that settlement agencies were left in a predicament: “all the organizations wanted to plan as much as they could, but without the money and without the full details, they weren't able to be as effective as they could.”⁶³

Departmental officials acknowledged that they continue to struggle to provide information to service providers, provinces and territories, school boards and communities in a timely manner. They recognized that additional resources need to be dedicated to information sharing in order to facilitate planning by partners. Dawn Edlund, Associate Deputy Minister, Operations, Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada indicated that “[h]aving more time and resources to put towards making sure the information we have is shared in a timely way to allow other partners in the system to plan for things and get ready for things would be important.”⁶⁴

Officials explained that they were planning and implementing the Syrian resettlement at the same time, given the commitments that had been made by the Government of Canada. Having even a couple of weeks to do more planning at the beginning would have made a significant difference. They also suggested that greater consideration of the pace of arrivals was needed.⁶⁵

⁶⁰ Standing Senate Committee on Human Rights, [Evidence](#), 1st Session, 42nd Parliament, 11 May 2016 (Gerry Mills, Director, Operations, Immigrant Services Association of Nova Scotia).

⁶¹ Standing Senate Committee on Human Rights, Fact-finding mission to Montreal, 1st Session, 42nd Parliament, 31 May 2016 (Cathy Nguyen, Sponsorship Program Coordinator, Action Réfugié Montréal).

⁶² Standing Senate Committee on Human Rights, [Evidence](#), 1st Session, 42nd Parliament, 11 May 2016 (Louisa Taylor, Director, Refugee 613).

⁶³ Standing Senate Committee on Human Rights, Fact-finding mission to Montreal, 1st Session, 42nd Parliament, 31 May 2016 (Janet Dench, Executive Director, Canadian Council for Refugees).

⁶⁴ Standing Senate Committee on Human Rights, [Evidence](#), 1st Session, 42nd Parliament, 19 October 2016 (Dawn Edlund, Associate Assistant Deputy Minister, Operations, Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada).

⁶⁵ Ibid.

The Committee is of the view that there are valuable lessons to be learned from the Syrian resettlement initiative. Such a major initiative ought to incorporate a period of advance planning. Moreover, resources need to be allocated specifically to communicating with, and providing support to, the full range of organizations that work with refugees and private sponsors, as well as the refugees and sponsors themselves.

C. The Refugees who Start out Behind

The demographics of, and resources available to, the two principal streams of Syrian refugees (PSRs and GARs) are quite different and the implications will have an impact on their ability to integrate. As underscored below, a number of PSRs arrive equipped to tackle life in Canada and are supported by a strong network of individuals who are willing to help. On the other hand, private sponsorships do occasionally breakdown. When this happens, there is a risk that PSRs may be left entirely without support. GARs are specifically selected because they are the most vulnerable, yet they generally receive less support than PSRs. Innovative solutions are required to ensure that they are able to successfully integrate and develop the social support systems they will need to thrive in Canada.

1. Demographics of the GAR and PSR Syrian refugees

Like all refugees arriving in Canada, Syrian GARs and PSRs will face challenges in the integration process. However, the hurdles faced by GARs may be more substantial, because of the distinct demographic differences between the Syrian refugees who arrive under the GAR and the PSR streams.

Language skills and education are key factors for employment and social integration. The Committee was informed that PSRs are generally of a higher social and economic status than GARs, who were selected because they are the most in need of protection.⁶⁶ Sixty percent of Syrian PSRs arrived with English-language skills, in contrast with ten percent of GARs. The PSRs tend to have more education as well, while some GARs are completely illiterate in their native language.⁶⁷

GAR families also tend to be larger, with numerous children. PSRs also often have family already in Canada, which can help with their integration. As Mario J. Calla, the executive director of COSTI Immigrant Services said, “[c]learly, the privately sponsored ... single person who already speaks English, is going to be able to... find a job and get going a lot more quickly.”⁶⁸ On the other hand, the Minister said of GARs:

We asked the United Nations for vulnerable people, and we got them. We wanted them, so in a sense that's good. The other side of the coin is that it

⁶⁶ Standing Senate Committee on Human Rights, Fact-finding mission to Montreal, 1st Session, 42nd Parliament, 31 May 2016 (Janet Dench, Executive Director, Canadian Council for Refugees).

⁶⁷ Standing Senate Committee on Human Rights, [Evidence](#), 1st Session, 42nd Parliament, 30 May 2016 (Mario J. Calla, Executive Director COSTI Immigrant Services and Bayan Khatib, Board Member and Head of the Social Committee, Syrian Canadian Foundation).

⁶⁸ Standing Senate Committee on Human Rights, [Evidence](#), 1st Session, 42nd Parliament, 30 May 2016 (Mario J. Calla, Executive Director COSTI Immigrant Services).

might take more work to prepare people with that demographic profile for success...⁶⁹

2. GARs, PSRs and BVORs: ensuring adequate support for all

In addition to the demographic differences noted above, which can significantly influence how easily a person integrates into Canadian society, PSRs and BVORs often receive intensive support from the group of committed volunteers who sponsor them. As Reverend Cornelius explained:

Our refugee sponsorship groups listen to the story of their newly arrived friends, listen to their dreams and hopes for a future and then, in addition to the practical support of finding housing, guaranteeing and establishing utility and communication services and the myriad of other practical realities, work ... to realiz[e] those deeper future dreams.⁷⁰

In contrast, GARs receive support for specific issues from caseworkers managing multiple files at settlement agencies that operate under contract with IRCC. As a result, they generally receive limited support. Witnesses from organizations that work with refugees informed the Committee that there are community volunteers who would like to help GARs. Opportunities also exist to engage private sponsorship groups in the settlement of GARs. Unfortunately, although some organizations have created matching programs to link volunteers to GAR families, many others lack the capacity to manage volunteers to assist GARs.⁷¹

3. Sponsorship breakdown: PSRs and BVORs left without support

Although most PSRs and BVORs are supported by a network of dedicated individuals when they arrive in Canada, this is not universally the case. In some instances, private sponsorships breakdown and sponsors fail to meet their financial obligations after the refugees arrive.⁷² The Committee heard that these breakdowns occur most often in the context of family reunification. Angela Keller-Herzog reminded the Committee that individuals and families do not always get along; it should not be surprising if there are occasional instances in which private sponsorship agreements do not work out, particularly when very vulnerable groups of people are involved.⁷³ The Committee agrees with her observation that the real question is whether adequate support structures are in place to catch refugees who unexpectedly find themselves without backing from their sponsors.

⁶⁹ Standing Senate Committee on Human Rights, [Evidence](#), 1st Session, 42nd Parliament, 18 May 2016 (The Honourable John McCallum, P.C., M.P., Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship).

⁷⁰ Standing Senate Committee on Human Rights, [Evidence](#), 1st Session, 42nd Parliament, 19 October 2016 (Reverend Brian Cornelius, Chair of the Finance Committee, First United Church, United Church of Canada).

⁷¹ Standing Senate Committee on Human Rights, [Evidence](#), 1st Session, 42nd Parliament, 11 May 2016 (Louisa Taylor, Director, Refugee 613); Standing Senate Committee on Human Rights, [Evidence](#), 1st Session, 42nd Parliament, 30 May 2016 (Bayan Khatib, Board Member and Head of the Social Committee, Syrian Canadian Foundation).

⁷² Standing Senate Committee on Human Rights, Fact-finding mission to Montreal, 1st Session, 42nd Parliament, 31 May 2016 (Janet Dench, Executive Director, Canadian Council for Refugees; Jean Rodin, Coordinator of Educational Services, Laval School Board; and, Cathy Nguyen, Sponsorship Program Coordinator, Action Réfugié Montréal).

⁷³ Standing Senate Committee on Human Rights, [Evidence](#), 1st Session, 42nd Parliament, 19 October 2016 (Angela Keller-Herzog, Core Organizer, Ottawa Centre Refugee Action).

Witnesses indicated that when sponsorship relationships are under strain, settlement agencies and other organizations that assist private sponsors can offer support and conflict resolution services.⁷⁴ In some cases, a settlement agency or the federal government could step in to find an alternative solution.⁷⁵

The Committee takes note of a recent evaluation of Canada's refugee resettlement program, to which officials referred during their testimony.⁷⁶ The evaluation pointed out that although IRCC personnel are responsible for monitoring sponsors and privately-sponsored refugees, "there are no formal mechanisms to implement the monitoring of sponsors' activities."⁷⁷ In response to this evaluation, IRCC has indicated that it will "develop a plan for improved client/sponsor monitoring" and "clarify points of contact for PSRs and BVORs ... in the event of sponsorship breakdown."⁷⁸

It is clear that a community that collectively cares for its vulnerable is a healthier and more cohesive community. The government should take care to promote through its policies the involvement and participation of civil society.

