Sparing Room for Refugees: Some Housing Considerations for Syrians and Yazidis in Canada

Pallabi Bhattacharyya, Annette Riziki and Lori Wilkinson

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Outline of Presentation

- Background information
- Review of relevant literature
- Methodology
- Presentation of results and Discussion
- Policy implication and conclusion
Total Refugees Worldwide, 2001-2016

Where are the Refugees from?
01 January to 31 August 2016

- Syria: 28.0%
- Afghanistan: 14.6%
- Iraq: 9.0%
- Nigeria: 8.1%
- Eritrea: 5.6%
- Pakistan: 2.9%
- Sudan: 2.9%
- Gambia: 2.8%
- Other: 8.7%
- Egypt: 1.5%
- Iran: 1.8%
- Bangladesh: 1.9%
- Senegal: 2.1%
- Mali: 2.2%
- Somalia: 2.3%
- Guinea: 2.7%
- Ivory Coast: 2.8%

IOM October 12 2016
Burden of Hosting Refugees falls on less wealthy countries….

Only 3% of the world’s refugees are settled in a wealthy country.

Data calculated from UNHCR Mid-Year Trends, Dec 2015
Add Germany to this list at 449,000 asylum applications
Immigrants by Class of Entry, Canada, 1980-2016

Data provided by Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada, various years
Graph by L. Wilkinson (2018)
Refugees to Canada by Type, 2004-2016

Calculations from Immigration and Citizenship Canada, 2018. Admission Category and Applicant type
Source: IRCC 2017
Refugees represent 1.7% of the Canadian Population (Just over one in ten Immigrants)

Immigrants by Refugee Category in Canada, 1980-2016

Jedwab, 2018
Over half of all refugees are under age 25 at arrival

Source: IRCC. 2016. Data request tracking number: CR-16-0095
Destination Communities for Syrians 2016

Map courtesy of IRCC (March 28 2016)


Map courtesy of IRCC (March 28 2016)
Syrians to Prairie Region 2015-2017

Source: IRCC monthly statistics, 2017
Resettling Refugees on this scale is not new…

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year Range</th>
<th>Number and Nationality</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1956-57</td>
<td>over 37,000 Hungarians</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1970-1980</td>
<td>50,000+ Vietnamese (137,000 over 5 years)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Accounted for 25% of all immigrants that year; arrived during an economic recession; were settled outside of Montreal, Toronto and Vancouver</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1992-1994</td>
<td>11,000+ Bosnian, Serbian, Croatian</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Airlifted 5,000+ Kosovars in 1999 in 6 weeks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Resettled 4,000+ Karen from Thailand in 2006</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Over 25,000 high needs Iraqi arrived in 2013-14</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Canada has a long humanitarian tradition of assisting refugees

- Refugees enter Canada through 2 programs:
  - **Refugee Resettlement Program**: for people who need protection from outside Canada
  - **In-Canada Asylum System**: for people making refugee protection claims from within Canada

- These programs are enshrined in Canada’s legislation and regulation which recognize that Canada’s “refugee program is in the first instance about saving lives and offering protection to the displaced and persecuted”.

Jedwab, 2018
Canada’s Refugee Resettlement Program

- Resettlement reflects Canada’s commitment to **share responsibility** for the world’s displaced and persecuted.

- Refugees are **selected abroad**, from refugee camps and urban areas, based on their need for protection and are resettled through 1 of 3 streams:

  - **Government-assisted refugees (GARs)**: Refugees referred by the UNHCR or another referral organization. The **Government** provides income support, settlement services and integration support.

  - **Privately sponsored refugees (PSRs)**: Refugees referred by **private sponsors** in Canada. The **Private sponsors** provide income support, settlement services and integration support.

  - **Blended visa office-referred refugees (BVORs)**: Refugees referred by the UNHCR or another referral organization. **Private sponsors** and the **government** jointly provide income support, settlement services and integration support.

- Upon arrival in Canada, refugees become permanent residents and have a **pathway to citizenship**.
What kind of financial support is provided?

- Housing for government assisted refugees often begins at a reception centre
- “permanent” housing located
  - Government assisted: Resettlement Assistance Program locates housing
  - Privately sponsored: small group finds housing
- Initial allowance to acquire clothing, small furniture
- Monthly allowance based on household size and market
- Federal funding ends at “Month 13”
### Yazidi and Syrian refugee demographics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>YAZIDI</th>
<th>SYRIANS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sex</td>
<td>66% female</td>
<td>42% female</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average age</td>
<td>45% age 20-29yrs</td>
<td>57% below 25 yrs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No formal schooling</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>23%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percent gov’t assisted</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>88%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average family size</td>
<td>5.5</td>
<td>5.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average children per family</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Knowledge of English</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Months in Canada</td>
<td>0-14 months</td>
<td>57% 13+ months, 21% 0-5 months</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Wilkinson et al., 2017; Wilkinson and Bhattacharyya, 2018
Content of Syrian and Yazidi studies

