

RESETTLEMENT OF SYRIAN NEWCOMERS IN HAMILTON:

EVALUATION SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATIONS



The Mayor's Advisory Committee on
Syrian Newcomers



July 2017

Background

Hamilton is a city that regularly welcomes newcomers and refugees. In the past, the city welcomed refugee influxes from Vietnam, Cambodia, Kosovo and Somalia.

Between November 2015 and April 2017, Canada resettled 44,920 Syrian newcomers in more than 350 communities across the country. Ontario received 19,915 (44.3%) of the national total, out of which 1,710 (3.8%) have since called Hamilton home. The volume of Syrian refugees represented more than four times the number of refugees typically welcomed to Hamilton in a year, thereby creating different kinds of resettlement challenges, opportunities and success stories.

Of the total Syrian newcomers welcomed in Hamilton, 82.2% are Government Assisted Refugees (GARs), the third highest total of Syrian GARs welcomed in Ontario. Hamilton received the 5th highest total of all Syrian newcomers welcomed in Ontario, behind Toronto (8,895), Ottawa-Gatineau (2,435), London (1,915) and Kitchener-Cambridge-Waterloo (1,720).



In Hamilton, Wesley Urban Ministries is the lead agency for GARs, while various private groups, church affiliates, community organizations and other private individuals sponsored PSR and BVOR refugees who came to Hamilton.

Refugee Category	Canada	CAN (%)	Ontario	ON (%)	Hamilton	HAM (%)
Government Assisted Refugee (GAR)	23,550	52.4%	10,235	51.4%	1,405	82.2%
Blended Visa Office-Referred (BVOR)	4,140	9.2%	2,295	11.5%	105	6.1%
Privately Sponsored Refugee (PSR)	17,230	38.4%	7,385	37.1%	200	11.7%
Totals by region	44,920	100%	19,915	44.3%	1,710	3.8%

Source: Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada | April 2017



Evaluation Overview

This report presents the findings of an evaluation of the resettlement of Syrian newcomers in Hamilton. The evaluation was conducted to assist the Mayor's Office, City of Hamilton and community partners in understanding the collective experience of the Syrian resettlement efforts, what worked and what could be improved for future resettlement initiatives.



1,710 Syrian newcomers arrived in Hamilton from November 2015 to April 2017. Almost 1,000 Syrians arrived in the first several months alone. Partners characterized the initial period of the influx as overwhelming and challenging. They attributed the challenge largely to the volume of refugees, lack of adequate information and the speed of newcomers' arrival.

In March 2016, it became apparent that Hamilton's Syrian resettlement effort could benefit from a collaborative table involving key sectors with touch points to the resettlement efforts. The key sectors identified were housing, health, language, employment, education and informal community networks. In view of this, the Mayor issued a call to action, bringing together a coalition of community partners for its first meeting in spring of 2016 to form The Mayor's Advisory Committee on Syrian Newcomers.

The Mayor's Advisory Committee on Syrian Newcomers and its five Working Groups, became a collaborative table involving over 100 community partners, private citizens and some Syrian newcomers. The committee worked together to identify, discuss and address key challenges associated with the resettlement work. Now, more than a year into its mandate, the Mayor's Advisory Committee is wrapping up the collaborative table with this evaluation and lessons learned report.



This report draws on feedback gathered from key community partners, private sponsors and Syrian newcomers with respect to their experiences with the Hamilton's Syrian resettlement initiative. Feedback was collected through key informant interviews and focus groups with members of the Mayor's Advisory Committee, its working groups, other services providers and community partners. Interviews were also conducted with eight local private sponsor groups and Sponsorship Agreement Holders. Three focus groups were further conducted involving 50 Syrian newcomers to ensure their voices and experiences were heard and would be used to support potential future response efforts.

Based on the comprehensive engagement process conducted for this evaluation and lessons learned report, eight recommendations have been identified for review and consideration. These recommendations reflect the collective feedback and experiences of Syrian newcomers, community partners and the City of Hamilton staff who supported the initiative in various ways. These recommendations include:

Key Recommendations

1 Implement the lessons learned from the Syrian resettlement efforts through the Hamilton Immigration Partnership Council (HIPC).