— Mario J. Calla, Executive Director, COSTI Immigrant Services

The Committee is of the view that all actors in the refugee resettlement system must work to address the needs of the more vulnerable GARs and PSRs. It agrees with Ms. Taylor, who said "there are rich resources in the community in terms of time and talent. More strategic investment by different levels of government in developing those resources and leveraging them in cooperation with the sponsorship and settlement sector will make a huge difference to long-term integration."⁷⁹

A final note regarding the unequal treatment of refugees based on the stream they are in, their country of origin and other such factors. If Canada's refugee resettlement system is to remain credible, all refugees must be treated equitably. GARs and PSRs often receive vastly different levels of support; some refugees are required to repay thousands of dollars in travel loans while others in similar economic circumstances are not; and processing times in different parts of the world vary by years. Canada cannot continue like this without seeing our reputation for fairness tarnished.

⁷⁴ Standing Senate Committee on Human Rights, [Evidence](#), 1st Session, 42nd Parliament, 19 October 2016 (Reverend Brian Cornelius, Chair of the Finance Committee, First United Church, United Church of Canada and Saleem Spindari, Manager, Refugee Settlement Support Projects, Family and Settlement Services, MOSAIC).

⁷⁵ Standing Senate Committee on Human Rights, [Evidence](#), 1st Session, 42nd Parliament, 18 May 2016 (Dawn Edlund, Associate Assistant Deputy Minister, Operations, Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada); Standing Senate Committee on Human Rights, [Evidence](#), 1st Session, 42nd Parliament, 19 October 2016 (Saleem Spindari, Manager, Refugee Settlement Support Projects, Family and Settlement Services, MOSAIC).

⁷⁶ Standing Senate Committee on Human Rights, [Evidence](#), 1st Session, 42nd Parliament, 19 October 2016 (Dawn Edlund, Associate Assistant Deputy Minister, Operations, Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada).

⁷⁷ IRCC, [Evaluation of the Resettlement Programs \(GAR, PSR, BVOR and RAP\)](#), July 2016, p. 18.

⁷⁸ IRCC, [Evaluation of the Resettlement Programs \(GAR, PSR, BVOR and RAP\)](#), July 2016, p. ix.

⁷⁹ Standing Senate Committee on Human Rights, [Evidence](#), 1st Session, 42nd Parliament, 11 May 2016 (Louisa Taylor, Director, Refugee 613).

BARELY SCRAPING BY: HIGH COSTS AND LOW INCOMES

An issue that was raised repeatedly in the Committee's study was the inadequacy of federal income support for GARs. There is general agreement that the level of financial support, which is tied to provincial social assistance rates, is inadequate to meet refugees' essential needs. Witnesses told the Committee, for example, that the amounts provided are insufficient to cover housing costs as well as food.⁸⁰ Muhammad Rehan, General Manager of the Muslim Welfare Centre of Toronto, told the Committee that, since the arrival of Syrian refugees in Canada, his food bank has seen a threefold increase in patrons: it used to serve 30 clients per day; it now serves an average of 90. This is placing enormous strain on organizations such as his, which serve halal meat.⁸¹ A recent IRCC evaluation report includes results from a survey (which did not include Syrian refugees) indicating that 65% of GARs used food banks.⁸²

We as volunteers have had to struggle to pull together money to help people pay rent ... This is really a huge problem...

— Bayan Khatib, Board Member and Head of the Social Committee, Syrian Canadian Foundation

Since the level of federal income support is tied to provincial social assistance rates, any solution to this problem is complex. Mr. Calla, for example, suggested that this issue should be addressed not only with respect to refugees, but for all Canadians.⁸³

A. Income support: The importance of Child Tax Benefits

In the context of extremely limited federal income support, funds received from the Canada Child Benefit can be critically important to refugee families. The Committee heard repeatedly that delays in receiving child tax benefits (formerly the Canada child tax benefit) had a huge impact on the budgets of Syrian refugee families during the period immediately following their arrival in Canada. These are tax-free benefits provided by the federal government to help with the cost of raising children. The program is not limited to refugee families and the amount received is income dependent. Families receive benefits for children under the age of 18 and the amount is calculated based on the parents' income tax returns.

Witnesses told the Committee that many refugee families rely on this benefit to meet their basic needs – including purchasing food for their families. The amounts can be quite substantial. Corinne Prince St-Amand, Director General, Integration-Foreign Credentials Referral Office, Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada explained that in Ontario (the amount varies by jurisdiction), for example, a family with six children under the age of 18 could receive \$48,285 in federal benefits annually, if they qualify to receive the maximum amount under the Canada Child Benefit and the Goods and services /Harmonized

⁸⁰ Standing Senate Committee on Human Rights, [Evidence](#), 1st Session, 42nd Parliament, 11 May 2016 (Gerry Mills, Director, Operations, Immigrant Services Association of Nova Scotia).

⁸¹ Standing Senate Committee on Human Rights, [Evidence](#), 1st Session, 42nd Parliament, 30 May 2016 (Muhammad Rehan, General Manager, Muslim Welfare Centre of Toronto).

⁸² IRCC, [Evaluation of the Resettlement Programs \(GAR, PSR, BVOR and RAP\)](#), July 2016, p. 29.

⁸³ Standing Senate Committee on Human Rights, [Evidence](#), 1st Session, 42nd Parliament, 30 May 2016 (Mario J. Calla, Executive Director COSTI Immigrant Services).

sales tax credit based on their income.⁸⁴ However, processing delays mean that some refugees have to wait months before they receive the Canada Child Benefit. The Committee also heard from COSTI that CRA has requested its clients “fill out an extensive questionnaire and provide supporting documents such as report cards from schools, supporting letters from doctors, landlord, phone bills. This in turn puts a huge pressure on caseworkers as they’d need to assign interpreters and possible accompaniment to solve this one issue.”⁸⁵

At the Committee’s last meeting for this study, IRCC officials informed the Committee that they have been working with the Canada Revenue Agency (CRA) to expedite delivery of the Canada Child Benefit. The results, however, seem mixed. Although some improvements were reported, Mr. Calla indicated that long wait times remain a problem for some of the refugees with whom his organization works.⁸⁶ Government officials also highlighted a new concern in relation to these benefits. As with all beneficiaries, Syrian families will be required to submit tax returns for 2016 in order for CRA to calculate the amounts they are owed in 2017. Families that do not submit their return will stop receiving the benefits. IRCC and CRA are currently developing a plan to ensure that the refugees understand what is required to maintain their benefits.⁸⁷

The Committee is pleased to see that IRCC is working on this issue and took its observations from this past June to heart. The Committee expects that any remaining delays in processing refugees’ child tax credit applications will be resolved promptly. It is also of the view that IRCC should work with CRA to minimize the need for additional documentation in order to verify refugees’ eligibility for the Canada Child Benefit.

B. The High Cost of Housing

Finding affordable housing has proven to be challenging for many Syrian refugees, especially those with large families who are settling in major urban centres. Many GARs who arrived between 4 November 2015 and 29 February 2016, for instance, were accommodated in hotels for longer periods than usual because they had difficulty finding housing. For some, the arrangement lasted months. During this time, families were confined to small hotel rooms designed for short stays.

In some cities, like Montreal, municipal restrictions on access to subsidized housing compound these difficulties. Mazen Houdeib, Director General of Le Regroupement des organismes du Montréal ethnique pour le logement (ROMEL) told the Committee that finding housing for the large number of Syrian refugees arriving at the same time was difficult, despite the fact that his organization has an extensive affordable housing database, because the city of Montreal has a one-year residency requirement for rent subsidies and social housing. Mr. Houdeib expressed concern that, because of the shortage of affordable housing, refugees are living in overcrowded conditions. The Committee was also informed

⁸⁴ Standing Senate Committee on Human Rights, [Evidence](#), 1st Session, 42nd Parliament, 19 October 2016 (Corinne Prince St-Amand, Director General, Integration-Foreign Credentials Referral Office, Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada). All families in Canada earning less than \$30,000 a year can apply for [Goods and Services/Harmonized Sales Tax credit](#) in addition to receiving the [Canada Child Benefit](#).

⁸⁵ Mario Calla, COSTI Immigrant Services, written submission, 9 November 2016.

⁸⁶ Mario Calla, COSTI Immigrant Services, written submission, 9 November 2016.

