A DEFINING MOMENT IN RESPONDING TO REFUGEES

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During the fall of 2015 the Canadian public was captured by striking images of the lifeless body of Alan Kurdi on the shores of a Turkish beach. It vividly woke the country to a refugee crisis that had been brewing for years and brought the crisis home because he and his family were trying to make their way to Canada. It became an election issue and later a point of nation building as Canadians rose to the occasion to support refugees.

The crisis sparked individuals, communities, academics, business leaders, politicians and service provider organizations to act quickly to welcome unprecedented numbers of refugees in a short time. This was something not seen for at least a generation or two. Now, almost a year later this issue of *Canadian Diversity/Diversité canadienne* examines the global refugee crisis and Canada's response.

Articles in this issue come from a wide range of perspectives and sectors and focus on the Syrian crisis but also look at issues facing refugees more generally. The issue opens with insights from John McCallum, the Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada. He reminds readers that this is not the first time Canadians have welcomed large numbers of refugees, noting how the country received 37,000 Hungarians 60 years ago and 60,000 Vietnamese in the late 1970s. He also highlights the leadership, dedication and generosity displayed by not only individual Canadians but also the country's private sector. This is linked to the country's unique approach to integrating refugees through not only Government Assisted streams but also its Private Sponsorship of Refugee program.

Elke Winter and Benjamin Zyla engage these issues further in their article, by offering a general context of the Syrian conflict and Canada's response. They also situate the crisis and response in relation to countries in Europe that have seen millions of migrants arrive over the last few years. The pay special attention to Sweden and Germany — who like Canada are outliers on the global stage by initial opening rather than closing boarders and seeing this moment as a unique time to show humanitarianism and compassion. Whereas McCallum emphasized the role of private sponsors and the business community, they highlight the importance of local service providers in making the response to this crisis a defining moment for Canada.

In the article that I have contributed with Michael Ungar we explore the Syrian cohort of refugees demographically. Like most other refugees, this cohort is young. In fact the vast majority are under the age of 25. We argue that if this is the case, then Canadians need to focus on offering these young people access to language and learning, focus on opportunities for their social and cultural integration, and consider their long-term physical and mental wellbeing. We argue it is likewise important to have systematic information and evidence to create targeted interventions and generate evidence-based policy. Only then can we assure that the immense potential of these young people is tapped for the benefit of their own communities and Canada as a whole.

The potential of refugees is also analysed by Jack Jedwab and Lori Wilkinson in their article. Using General Social Survey data they examine the intersection of social, cultural, linguistic and economic dimensions of integration to Canada. They do this by comparing refugees to economic stream immigrants. Generally they challenge many popular conceptions of refugees. Although they find that refugees earn less than economic stream immigrants and are less trusting, over the long run refugees are more active in the labour force with higher rates of employment and have a greater sense of belonging. They find that money doesn't buy belonging and social integration is not just about getting a job.

Related, a number of articles in this issue focus on attracting refugees and newcomers to smaller centres around the country. This is noted by Minister McCallum as well as Winter and Zyla. The issue is explored fully by Naomi Alboim's contribution. She has years of experience in the area, both as a policy maker and leading academic researcher in the field. In her article she offers an overview of how to attract and retain newcomers in secondary regions. Like Jedwab and Wilkinson she shows that it isn't just about jobs.

Articles by Michaela Hynie and Tina Changoor as well as Ashley Korn and Philippe Raphael contest this. Although they concede that many factors matter, they emphasize that long term success in resettlement and integration is based on employment first and foremost. Hynie and Changoor explore this by looking at barriers to employment, such as lack of language skills or lack of recognition of degrees. They also look at how under- and un-employment contribute to mental and physical health stress. Korn and Raphael also examine employment issues, but focus on Government Assisted Refugees. In doing so they echo the same barriers and note the importance of employment programs and the role of service provider organization in ensuring the integration of refugees.

A core issue of employment is language. Nathalie Piquemal and Yves Labrèche, in their article, examine how it is also crucial to other forms of integration. In particular they look at Francophone refugees, largely from Africa, as "involuntary minorities" in Anglophone communities. Like Jedwab and Wilkinson, they explore what fosters or hinders the development of a sense of belonging and intercultural dialogue and exchange. They emphasize the importance of offering people a strong understanding of the issues and challenges associated with ethnic and cultural diversity.

Understanding culture and diversity is not only important for economic and social and cultural integration, it is also a major factor in accessing services. Virginia Lane and Hassan Vatanparast's article analyses this by considering optimal healthcare services models for newcomers. They question whether they should be centralized in hubs or more localized across centres. In exploring these issues, like Piquemal and Labrèche, they show that it is not only important to recognize the lack of familiarity newcomers have with the healthcare system, but it is essential for the dominant community and service providers to understand the unique needs of newcomers. It is a two way street.

The last article in this issue is by Fariborz Birjandian, who offers a powerful auto-ethnographic perspective as a refugee, settlement provider, and contributor to policy development. Like Lane and Vatanparsat he advocates for a holistic approach. He offers a personal narrative of how providing a seamless system of support is key to helping refugees overcome their past traumas, confront their fears, and realize their hopes of a new life. It is fundamental to successful integration. He also reminds readers that the refuges crisis is a global one, with refugees from far too many contexts, and Canada like other developed countries has a responsibility to respond and take action to prevent the creation of refugees in the first place. That is, for thinking about the crisis from pre- to post-arrival and truly investigating and alleviating its root causes.

Overall the articles in this issue remind readers that Canada has a rich history of responding to refugee crises and that it is a leader in integrating newcomers. At the same time, contributions show that despite its many successes, newcomers to the country still face many obstacles and there is a continued need to research and tackle them to make the country, if not the world, more equitable and open to refugees and newcomers.