- Focal points include: **housing**, **language acquisition and language ability**, **employment information**, and **settlement service use**
- Both the studies were funded by IRCC
- Mainly government assisted refugees
- Both studies were conducted face-to-face by the settlement agency workers.
- Participants given $10 grocery gift card OR $10 honorarium
Syrians interviewed by city of arrival

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>City</th>
<th># interviewed</th>
<th>Actual arrivals</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Winnipeg</td>
<td>121</td>
<td>1,200</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brandon</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moose Jaw</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>120</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prince Albert</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Saskatoon</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>505</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Regina</td>
<td>86</td>
<td>550</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brooks</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lethbridge</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>230</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Red Deer</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>185</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Edmonton</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>1,270</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Calgary</td>
<td>81</td>
<td>1,030</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total (GAR only)</strong></td>
<td><strong>632</strong></td>
<td><strong>5,315</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- Brandon 43%
- Brooks 40%
- Prince Albert 33%
- Lethbridge 31%
- Moose Jaw 19%
- Red Deer 18%
- Saskatoon 16%
- Regina 16%
- Winnipeg 10%
- Calgary 8%
- Edmonton 4%
Yazidi Refugees - Qualitative Interviews

- Interviews were conducted on a sample of 35 Yazidi in these four cities of Canada.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>City</th>
<th>Number of Participants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Calgary</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>London</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Toronto</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Winnipeg</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Housing the Syrian And Yazidi Refugees

Results

Photo credit: City of Brandon, 2017
Temporary Housing Conditions
## Experiences with Temporary Housing

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>YAZIDI</th>
<th>SYRIANS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Time spent in temporary housing</td>
<td>15 days to 3 months</td>
<td>Average 15 days, Manitoba 0 days</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Satisfaction with housing</td>
<td>Satisfactory</td>
<td>Very satisfactory</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positive experiences</td>
<td>Refugees in Winnipeg were happy because they were allowed to cook their own food.</td>
<td>Friendly hotel staff, frequent visits from settlement service providers.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Unavailability of culturally appropriate food, size of the kitchen (Winnipeg), time of stay, too many people</td>
<td>Size of the rooms and having to share with many people, concerns with culturally inappropriate food</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: no Syrian refugees destined to Manitoba stayed in hotels.
Permanent Housing Conditions
Housing satisfaction of Syrian refugees in the Prairies

Wilkinson et al., 2017
Percentage Renting their House - by City of Residence, Manitoba, 2017

Wilkinson et al., 2017
Does Housing meet your Needs? by City of Residence, Manitoba, 2017

Wilkinson et al., 2017
# Summary of Housing Complaints

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>YAZIDI</th>
<th>SYRIANS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Size of the Units</strong></td>
<td>Overcrowding for some families</td>
<td>Overcrowding for some families</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Financial</strong></td>
<td>All worried about high cost of rent</td>
<td>All worried about high cost of rent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Housing conditions</strong></td>
<td>➢ Distance to amenities</td>
<td>➢ Distance to children’s school</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>➢ Unhappy living in basements</td>
<td>➢ Lack of playground nearby</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>➢ Houses were old and in need of repair.</td>
<td>➢ Noisy neighbourhood</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>➢ Issues with furniture received</td>
<td>➢ Fear of living in housing with indoor staircases</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>➢ Unhappy living in downtown</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Housing Needs</strong></td>
<td>The desire to live near other Yazidis</td>
<td>Special needs for families with small children.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
While the two groups share some similar experiences in locating housing, there are some differences

- family composition,
- gender, and
- the effect of trauma
Women & Independent Living

- Many very young widowed mothers in this community
- In Iraq, women were discouraged from being independent
- Women less likely to attend school
- The few adult males in this community are responsible for caring for multiple families

Yazidi mother and daughter in Toronto; photo credit: C. Ellingson, 2017
Policy and Practical Implications

- Housing affordability + Month 13
- Additional Emergency funding
- Incentives for developers + Urban Planners
- Larger apartment units should be easily locatable and less expensive to enable refugee families.
- Basement suites are not suitable for traumatized individuals/groups of refugees
- **Required more often for Yazidi**—
  - Provide them housing near to other Yazidis
- **Problems specifically mentioned by Syrians**—
  - More play structures close to apartment units.
  - Baby gates with instructions on their use.
Acknowledgements

For supporting the Syrian Survey

Brooks and County Immigration Services
Calgary Catholic Immigration Society
Catholic Social Services (Edmonton)
Catholic Social Services (Red Deer)
Lethbridge Family Services-Immigrant Services
Moose Jaw Multicultural Council
Regina Open Door Society
Saskatoon Open Door Society
YWCA Prince Albert
La Société franco-manitobaine/Accueil francophone (Saint-Boniface)
Manitoba Interfaith Immigration Council Inc. (Winnipeg)

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Additional Findings, Reports and Information

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http://umanitoba.ca/about_IRW.html

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Relevant Publications