⁸⁷ Standing Senate Committee on Human Rights, [Evidence](#), 1st Session, 42nd Parliament, 19 October 2016 (Dawn Edlund, Associate Assistant Deputy Minister, Operations, Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada).

that some Montreal landlords were engaging in illegal leasing practices, signing multiple leases for the same apartment or asking refugees to pay a full year's rent in advance. Mr. Houdeib recommended that housing subsidies be granted to refugees upon arrival, and also advocated for broader investments in subsidized housing generally.⁸⁸

The Committee was pleased to learn that progress has been made in some areas. On 19 October 2016, departmental officials said that 100% of the refugees that arrived before the end of February now have permanent housing.⁸⁹

C. The Impact of the Immigration Loans Program

The Government of Canada loans money to refugees to cover their travel costs to Canada. Repayment of travel loans starts 30 days after arrival in Canada, and the loans must be re-paid, with interest, within one to six years, depending on the amount of the loan. A deferral of payment for up to 24 months or a review of repayment arrangements can be requested for reasons of financial hardship.⁹⁰

The Government of Canada waived the travel loan for Syrian refugees who arrived between 4 November 2015 and 29 February 2016. However, Syrian refugees who arrived before and after these dates, as well as those who arrived from countries other than Turkey, Lebanon, and Jordan must still repay their travel costs.⁹¹ Refugees who are not Syrian are required to repay the loan regardless of their arrival date.⁹² According to Ms. Mills, this is creating an unfair, 'two-tier' refugee system.⁹³

Numerous witnesses were critical of the Immigration Loans Program and the inequity of waiving the travel loan for some refugees but not others. Mr. Vadala stated that the loan "only serves to further impoverish a group that is already facing significant financial challenges."⁹⁴ As Mr. Spindari indicated, refugees can repay the travel loans:

and most of them are repaying the amount, but they are cutting corners in order to be able to do that. They are taking from the child care subsidies they are getting in order to make these payments. So the will is there. They are doing that. But because we are treating the whole program as a humanitarian program, if it is waived, it would ease their transition and integration and settlement into their communities.⁹⁵

⁸⁸ Standing Senate Committee on Human Rights, Fact-finding mission to Montreal, 1st Session, 42nd Parliament, 31 May 2016 (Mazen Houdeib, Director General, ROMEL).

⁸⁹ Standing Senate Committee on Human Rights, [Evidence](#), 1st Session, 42nd Parliament, 19 October 2016 (Dawn Edlund, Associate Assistant Deputy Minister, Operations, Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada).

⁹⁰ [Immigration and Refugee Protection Regulations, SOR/2002-227, ss. 291-292](#).

⁹¹ Standing Senate Committee on Human Rights, Fact-finding mission to Montreal, 1st Session, 42nd Parliament, 31 May 2016 (Cathy Nguyen, Sponsorship Program Coordinator, Action Réfugié Montréal).

⁹² Standing Senate Committee on Human Rights, [Evidence](#), 1st Session, 42nd Parliament, 11 May 2016 (Gerry Mills, Director, Operations, Immigrant Services Association of Nova Scotia).

⁹³ Ibid.

⁹⁴ Standing Senate Committee on Human Rights, [Evidence](#), 1st Session, 42nd Parliament, 30 May 2016 (Alexander Vadala, Senior Coordinator, Policy & Research, Ontario Council of Agencies Serving Immigrants).

⁹⁵ Standing Senate Committee on Human Rights, [Evidence](#), 1st Session, 42nd Parliament, 19 October 2016 (Saleem Spindari, Manager, Refugee Settlement Support Projects, Family and Settlement Services, MOSAIC).

Janet Dench also stated that the inconsistent treatment of refugees is “causing some tensions and disquiet” among various refugee populations.⁹⁶

The Committee is deeply concerned that repayment of the loans affects refugees’ ability to pay for basic expenses, increases the likelihood that their children will live in poverty, and compounds their vulnerability. The repayment requirement creates pressure to find any available work instead of taking language training. Moreover, the loans create added stress for a population that is already highly vulnerable due to trauma, concern for family and friends still inside Syria, and the need to integrate into a completely different society. It was heart-breaking to hear from tearful refugees who asked us how they could possibly pay for their families’ plane tickets to Canada in addition to paying for rent, food and other essentials.

There is somewhat of a running joke in the sponsorship community, which is: "How do we welcome refugees to Canada? With debt."

— Malaz Sebai, Board Director, Lifeline Syria

The Committee was pleased to learn from IRCC that fees for the medical exam and pre-departure medical services were waived for the first time for the Syrian refugees. The same will be done for all resettled refugees as of April 2017. These are important steps. However, they do not go far enough. More must be done to address the burden of the transportation loans. We were pleased to hear that IRCC evaluated the transportation loan program in 2015 and is currently preparing policy proposals for the Minister.⁹⁷

THE KEYS TO SUCCESSFUL INTEGRATION

During the course of this study, it became clear to the Committee that there are a number of specific areas which require greater attention if Syrian refugees are to integrate successfully into Canadian society. These include language training; employment, training and education; mental health services; specialized programming to deal with violence against women; and, programs to bring refugees’ family members to Canada.

The evidence heard by the Committee highlighted the importance, for both public and private actors, of undertaking a “Gender Based Analysis Plus” (GBA*) as part of all of resettlement programming at the planning, implementation and evaluation stages. Completing this analysis allows those providing services to Syrian refugees and other newcomers to “assess the potential impacts of policies, programs or initiatives on diverse groups of women and men, girls and boys, taking into account gender and other identity factors.”⁹⁸ The Committee is of the view that IRCC, along with Status of Women Canada, could

⁹⁶ Standing Senate Committee on Human Rights, Fact-finding mission to Montreal, 1st Session, 42nd Parliament, 31 May 2016 (Janet Dench, Executive Director, Canadian Council for Refugees and Cathy Nguyen, Sponsorship Program Coordinator, Action Réfugié Montréal).

⁹⁷ Standing Senate Committee on Human Rights, [Evidence](#), 1st Session, 42nd Parliament, 19 October 2016 (Dawn Edlund, Associate Assistant Deputy Minister, Operations, Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada).

⁹⁸ Government of Canada, [“GBA+, Gender Based Analysis Plus.”](#)

play a valuable role in supporting partner organizations, as well as provincial and territorial governments, to implement GBA+ in their decision-making processes.

A. Language Training for Adults: Women Must not be Left Behind

As noted above, a number of refugees from both the PSR and GAR streams are unable to speak English or French. As a result, access to language training is a cornerstone for successful integration into Canadian society. The Minister stated that language training “is a top priority” for his department.⁹⁹ Departmental officials informed the Committee that 64% of the eligible Syrian refugees outside of Quebec (6,100 individuals) had enrolled in IRCC-funded language training by the end of August 2016. When other forms of language training, such as provincially-funded classes and conversational classes, are included, 95% of GARs and 79% of PSRs are receiving some form of language training. Demand for federally-funded language classes remains high and officials expect the number of Syrian refugees enrolled in federally-funded language training to grow due to funding increases.¹⁰⁰

Nonetheless, challenges remain. Zena Al Hamdan, Programs Manager, Arab Community Centre of Toronto, explained that outside the larger urban centres, such as in Grey/Bruce County, Ontario, where a number of privately sponsored Syrian refugees are residing, lower level English classes are not available.¹⁰¹ In Montreal, refugees expressed frustration about waiting times to start French language training which, in turn, delays integration including employment.¹⁰²

Ms. Al Hamdan, echoing a similar sentiment, told the Committee that a large number of Syrian refugees are trades people, “a booming sector” in Canada, but because of their limited language skills, they are unable to find work. One witness informed the Committee that his sponsorship group involves refugees in volunteer activities to allow them to gain work experience and practice their language skills. However, these innovative practices are relatively rare.¹⁰³ Without proper language training, refugees will not be able to move forward with their lives in Canada.¹⁰⁴

As noted above, many Syrian refugees have arrived in Canada with young children. As a result, one parent, usually the mother, stays behind to care for the children while the other attends language classes. Without access to childcare, many refugee women are unable to participate in language training. The Committee was informed that this gap in services has a negative impact on women and on their children. Ms. Mills explained that children raised in households that do not speak English or French begin school at a disadvantage. She stated that her settlement agency, which is the only RAP provider

⁹⁹ Standing Senate Committee on Human Rights, [Evidence](#), 1st Session, 42nd Parliament, 18 May 2016 (The Honourable John McCallum, P.C., M.P., Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship).