Community partners consider HIPC as an established collaborative table of immigration and refugee partners in Hamilton involving over 70 key stakeholders. Funded by the Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada (IRCC) and delivered by the City of Hamilton on behalf of IRCC, HIPC is seen as viable and capable of actualizing some of the lessons learned from the Syrian resettlement efforts through its collaborative community tables. However, additional resources may be required for HIPC to be able to fully implement all the lessons learned as its operating budget and mandate are strictly determined by IRCC's Contribution Agreement.



2 Ensure the Mayor's Office, Hamilton City Council and the City of Hamilton continue to advocate and provide municipal support to the resettlement of refugees and newcomers

Focus groups, interviews and research conducted for this report concluded that municipal governments have strategic roles to play in making their communities welcoming and supportive of newcomers. At the beginning of the Syrian resettlement efforts in Hamilton, there was increased public and media interest, often with no concrete response from the City, until the Mayor made a motion to create the Mayor's Advisory Committee on Syrian Newcomers. Many saw the Mayor's Advisory Committee as a very effective collaboration that brought all key partners to the table and had the political clout needed to drive a collaborative effort. The City of Hamilton is therefore expected by community stakeholders to continue to play a visible leadership role in creating and supporting a welcoming community for refugees and newcomers.



3 Develop a comprehensive community settlement and integration plan to support future resettlement initiatives during influx.

The volume, scale and pace of the Syrian resettlement efforts caught many partners off guard. Many partners, institutions and private individuals were not sure what to do or how to help out at the outset of the influx. Understanding critical roles, who was doing what and the support mechanisms at the community level for all expected refugees would have been helpful. In view of this, there is a need to develop a "comprehensive community settlement and integration plan" of some sort to act as a checklist for Hamilton that outlines local roles and responsibilities. The plan will also support better mobilization of partners and resources. Partners recommend this strategic checklist is best suited for HIPC to develop, which should also include a review of best practices locally and from other communities similar to Hamilton.

4 Support the private sponsorship system in Hamilton.

Roughly 85% of Syrian newcomers in Hamilton came through the Government-Assisted Refugee (GAR) program. However, nearly 15% came through the Privately-Sponsored Refugee (PSR) program. Private sponsorship is an integral part of the overall settlement and integration system. Unlike GAR which has a dedicated lead agency in Hamilton, the PSR stream is supported by various organizations, religious affiliates, community groups, Settlement Agreement Holders and private citizens. A strategic connection of these partner efforts would be useful. In addition, the GAR and PSR refugee families are also separated from their loved ones overseas. This report recommends more family reunification support and sponsorship advocacy to the federal government.



5 Enhance newcomers' access to information regarding their rights.

Conversation with various Syrian newcomers revealed the fact that many of them, due to lack of formal English or comprehension of the Canadian system, didn't understand their rights, obligations and protection. Some didn't understand the documents they signed or information passed on to them, even in Arabic. In some cases, some still couldn't understand critical messages, even when the information was translated or interpreted in Arabic due to low literacy level, information volume and the challenges associated with resettling in a new country. This report recommends that more efforts be made to not only translate or interpret documents but also to increase engagement with refugees and obtain their feedback regularly with regard to their resettlement experiences, rights, obligations and entitlements under the Canadian law.

6 Advocate for more support for organizations working on the front lines of newcomer resettlement and integration in Hamilton.

The newcomers' resettlement experience in Hamilton, similar to other communities, has identified the lack of adequate resources facing many settlement organizations and supporting agencies. Many of these organizations deal with volume and service requests from clients that have not been matched with commensurate funding from federal and provincial funders. Some even had to lay off staff in the middle of critical need due to lack of adequate funding. This report recommends that the Hamilton City Council, local MPs/MPPs and key community partners continue to advocate with other levels of government and local institutions for additional support for Hamilton's formal and informal organizations that support refugees and newcomers.



7 Improve information coordination among all three levels of government, and among local settlement services providers and community networks.

The federal government has the responsibility and determines quotas of immigrants and refugees coming into Canada through the Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada (IRCC). Traditionally, IRCC deals directly with their community-funded agencies and partners, and largely excluding direct dealings with municipal governments in the process. For the Syrian resettlement effort, information sharing among the federal,

provincial and municipal governments was either not available, too weak or in some cases conflicting. Lack of timely information did not help Hamilton's local resettlement effort in many ways. Some community partners also raise the need for a better information sharing. This report recommends developing an information sharing strategy that supports governments and community partners in creating a better resettlement experiences for refugees in their communities.

