

Providing Refugees with the Right Information at the Right Time: Lessons Learned During the Resettlement of Syrian Refugees

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Community Partners



Importance of Information Provision

- Providing information to refugees is an essential component of resettlement and integration
- Information helps refugees to:
 - Navigate the Canadian system
 - Have knowledge of the Canadian way of life
 - Have realistic expectations about life in Canada
 - Access and utilize settlement and other services

Research Questions

- **What are the information needs of recently arrived Syrian refugees? How can we best fill these needs?**
- What types of information do Syrian refugees have and seek pre-arrival, immediately upon arrival, and long-term?
- What barriers do Syrian refugees face in obtaining this information?
- What strategies can be used to most effectively support Syrian refugees in obtaining needed information?

Research Approach

- **Semi-structured interviews** with **23 key informants** from Service Provider Organizations who provide information and services to Syrian refugees
 - 11 key informants from Calgary, AB
 - 12 key informants from London, ON
- **Focus groups** with **148 Syrian refugees**
 - 68 Syrian refugees in Calgary, AB
 - 80 Syrian refugees in London, ON

Syrian Refugees in Calgary and London

Refugee Category	Calgary, AB	London, ON
Government-Assisted	872	1181
Privately Sponsored	951	382
Blended Visa Office-Referred	117	75
TOTAL	1940	1638

Data as of January 29, 2017

Information Needs and Gaps

Pre-Arrival Information Needs

- Many fast-tracked Syrian refugees had little information pre-arrival

Pre-Arrival Information Provision

- Many Syrian refugees knew:
 - They would receive funding for one year; basic needs would be met
 - What documents to bring with them to Canada
 - Exception was educational credentials
 - The weather in Canada is cold
- Information sources
 - Typically did not have access to the internet (particularly the case for GARs)
 - At times received information from friends and/or other refugees already in Canada – not necessarily accurate
- Often had high, unrealistic expectations

Pre-Arrival Information Needs

- Refugees desire more information about their departure date so they can adequately prepare
- Desire more information about:
 - Credential recognition and work opportunities
 - Education
 - Housing
 - Healthcare
 - Restrictions on traveling back to Syria
 - How to bring family members who will be left behind

Immediate Arrival Information Needs

- Information required:
 - Basic information about daily living in Canada and Canadian norms
 - How to access services, including language classes
 - Information on housing, transit, healthcare, enrolling children in school
 - Canadian laws and norms about the treatment of children and youth
 - Rights and responsibilities
 - Budgeting
- Overwhelming amount of information given upon immediate arrival – often not retained

Immediate Arrival Information Needs

**“Refugees need to be given the right dose
of information at the right time”**

Immediate Arrival Information Gaps

- High expectations
- Privately sponsored refugees had varied experiences with receiving information
- Need additional information about:
 - healthcare system
 - how to sponsor family members
- High demand for advanced English courses

Long-Term Information Needs

At the one year mark, Syrian refugees were interested in information about:

- Transitioning to Alberta/Ontario Works
- Advanced language classes (LINC Level 4 and beyond)
- Finding a job and gaining financial independence
- Long-term housing
- Bringing extended family members to Canada
- Educational opportunities
- **Fully integrating into the community**

Challenges to Providing Information

- Limited English language proficiency and literacy, coupled with long wait times for language classes
- Cultural norms around making and keeping appointments
- Lack of familiarity with computers and the internet
- Large families and unwillingness to use childcare during information sessions
- Getting information to women

Innovative Strategies for Information Provision

Innovative Strategies Pre-Arrival

- Videos in first language
 - Basic information that is accurate
 - Promote realistic expectations
- Online portal or app to ask questions pre-arrival

Innovative Strategies Post-Arrival

- Prefer to receive information in-person
 - Importance of trust
- Show and tell
- Offer many coordinated services under one roof (“one stop shop”)

Innovative Strategies Post-Arrival

- Outreach via home visits – “deliver information right to their doorsteps”

Innovative Strategies Post-Arrival

- Conversation circles
- “Tell me” series based on the questions refugees ask – later reinforced in language classes
- Hello Neighbour program
- Match program
- Interesting videos and flow charts

Gratitude

Next Steps

- Research optimal sources, format and content of information for refugees pre- and post-arrival

Thank You to Our Funders



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