¹⁰⁰ Standing Senate Committee on Human Rights, [Evidence](#), 1st Session, 42nd Parliament, 19 October 2016 (Dawn Edlund, Associate Assistant Deputy Minister, Operations, Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada).

¹⁰¹ Standing Senate Committee on Human Rights, [Evidence](#), 1st Session, 42nd Parliament, 30 May 2016 (Zena Al Hamdan, Programs Manager, Arab Community Centre of Toronto).

¹⁰² Standing Senate Committee on Human Rights, Site visit to CARI St. Laurent, Montreal, 1st Session, 42nd Parliament, 31 May 2016 (Refugees).

¹⁰³ Standing Senate Committee on Human Rights, [Evidence](#), 1st Session, 42nd Parliament, 19 October 2016 (Reverend Brian Cornelius, Chair of the Finance Committee, First United Church, United Church of Canada).

¹⁰⁴ Standing Senate Committee on Human Rights, Site visit to CARI St. Laurent, Montreal, 1st Session, 42nd Parliament, 31 May 2016 (Refugees).

in Nova Scotia, provides services to Syrian GAR families, including 136 children under the age of five. Ms. Mills said:

We don't have enough childcare attached to language training programs. We have 39 babies, which means under the age of 18 months. All those children, unless we get them into some sort of childcare, are going to be another lost group and they will have very little English by the time they go to school.¹⁰⁵

To ensure that Syrian women refugees are not deprived of the opportunity to seek employment and participate in their communities, language training classes must be paired with childcare services. Unfortunately, childcare services are not provided by a number of provincially funded language programs. While English language classes funded by the federal government generally offer childcare services, they are difficult to access due to limited numbers of spaces.¹⁰⁶

There's not nearly enough child care for language classes, and this is going to leave women behind more than anyone else.

— Louisa Taylor, Director, Refugee 613

Officials from IRCC informed the Committee that they are aware of this gap and are working with service provider organizations to address the issue. The Committee is of the view that at this point, greater urgency is needed. Such classes provide social and cultural integration benefits as well as language acquisition. The lack of childcare positions attached to adult language training is a lost opportunity, then, for the integration of both mothers and their young children.

B. Employment: A Major Challenge but a Must for Integration

Refugees who appeared before the Committee expressed their desire to work and to support themselves. Since refugees resettled from abroad are given permanent resident status on arrival, they have the same legal access to employment opportunities as other permanent residents.

Much like language, education and work experience are prerequisites to be considered for a job in Canada. Some Syrian refugees have post-secondary education and/or experience in their respective fields, but, like other newcomers to Canada, they may find their qualifications are not recognized.

Some of the Syrian refugees have found work, particularly PSRs. IRCC is currently conducting an assessment of the integration of the Syrian refugees that arrived before March 2016. While more than half of the surveyed PSRs found employment, this was the case for only 12% of GARs, who tend to

¹⁰⁵ Standing Senate Committee on Human Rights, [Evidence](#), 1st Session, 42nd Parliament, 11 May 2016 (Gerry Mills, Director, Operations, Immigrant Services Association of Nova Scotia).

¹⁰⁶ Standing Senate Committee on Human Rights, [Evidence](#), 1st Session, 42nd Parliament, 30 May 2016 (Mario J. Calla, Executive Director COSTI Immigrant Services).

have much lower language skills. Officials from IRCC indicated that, although this number may seem low, they considered it “a good initial step.”¹⁰⁷

The Committee was pleased to hear that some private sponsors are finding creative ways to help the refugees they sponsor to obtain work experience in Canada. Reverend Cornelius discussed the efforts of United Church sponsorship groups to create employment opportunities for the refugees they have sponsored. One group partnered with a local business to create a two-month position for a refugee where the sponsoring group paid part of the salary. They are hopeful that a permanent position will be created for the refugee after this period.¹⁰⁸

Employment and the ability to provide for one’s family is a major source of pride. The Committee witnessed the enthusiasm of the Syrian refugees to get working and hopes that each of them will have this opportunity soon. Innovative efforts such as that of the United Church sponsorship group outlined above should be encouraged.

1. Recognition of foreign education and work experience

A number of witnesses informed the Committee that the education and credentials of Syrian refugees, like many newcomers to Canada, are often not recognized. Although professional regulatory bodies have good reasons for their strict accreditation processes, faster accreditation for experienced professionals would help highly-qualified refugees to find work in their fields.¹⁰⁹ Without such programs, Canada is failing to harness the talent of “very highly qualified people who are human capital to the Canadian economy.”¹¹⁰ In addition, the Canadian Alliance for Syrian Aid told the Committee that refugees need more information about how to have their education recognized in Canada, at what educational level they should register, and the steps are required to be admitted to post-secondary education, possibly through a one-stop website.¹¹¹

C. Experience of Children and Youth

The Syrian children who arrived this year as refugees will grow up in Canada, contributing throughout their lives to our country. Education will be critical to ensuring that these children are able to succeed in their new home.

With a few exceptions, witnesses spoke positively about support received in the area of education for children. Schools have been able to accommodate the influx of students and children are overjoyed at finally being able to attend school. The children’s happiness is felt by the whole family.

¹⁰⁷ Standing Senate Committee on Human Rights, [Evidence](#), 1st Session, 42nd Parliament, 19 October 2016 (Dawn Edlund, Associate Assistant Deputy Minister, Operations, Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada).

¹⁰⁸ Standing Senate Committee on Human Rights, [Evidence](#), 1st Session, 42nd Parliament, 19 October 2016 (Reverend Brian Cornelius, Chair of the Finance Committee, First United Church, United Church of Canada).

¹⁰⁹ Standing Senate Committee on Human Rights, [Evidence](#), 1st Session, 42nd Parliament, 30 May 2016 (Bayan Khatib, Board Member and Head of the Social Committee, Syrian Canadian Foundation and Zena Al Hamdan, Programs Manager, Arab Community Centre of Toronto).

¹¹⁰ Ibid. (Zena Al Hamdan).

¹¹¹ Standing Senate Committee on Human Rights, Fact-finding mission to Montreal, 1st Session, 42nd Parliament, 31 May 2016.

The provinces put tremendous effort into ensuring that children would be able to attend school upon arrival. In Laval, Québec, for instance, Isabelle Beaudry, Assistant Director at the Laval School Board, told the Committee that her board coordinated its efforts as of the moment it was informed that it would be welcoming a large number of Syrian refugees.¹¹² While it did not expect to be coordinating the arrival of 300 new Syrian students, the highest number received by a school board in Quebec, its early efforts helped mobilize resources. The Board created 21 new classes, with new teachers and materials needed.¹¹³ It also trained teachers to deal with a number of issues such as difficulty learning and mental health. As of June 2016, the Laval School Board estimated that the cost of the efforts would be \$1.7 million. They expressed concern about whether sufficient funds would be in place to continue to provide the same level of support to the refugee students in the next school year.¹¹⁴ The Committee hopes that provincial and local governments will be able to sustain the support they have provided to Syrian refugee children in order to ensure their long-term success.

Although education is an area of provincial jurisdiction in Canada, the federal government is also involved in promoting the integration of children and youth in about 3,000 schools with high numbers of immigrant and/or refugee students, through a program called Settlement Worker in Schools. The program offers culturally-appropriate services and short term counselling relating to settlement, education and mental health. In addition, newcomer orientation sessions take place in schools before the start of the school year to prepare new students for the transition into the Canadian school system.¹¹⁵

In contrast to the positive feedback the Committee received in respect of educational programs for children, a number of witnesses expressed concern about the situation of teenagers and young adults (referred to as youth by witnesses). One area of particular concern is extra-curricular youth programming.¹¹⁶ Based on their experience with other refugee populations, COSTI informed the Committee that youth had the most difficult time integrating because they are at a challenging age. They struggle to cope with the traumas of war and they are faced with a steep learning curve to adapt to a new culture. Some youth never connect with Canadian society. COSTI found that programs tailored specifically to this age group are essential for their future success in Canada.¹¹⁷

¹¹² Standing Senate Committee on Human Rights, Fact-finding mission to Montreal, 1st Session, 42nd Parliament, 31 May 2016 (Isabelle Beaudry, Assistant director, School organization and transport, Laval School Board).

¹¹³ Standing Senate Committee on Human Rights, Fact-finding mission to Montreal, 1st Session, 42nd Parliament, 31 May 2016 (Jean Rodin, Coordinator of Educational Services, Laval School Board).

¹¹⁴ Ibid.