8 Advocate for more support to address longer-term integration challenges. Refugees are supported financially for up to 12 months through government and private sponsors upon arrival. Within this period, they are expected to get a job and integrate successfully. The majority of those who are not able to land a job would end up on Ontario Works (OW) or on the Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP) from "Month 13". However, critical needs such as affordable housing, language classes, childminding spaces, employment, health services (including mental health) and community supports continue to linger. This report recommends that governments, private enterprises, non-profit organizations and residents continue to provide ongoing support to refugees well beyond the first 12 months.



The Mayor's Advisory Committee on Syrian Newcomers – members

Name	Role	Organization
Daljit Garry (co-chair)	Executive Director	Wesley Urban Ministries
Dr. Mohamed Hamed (co-chair)	Professor	Department of Mechanical Engineering, McMaster University
Ines Rios	Executive Director	Immigrants Working Centre
Judy Travis	Executive Director	Workforce Planning Hamilton
Rev. Bill Mous	Director of Justice, Community and Global Ministries	The Anglican Diocese of Niagara
Erin Pease	Director, Office for Refugees	The Catholic Diocese of Hamilton
Bill Torrens	Superintendent	Hamilton-Wentworth District School Board
Sandie Pizzuti	Superintendent	Hamilton-Wentworth Catholic District School Board
Dr. Cathy Risdon	Director of Health Services and Professor	McMaster Health Sciences, Department of Family Medicine
Dr. Julie Emili	Associate Medical Officer of Health	Public Health Services, City of Hamilton
Lily Lumsden	Senior Regional Manager	YMCA Hamilton/Burlington, Employment and Immigration Services
Denise Christopherson	Chief Executive Officer	YWCA Hamilton
Jim Vanderveken	Chair / Dean	HIPC / Centre for Community Partnerships & Experiential Learning, Mohawk College
Lubna Sartawi	Vice-President	Muslim Association of Hamilton/ Co-leader, Alliance Newcomer Supports
Larry Huibers	Executive Director	Hamilton Housing Help Centre
Marwan Masri	President	Arab Cultural & Heritage Centre, Hamilton

Mayor's Office and Staff Support:

Name	Role	Organization
Christopher Cutler	Advisor to the Mayor, Community Relations	Mayor's Office, City of Hamilton
Amanda Kinnaird	Communications and Media Relations	Mayor's Office, City of Hamilton
Suzanne Brown	Director, Neighbourhood & Community Initiatives	Community & Emergency Services, City of Hamilton
John Ariyo	Manager, Community Initiatives	Community & Emergency Services, City of Hamilton
Nicole Longstaff	Senior Project Manager, Newcomer Resettlement	Community & Emergency Services, City of Hamilton
Naomi Ahmad	Research Advisor	Community & Emergency Services, City of Hamilton
Layla Abdulrahim-Moore	Working Group Coordinator, HIPC	Community & Emergency Services, City of Hamilton
Allison Jones	Communications Officer	Community & Emergency Services, City of Hamilton

Evaluation Report – Engagement and Participation

Organizations and Individuals who participated in this Evaluation and Lessons Learned Report through Focus Groups and Interviews

Advisory Committee Against Racism, City of Hamilton
Adult Basic Education Association
Anglican Diocese of Niagara (Hamilton)
City Housing, City of Hamilton
Department of Family Medicine, McMaster Health Sciences
Hamilton Housing Help Centre
Hamilton Immigration Partnership Council
Hamilton Wentworth District School Board
Hamilton Wentworth Catholic District School Board
Housing Division, City of Hamilton
Immigrants Working Centre
Mayor's Office, City of Hamilton
Mohawk College
Muslim Association of Hamilton
Neighbourhood & Community Initiatives, City of Hamilton
Ontario Works, City of Hamilton
Public Health Services, City of Hamilton
Workforce Planning Hamilton
Roman Catholic Diocese of Hamilton
Wesley Urban Ministries
YMCA Hamilton/Burlington/Brantford
YWCA Hamilton

Working Groups of the Mayor's Advisory Committee on Syrian Newcomers

Community Support/Networks Working Group
Education Working Group
Employment, Language and Skills Development Working Group
Health Working Group
Housing Working Group

Hamilton's private sponsors and private sponsor groups

Hamilton's Syrian newcomers and their families

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et Citoyenneté Canada