¹¹⁵ Standing Senate Committee on Human Rights, [Evidence](#), 1st Session, 42nd Parliament, 19 October 2016 (Dawn Edlund, Associate Assistant Deputy Minister, Operations, Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada).

¹¹⁶ Standing Senate Committee on Human Rights, [Evidence](#), 1st Session, 42nd Parliament, 18 May 2016 (Corinne Prince-St-Amand, Director General, Integration and Foreign Credentials Recognition Office, Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada).

¹¹⁷ Standing Senate Committee on Human Rights, Site visit to COSTI Immigrant Services, Toronto, 1st Session, 42nd Parliament, 30 May 2016; Boys & Girls Clubs of Canada, [Study on the integration of newly-arrived Syrian refugees: Submission to Senate Standing Committee on Human Rights](#), written submission, May 2016.

I don't want to forget the youth. I talked about the little ones, under five years old, but we should not forget the youth. We need to catch those youth, the ones who are 18, 19 and 20 years old. We have 21-year-olds with two kids, and they're in high school. They had been out of school for three years. It's just not the right place for them.

— Gerry Mills, Director, Operations, Immigrant Services Association of Nova Scotia (ISANS)

D. Mental Health and the Need for an Appropriate Response to Refugee Trauma

The Committee heard that the arrival of the Syrian refugees has highlighted certain gaps in health care services available to refugees. The testimony focused on mental health, but some general health issues were also raised. For example, the Interim Federal Health Program (IFHP) coverage, which provides basic health services to resettled refugees until they are eligible for provincial and territorial health insurance and supplemental benefits for the duration of the sponsorship period, includes dental services. This service is funded by IRCC and administered by Medavie Blue Cross. The Committee was concerned to hear that in some cases, refugees are “waiting for months for the insurer’s response on the required pre-approvals for basic work like filling kids’ cavities.”¹¹⁸ The Committee urges the IRCC to investigate this situation and to ensure that its private sector partners fulfil their obligations to refugee clients in a timely fashion.

Going forward, mental health is expected to be an issue of major concern for a small portion of the Syrian refugees. Dr. Meb Rashid, Medical Director, Crossroads Clinic, Women’s College Hospital and Assistant Professor, Department of Family and Community Medicine, University of Toronto, stated that, based on what is known from other refugee populations, including those coming from Rwanda, Cambodia, Congo and Vietnam, 80 to 90% of the Syrian refugees will not have significant mental health needs.¹¹⁹ The challenge is creating the safe space for the remaining 10 to 20% to feel comfortable enough to open up about their mental health issues.

IRCC informed the Committee that it conducts mental health screenings during the immigration medical exam. If any issues are detected, the refugees are settled in communities where support can be provided. According to departmental officials, the IFHP includes private psychotherapist services when referred by a doctor and prescription drug coverage similar to what is available to Canadians on social assistance.¹²⁰

Additionally, the department is working with service providers to incorporate mental health programming in language training classes for women. A pilot project for men has also been set up. Art therapy sessions were offered to children, when refugees were still in hotels, to identify mental health issues.

¹¹⁸ Standing Senate Committee on Human Rights, [Evidence](#), 1st Session, 42nd Parliament, 19 October 2016 (Angela Keller-Herzog, Core Organizer, Ottawa Centre Refugee Action).

¹¹⁹ Standing Senate Committee on Human Rights, [Evidence](#), 1st Session, 42nd Parliament, 30 May 2016 (Dr. Meb Rashid, Medical Director, Crossroads Clinic, Women’s College Hospital and Assistant Professor, DFCM, University of Toronto, as an individual).

¹²⁰ Standing Senate Committee on Human Rights, [Evidence](#), 1st Session, 42nd Parliament, 19 October 2016 (Dawn Edlund, Associate Assistant Deputy Minister, Operations, Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada).

Officials also informed the Committee that IRCC is working with organizations to develop programming for settlement provider organizations in order to assist their staff to identify mental health issues and indicators of family violence.¹²¹ Mr. Vadala told the Committee that OCASI is training frontline workers, in collaboration with member agencies, to identify issues of trauma and refugee mental health.¹²² While mental health conditions may relate to the trauma experienced by refugees during the war and the difficult time they had as refugees in other countries, the stress of integrating into Canadian society can also cause difficulties for some refugees.¹²³

Immediately after migration there is frequently a period of elation, and it may take months before mental health issues actually declare themselves. We need to be ready for this.

— Dr. Meb Rashid, Medical Director, Crossroads Clinic, Women's College Hospital and Assistant Professor, DFCM, University of Toronto, as an individual

Dr. Rashid stated that the mental health issues that are surfacing are only “the tip of the iceberg.”¹²⁴ He suggested that connecting refugees with family doctors and other primary care providers is essential to early identification and treatment of mental health issues. In his view, connecting refugees with primary health care services has been a point of weakness in the Toronto area and could use more attention. The doctor also emphasized the therapeutic benefits of integration into Canadian society:

There is a tremendously positive impact on people's mental health when they obtain employment, when they finish their education, when they learn French or English, when they really develop... [a] sense of themselves again, and this should not be underestimated in the context of treating people's mental health issues.¹²⁵

The Committee is not convinced that Canada is fully prepared to help refugees whose mental health issues will surface in the coming months and years. Witnesses identified a shortage of psychiatrists and mental health resources, language barriers and cultural norms as being factors that delay or impede access to mental health resources.¹²⁶ According to data on use of the IFHP, few refugees are accessing the mental health services available under that program, although it is possible that refugees are

¹²¹ Ibid.

¹²² Standing Senate Committee on Human Rights, [Evidence](#), 1st Session, 42nd Parliament, 30 May 2016 (Alexander Vadala, Senior Coordinator, Policy & Research, Ontario Council of Agencies Serving Immigrants).

¹²³ Standing Senate Committee on Human Rights, [Evidence](#), 1st Session, 42nd Parliament, 19 October 2016 (Angela Keller-Herzog, Core Organizer, Ottawa Centre Refugee Action).

¹²⁴ Standing Senate Committee on Human Rights, [Evidence](#), 1st Session, 42nd Parliament, 30 May 2016 (Dr. Meb Rashid, Medical Director, Crossroads Clinic, Women's College Hospital and Assistant Professor, DFCM, University of Toronto, as an individual).

¹²⁵ Ibid.

¹²⁶ Standing Senate Committee on Human Rights, [Evidence](#), 1st Session, 42nd Parliament, 19 October 2016 (Dr. Asmat Khan, as an individual); Standing Senate Committee on Human Rights, [Evidence](#), 1st Session, 42nd Parliament, 30 May 2016 (Dr. Meb Rashid, Medical Director, Crossroads Clinic, Women's College Hospital and Assistant Professor, DFCM, University of Toronto, as an individual).

accessing services through provincial or territorial coverage. IRCC simply does not have enough information to know.¹²⁷

[F]or those that are suffering from depression or post-traumatic stress disorder, a critical piece of their treatment involves successful integration...

—Dr. Meb Rashid, Medical Director, Crossroads Clinic, Women's College Hospital and Assistant Professor, DFCM, University of Toronto, as an individual

There is a need to better understand how to support refugees' mental health in culturally sensitive ways and to encourage those who are suffering from mental illness to seek assistance. The Committee agrees with Ms. Keller-Herzog that creating mental health “footholds, steppingstones and safety nets for the individuals at risk is an important investment that Canada needs to make” to ensure that new arrivals integrate into Canadian society and to avoid problems in future generations.¹²⁸ While healthcare is largely a matter of provincial jurisdiction, through such programs as the IFHP and settlement funding, the Government of Canada can play an important part in improving Canada's approach to mental health in refugee populations.

E. Violence against Women: The Need for a Specialized Response

Witnesses drew the Committee's attention to issues of gender-based violence within the Syrian refugee population. Ms. Keller-Herzog indicated that “integrating to life in Canada with our different gender roles can result in domestic stresses inside the household and inside the family, and we are concerned that if left unsupported this can find expression in violence against women.”¹²⁹ Dr. Rashid told the Committee that “sexual violence has been an issue for refugees; pre-migration as well, not only intimate partner violence but violence that is sometimes used in the context of war.”¹³⁰

Witnesses were careful to point out that domestic violence is a problem in every population and that there are issues around outreach and resource constraints with respect to domestic violence responses in the general Canadian population.¹³¹ These witnesses emphasized, however, that the situation becomes even more complex “when people aren't proficient in English or French, when they have just recently arrived in the country, when they have children to take care of.”¹³² They stressed the critical

¹²⁷ Standing Senate Committee on Human Rights, [Evidence](#), 1st Session, 42nd Parliament, 19 October 2016 (Dawn Edlund, Associate Assistant Deputy Minister, Operations, Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada).

¹²⁸ Standing Senate Committee on Human Rights, [Evidence](#), 1st Session, 42nd Parliament, 19 October 2016 (Angela Keller-Herzog, Core Organizer, Ottawa Centre Refugee Action).

¹²⁹ Standing Senate Committee on Human Rights, [Evidence](#), 1st Session, 42nd Parliament, 19 October 2016 (Angela Keller-Herzog, Core Organizer, Ottawa Centre Refugee Action).

¹³⁰ Standing Senate Committee on Human Rights, [Evidence](#), 1st Session, 42nd Parliament, 30 May 2016 (Dr. Meb Rashid, Medical Director, Crossroads Clinic, Women's College Hospital and Assistant Professor, DFCM, University of Toronto, as an individual).

¹³¹ Standing Senate Committee on Human Rights, [Evidence](#), 1st Session, 42nd Parliament, 30 May 2016 (Bayan Khatib, Board Member and Head of the Social Committee, Syrian Canadian Foundation and Dr. Meb Rashid, Medical Director, Crossroads Clinic, Women's College Hospital and Assistant Professor, DFCM, University of Toronto, as an individual).

¹³² Ibid. (Dr. Meb Rashid).

importance of adequately resourced information and outreach activities in ensuring the safety and security of vulnerable refugee populations.

Refugees – both male and female – need domestic violence interventions targeted to their specific situation. For example, Ms. Al Hamdan told the Committee that there is a need to ensure that refugee women, including Syrian refugee women, understand that if they leave a violent husband or partner it will not have an effect on their legal status in this country.¹³³

The Committee was pleased to learn that work is currently being done to try to connect these vulnerable women to services in their own language. For example, “culturally and linguistically appropriate counselling and support” is available from a women’s shelter in Toronto “to help newcomer women, particularly the Syrian refugees, get the relevant information so they understand the cycle of abuse. Employees are there to help them with safety plans, how to navigate the legal system, how to obtain the right medical and social services.”¹³⁴ Dr. Rashid observed that once health care professionals and others come into contact with survivors of domestic violence, they can also direct people towards appropriate supports.¹³⁵ Nevertheless, the Committee also shares the concerns voiced by witnesses about the ability of the most isolated and vulnerable survivors of gender-based violence to access information, care and support.

F. Family Reunification is Essential for Full Integration

Family reunification is an important factor in successful integration and in ensuring good mental health. Many Syrian refugees have loved ones who are still in a war zone or who are living in precarious situations inside or outside refugee camps in the region, or in other host countries. The Committee heard that some Syrian refugees in Canada are sending money to relatives in the Middle East to help them meet their basic needs. Many refugees who are working hard to successfully integrate into Canadian society, find their hearts and minds remain with their family members who are struggling to survive.

The most urgent and pressing need that our OCRA arrivals are telling us about is the dire situation that their left-behind relatives are facing... Their mothers, their fathers, their brothers, their sisters, their nephews, their nieces are at risk.

— Angela Keller-Herzog, Ottawa Centre Refugee Action

Family reunification is an area in which the federal government can make an immediate and long-lasting impact both in the resettlement process and integration. As noted by witnesses, family reunification for

¹³³ Standing Senate Committee on Human Rights, [Evidence](#), 1st Session, 42nd Parliament, 30 May 2016 (Zena Al Hamdan, Programs Manager, Arab Community Centre of Toronto).

¹³⁴ Standing Senate Committee on Human Rights, [Evidence](#), 1st Session, 42nd Parliament, 19 October 2016 (Corinne Prince St-Amand, Director General, Integration-Foreign Credentials Referral Office, Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada).

¹³⁵ Standing Senate Committee on Human Rights, [Evidence](#), 1st Session, 42nd Parliament, 30 May 2016 (Bayan Khatib, Board Member and Head of the Social Committee, Syrian Canadian Foundation and Dr. Meb Rashid, Medical Director, Crossroads Clinic, Women’s College Hospital and Assistant Professor, DFCM, University of Toronto, as an individual).

refugees is good for the integration of those that are already here, but also for new arrivals. The first to arrive are able to fully focus on their integration into Canada once reunited with family, and the new arrivals' integration is accelerated through assistance from those that arrived before them.¹³⁶

Refugees that have been sponsored by non-family members are asking their sponsors for help to bring relatives to Canada. Unfortunately, the cost of sponsoring these additional family members is often beyond the means of their sponsors and, given their incomes, these Syrian refugees generally do not have the financial resources to sponsor family on their own. In addition to the cost, private sponsorship in the context of family reunification involves long delays, fraught processes and uncertain prospects of success.¹³⁷ Attempts have been made to connect Syrian refugees in Canada with sponsorship groups who could sponsor their family members, but the demand has vastly surpassed the availability of sponsors. MOSAIC, for example, has a family reunification list for this purpose with 700 names, but has found sponsors for only 170.¹³⁸

For these families to be happy, to be functioning future citizens of Canada, they will need to bring their families here.

— Annette Wilde, refugee sponsor

Witnesses suggested the possibility of making changes to the GAR Program and the BVOR Program that would promote family reunification. For example, a program of joint government-private sponsorship, similar to the BVOR model, could be adopted. Witnesses also suggested that IRCC could facilitate the intake of family members into the GAR stream. The provision of additional support in Turkey, Lebanon and Jordan to assist refugees in completing complex application forms was also suggested.¹³⁹

What I would recognize is that we can't do everything in this world, and so there are choices. From a public policy perspective, I think that money is best spent and utilized through family reunification where there are those networks so that we have greater chances of success.

— Reverend Brian Cornelius, Chair of the Finance Committee, First United Church, United Church of Canada

¹³⁶ Standing Senate Committee on Human Rights, [Evidence](#), 1st Session, 42nd Parliament, 19 October 2016 (Angela Keller-Herzog, Core Organizer, Ottawa Centre Refugee Action).

¹³⁷ Ibid. (Angela Keller-Herzog); Standing Senate Committee on Human Rights, [Evidence](#), 1st Session, 42nd Parliament, 30 May 2016 (Alexander Vadala, Senior Coordinator, Policy & Research, Ontario Council of Agencies Serving Immigrants).

¹³⁸ Standing Senate Committee on Human Rights, [Evidence](#), 1st Session, 42nd Parliament, 19 October 2016 (Saleem Spindari, Manager, Refugee Settlement Support Projects, Family and Settlement Services, MOSAIC).

¹³⁹ Standing Senate Committee on Human Rights, [Evidence](#), 1st Session, 42nd Parliament, 19 October 2016 (Angela Keller-Herzog, Core Organizer, Ottawa Centre Refugee Action).

The Committee believes that the Government of Canada could do more to promote family reunification. It is of the view that family reunification will be beneficial for the integration of the refugees already in Canada and for the family members to come. At the same time, the focus of the GAR program on the most vulnerable cannot be lost. Witnesses seemed confident that a balance could be struck between assisting the most vulnerable refugees identified by UNHCR and promoting other objectives such as family reunification.

MONTH 13

With few exceptions, witnesses expressed concern about the arrival of Month 13, when the direct financial obligations to Syrian refugees undertaken by sponsors and the Government of Canada come to an end. The first refugees who arrived in November 2015 are now reaching this stage.

In the sector we talk about “month 13” a lot ... We're very concerned about month 13.

— Gerry Mills, Director, Operations, Immigrant Services Association of Nova Scotia (ISANS)

IRCC officials assured the Committee in October 2016 that they have been in discussion with the provinces and territories to address the challenges of “Month 13.” They are optimistic that Syrian refugees will continue their integration into Canadian society after the first year of federal income support or sponsor support ends.

GARs who cannot yet support themselves will continue to receive a similar amount in income support from the provincial and territorial governments in the form of social assistance in Month 13, and so may see little change in their situations.

On the other hand, a major shift will occur in Month 13 for many PSRs. During their first year in Canada, many privately sponsored families have had access to funds and in-kind support greater than that provided by provincial social assistance programs. When their sponsor's legal support obligations end in Month 13, a significant number of these refugees will shift onto social assistance and find that they have to live on a much smaller budget. At the same time, special agreements that were developed to assist them upon arrival, such as rent reductions agreed to by landlords, may also end, possibly resulting in higher and unplanned expenses.¹⁴⁰ As Annette Wilde, a refugee sponsor, stated: “My fear is at the end of the 12 months the majority of these families will fall into poverty.”¹⁴¹

The Committee is also cognizant that at Month 13, provincial and municipal governments will assume a much larger share of the responsibility for supporting refugees as they continue to integrate into Canadian society. The Committee encourages all levels of government to work together to ensure that Syrian refugees continue to receive adequate assistance over the long-term.

¹⁴⁰ Standing Senate Committee on Human Rights, [Evidence](#), 1st Session, 42nd Parliament, 11 May 2016 (Gerry Mills, Director, Operations, Immigrant Services Association of Nova Scotia).

¹⁴¹ Standing Senate Committee on Human Rights, [Evidence](#), 1st Session, 42nd Parliament, 30 May 2016 (Annette Wilde, refugee sponsor, as an individual).

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The Syrian refugee resettlement initiative was remarkably successful in leveraging public and private resources to respond to the largest single humanitarian crisis in the world since the end of the Second World War. Canada and Canadians have much to be proud of. The Committee wishes to emphasize, however, that the arrival of Syrian refugees in Canada is only a first step. Landing at a Canadian airport is day one; it is not the end of the story.

I think that the migration of the Syrian refugees is really an unprecedented event, and it certainly is a tribute to the best of what our country can offer.

— Dr. Meb Rasid, Medical Director, Crossroads Clinic, Women's College Hospital and Assistant Professor, DFCM, University of Toronto, as an individual

A long and difficult road lies ahead for these refugees. The Government of Canada must ensure that those who have found safe haven in our country are provided with the tools and supports necessary to integrate successfully. The Committee's study revealed a number of shortcomings in Canada's refugee resettlement system that urgently need to be addressed. Processing delays, family reunification, information sharing, funding for settlement services, youth integration, mental health, and travel loans – these and other issues require immediate attention. Once current gaps are addressed, it is critical that resettlement and integration support for Syrian refugees remain adequately resourced. Integration is a long-term project.

Canadians in huge numbers have bought into the notion that they have a role to play in helping newcomers integrate... If we don't do something very quickly ... we could end up squandering billions of dollars in private resources, energy, time and talent.

— Louisa Taylor, Director, Refugee 613

Around the world, millions of people are forced to flee their homes because of war and persecution. In the near future, the prospects for a durable peace in Syria look remote. The Committee believes that Canada should continue to offer protection to significant numbers of those displaced by conflict, including Syrian refugees. The compelling testimony of witnesses before this Committee, including refugees themselves, serves as a reminder that we must never lose sight of the human dimension of resettlement initiatives. Refugees deserve our generosity and our compassion.

Based on the evidence it heard, the Committee puts forward the following recommendations to the Government of Canada and the Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship:

Recommendation 1:

The Committee recommends that the Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship set and meet specific and transparent standards for refugee processing times. Accelerated processing times are encouraged, and higher standards of speed and efficiency should be met equitably for all refugees.

Recommendation 2:

The Committee recommends that the Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship improve the timeliness of the flow of information on refugee applications to refugees, sponsors, settlement and other related organizations. The Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship should also share critical arrival, resettlement and integration information in an open and timely manner. The Committee further recommends that the Government of Canada provide sufficient funding to meet the needs of the number of refugees arriving.

Recommendation 3:

The Committee recommends that the Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship provide settlement agencies with the resources required to fulfill the new public education and coordination roles that are being expected of them.

Recommendation 4:

The Committee recommends that the Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship, in consultation with settlement and other organizations, examine ways to connect government-assisted refugees with networks of supportive individuals in their communities of settlement. The Committee further recommends that the Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship develop formal monitoring systems to provide appropriate assistance to privately sponsored and blended visa-office referred refugees in cases of sponsorship challenges or breakdown.

Recommendation 5:

The Committee recommends that the Government of Canada implement equitable treatment among refugees of any background, and that any differential treatment on the basis of private or government sponsorship be minimal and essential. The Committee further recommends that when deemed essential, the use of differential treatment be time-limited, evaluated and used to support evidence-based policy innovation.

Recommendation 6:

The Committee recommends that the Canada Revenue Agency maintain timely processing for the disbursement of the Canada Child Benefit to ensure that refugees do not face financial hardship in their

first months in the country. The Committee also recommends that the Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship conduct outreach activities to fully inform refugees about the tax filing requirements for continued receipt of benefits. Any improvements in processing times should benefit all individuals in Canada who are eligible for the Canada Child Benefit equally.

Recommendation 7:

The Committee recommends that the Government of Canada replace the immigration loans for transportation expenses provided to refugees with grants, given that they are an economic burden and a source of high levels of stress and anxiety for refugees. Alternatively, the Government of Canada should introduce a debt forgiveness mechanism for those who are unable to repay their loans without financial hardship and eliminate the charging of interest on immigration loans.

Recommendation 8:

The Committee recommends that the Government of Canada increase federal funding for refugee language training and that it intensify cooperation with settlement agencies, as well as provincial and territorial governments, in order to deliver language classes to refugees immediately upon arrival in Canada and to provide childcare during classes.

Recommendation 9:

The Committee recommends that the Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship work with provincial and territorial governments and with settlement agencies to provide adequate programming to all youth, who face unique challenges in the integration process.

Recommendation 10:

The Committee recommends that the Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship, in coordination with federal, provincial, territorial, and municipal partners, develop a comprehensive plan to address the mental health needs of Syrian refugees. This plan should contain culturally appropriate interventions that address widespread and varied mental illnesses, including those related to ongoing trauma and post-traumatic stress disorder, and it should track data on needs and uptake of services to address barriers to treatment.

Recommendation 11:

The Committee recommends that the Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship intensify coordination with civil society partners in order to develop properly-resourced, culturally appropriate interventions to address domestic and gender-based violence, including outreach, information and support services, that are designed

to reach the most vulnerable and isolated members of the refugee population.

Recommendation 12:

The Committee recommends that the Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship review the refugee resettlement program to identify possible changes to facilitate the timely reunification of refugees already in Canada with members of their family still abroad who may face persecution and other serious risks to their safety. The Committee also recommends that the Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship recognize an inclusive definition of family.

APPENDIX A: TIMELINE OF KEY DATES IN THE SYRIAN REFUGEE RESETTLEMENT INITIATIVE

7 January 2015 – The Government of Canada committed to bringing in 10,000 Syrian refugees.

Source: Government of Canada, "[Archived - Helping to Protect the World's Most Vulnerable](#)," News release, 7 January 2015.

19 September 2015 – The Government of Canada announced a [temporary public policy to facilitate the sponsorship of Syrian and Iraqi refugees by Groups of Five and Community Sponsors](#). A number of mostly administrative changes were also announced to speed up the arrival time of Syrian and Iraqi refugees.

Source: Government of Canada, "[Archived - Faster help for Syrian and Iraqi refugees without compromising Canadian security](#)," News release, 19 September 2016.

2 September 2015 – The picture of three-year-old Syrian refugee Alan Kurdi's lifeless body on the Turkish seashore made international headlines.

Source: Jonathon Gatehouse, "[His name was Alan Kurdi](#)," Maclean's, 3 September 2015.

5 September 2015 – During the federal election campaign, Justin Trudeau committed to accept 25,000 Syrian refugees into Canada and to invest at least \$100 million in 2015-16 to increase refugee processing, as well as sponsorship and settlement services capacity in Canada. He also committed to providing UNHCR with an immediate \$100 million new contribution to support relief activities in Syria and the surrounding area.

Source: Liberal Party of Canada, "[Liberal Commit to Leadership on Syrian Refugee Crisis](#)," Media Releases, 5 September 2015.

4 November 2015 – Start date for the government's commitment to resettle 25,000 Syrian refugees.

Source: Government of Canada, "[#WelcomeRefugees: Key Figures](#)."

9 November 2015 – The Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada announced the creation of a new Cabinet ad hoc committee to help bring Syrian refugees to Canada and announced that it would fully restore the Interim Federal Health Program that provides limited and temporary health benefits to refugees and refugee claimants. The Government of Canada also reiterated the commitments it made during the election campaign.

Source: Government of Canada, "[Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship announces action on Syrian refugee crisis](#)," News Release, 9 November 2015.

24 November 2015 – The Government of Canada announced its five-phase action plan to resettle Syrian refugees to Canada: identifying, processing, transportation, welcoming and settlement. The objective was to identify 25,000 refugees to come to Canada by 31 December 2015. Of those, 10,000 would be resettled by the end of that year, with the remainder to be resettled by the end of February 2016.

Source: Government of Canada, "[Canada Offers Leadership on the Syrian Refugee Crisis](#)," News Release, 24 November 2015.

26 November 2015 – The Government of Canada confirmed that it would waive the cost of transportation and medical exams for Syrian refugees that arrived between 4 November 2015 and 29 February 2016.

Source: Peter O'Neil, "[Ottawa exempts Syrian refugees from loan repayment](#)," Vancouver Sun, 26 November 2015.

9 December 2015 – The Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada announced that the Government of Canada would provide more funding for resettlement and settlement service providers by extending current contribution agreements and providing new funding where and when it would be needed. The increased funding included: \$3.6 million for Resettlement Assistant Program service providers and \$355 million over a four year period for settlement and resettlement services, both in Canada and abroad. \$94.5 million of this sum would be used for income support for refugees.

Source: Government of Canada, "[Minister announces extensions to agreements and new funding for those providing services to refugees and newcomers](#)," News Release, 9 December 2015.

10 December 2015 – The first full plane of government-assisted Syrian refugees arrived in Toronto by military plane.

Sources: Rebecca Joseph, "[1st Planeload of Syrian refugees land on Canadian soil](#)," Global News, 10 December 2016; Government of Canada, "[Airports in Toronto and Montreal ready to welcome the first flights of Syrian refugees to Canada](#)," News Release, 9 December 2015.

12 January 2016 – The 10,000th Syrian refugee arrived in Canada.

Source: Government of Canada, "[Canada has welcomed its first 10,000 Syrian refugees](#)," News Release, 13 January 2016.

26 January 2016 – The Government of Canada launched the Syrian Family Links initiative, which was a partnership between Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada and Catholic Crosscultural Services. The aim of the initiative was to link former Syrian refugees who were willing to sponsor their family members, but did not have the means to do so, with Canadians who wanted to sponsor a refugee, but had not identified a specific refugee to sponsor.

Source: Government of Canada, "[Canada announces the Syrian Family Links initiative](#)," News Release, 26 January 2016.

5 February 2016 – The Government of Canada invited communities **outside the traditional network of cities and towns that** welcome government-assisted refugees, but are interested in doing so, to apply to develop a Community Partnership Settlement Plan for the 'Welcoming Communities' initiative, to demonstrate that they are able to provide the necessary services to help refugees settle and integrate.

Source: Government of Canada, "[Communities across Canada invited to apply to show how they can welcome and support Government-Assisted Refugees](#)," News Release, 5 February 2016.

18 February 2016 – The Government of Canada announced that, as of 1 April 2016, all refugees and asylum claimants would receive full healthcare coverage through a restored Interim Federal Health Program similar to what the provinces and territories provide to Canadians who receive social assistance. It also announced that, by April 2017, the program would be expanded to cover certain

services for refugees who have been identified for resettlement before they come to Canada, including coverage of the immigration medical examination, pre-departure vaccinations, services to manage disease outbreaks in refugee camps, and medical supports during travel to Canada.

Source: Government of Canada, "[Restoring Fairness to the Interim Federal Health Program](#)," News Release, 18 February 2016.

29 February 2016 – The Government of Canada announced that it had reached its objective to welcome 25,000 refugees by the end of February 2016. It also stated that 8,500 more government-supported refugees would arrive throughout 2016.

Source: Government of Canada, "[Canada welcomes 25,000 Syrian refugees](#)," News Release, 29 February 2016.

2 March 2016 – The Government of Canada confirmed that privately sponsored refugees who arrived in Canada after 1 March 2016 would be responsible for the cost of their own flights and medical exams.

Source: Stephanie Levitz, "[A timeline of Canada's policies and decisions during the Syrian refugee crisis](#)", Winnipeg Free Press, 31 March 2016.

30 March 2016 – Canada pledged to continue to resettle refugees from Syria throughout 2016 and beyond at the High Level Meeting on Pathways for Admission of Syrian Refugees in Geneva. The News Release stated that the Government of Canada's plan is to settle up to 44,800 refugees in 2016, the majority of them being Syrian.

Source: Government of Canada, "[Minister McCallum addresses UN conference on Syrian refugees](#)," News Release, 30 March 2016.

31 March 2016 – The Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada announced that any application for private sponsorship of a Syrian refugee received before 31 March 2016 would be processed in time for the refugee to arrive by 2016 or early 2017.

Source: Stephanie Levitz, "[A timeline of Canada's policies and decisions during the Syrian refugee crisis](#)", Winnipeg Free Press, 31 March 2016.

9 May - 18 June 2016 – To respond to delays in processing sponsorship applications, the Government of Canada posted 40 additional temporary staff to the Middle East.

Source: Government of Canada, "[Notice – #WelcomeRefugees: Processing privately sponsored Syrian refugee applications.](#)"

16 May 2016 – The Government of Canada ended the Syrian Links initiative because Syrian refugees who are registered for this program greatly exceeded the number of available sponsors.

Source: Government of Canada, "[Syrian Family Links Initiative: Connecting Syrian family members with sponsors.](#)"

18 June 2016 – The 40 additional staff sent to the Middle East to expedite the processing of Syrian refugee sponsorship applications returned to their regular posts.

Source: Government of Canada, ["#WelcomeRefugees: The road ahead"](#); Government of Canada, ["Notice – #WelcomeRefugees: Processing privately sponsored Syrian refugee applications."](#)

6 September 2016 – The Government of Canada indicated that the pace of arrival of Syrian refugees in Canada would increase in the fall of 2016. The News Release also stated that, by the end of December 2016, in addition to the privately sponsored refugees whose cases have been finalized, approximately 6,000 more government-supported (GAR and BVOR) Syrian refugees would arrive in Canada.

Source: Government of Canada, ["Communities prepare to welcome Syrian refugees,"](#) News Release, 6 September 2016.

30 October 2016 – The Government of Canada posted the following number of Syrian refugee arrivals for each category: 17,627 Government-Assisted Refugees, 3,445 Blended Visa Office-Referred Refugees and 12,651 Privately Sponsored Refugees.

Source: Government of Canada, ["#WelcomeRefugees: Key Figures."](#)

APPENDIX B: WITNESSES

May 11, 2016

Gerry Mills, Director, Operations (*Immigrant Services Association of Nova Scotia*)

Louisa Taylor, Director (*Refugee 613*)

Witness 1 (*As an Individual*)

Witness 2 (*As an Individual*)

May 18, 2016

The Honourable John McCallum, P.C., M.P., Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship

Michael Casasola, Resettlement Officer (*United Nations High Commissioner to Refugees*)

Dawn Edlund, Associate Assistant Deputy Minister, Operations (*Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada*)

David Manicom, Associate Assistant Deputy Minister, Strategic and Program Policy Sector (*Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada*)

Corinne Prince-St-Amand, Director General, Integration and Foreign Credentials Recognition Office (*Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada*)

May 30, 2016

Zena Al Hamdan, Programs Manager (*Arab Community Centre of Toronto*)

Mario J. Calla, Executive Director (*COSTI Immigrant Services*)

Bayan Khatib, Board Member and Head of the Social Committee (*Syrian Canadian Foundation*)

Dr. Meb Rashid, Medical Director, Crossroads Clinic, Women's College Hospital and Assistant Professor, DFCM, University of Toronto (*As an Individual*)

Muhammad Rehan, General Manager (*Muslim Welfare Centre of Toronto*)

Malaz Sebai, Board Director (*Lifeline Syria*)

Alexander Vadala, Senior Coordinator, Policy & Research (*Ontario Council of Agencies Serving Immigrants*)

Annette Wilde, Refugee Sponsor (*As an Individual*)

Witness 3 (*As an Individual*)

Witness 4 (*As an Individual*)

Witness 5 (*As an Individual*)

Witness 6 (*As an Individual*)

October 19, 2016

Reverend Brian Cornelius, Chair of the Finance Committee, First United Church (*United Church of Canada*)

Dawn Edlund, Associate Assistant Deputy Minister, Operations (*Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada*)

Catherine Fleming, Outreach (*Ottawa Centre Refugee Action*)

Bruce Grundison, Senior Director (*Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada*)

Andrew Harvey (*Ottawa Centre Refugee Settlement Group*)

Angela Keller-Herzog, Core Organizer (*Ottawa Centre Refugee Action*)

Dr. Asmat Khan (*As an Individual*)

Ümit Kiziltan, Acting Associate Assistant Deputy Minister, Strategic and Program Policy (*Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada*)

Corinne Prince St-Amand, Director General, Integration and Foreign Credentials Referrals Office (*Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada*)

Saleem Spindari, Manager, Refugee Settlement Support Projects, Family and Settlement Services (*MOSAIC*)