INTEGRATION OF REFUGEE YOUTH IN HALIFAX, NOVA SCOTIA: THE CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES FOR SMALLER URBAN CENTRES IN CANADA

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How can cities, like Halifax, Nova Scotia, move forward in serving refugee youth effectively? The reality is that resettlement is a temporary, short-term process while integration is a more long-term process. According to IRCC, over half of refugees who arrive in Canada are under the age of 18. They are a unique part of the newcomer population and understanding their needs can help cities become more effective in supporting them. As Canadian cities become more diverse, local institutions need to be intentional about promoting integration and preventing the exclusion of newcomers. There needs to be more dialogue around what integration support really looks like, and how communities can be involved. Though there are challenges to effectively meeting the needs of young refugees in smaller cities in Canada, there are also opportunities to creatively and resourcefully respond to and serve these young people.

Comment des villes comme Halifax, en Nouvelle-Écosse, peuvent-elles aller de l'avant pour servir efficacement les jeunes réfugiés ? La réalité est que la réinstallation est un processus temporaire à court terme, alors que l'intégration est un processus à long terme. Selon l'IRCC, plus de la moitié des réfugiés qui arrivent au Canada sont âgés de moins de 18 ans. Ils constituent une catégorie distincte de la population des nouveaux arrivants et la compréhension de leurs besoins peut aider les villes à les soutenir plus efficacement. À mesure que les villes canadiennes se diversifient, les institutions locales doivent s'efforcer de promouvoir l'intégration et de prévenir l'exclusion des nouveaux arrivants. Il doit y avoir davantage de dialogue sur la nature réelle du soutien à l'intégration et sur la façon dont les collectivités peuvent y participer. Bien qu'il soit difficile de répondre efficacement aux besoins des jeunes réfugiés dans les petites villes canadiennes, il existe également des possibilités de répondre et de servir ces jeunes de façon créative et ingénieuse.

We know that over half of all refugees coming to Canada are under the age of 18 (IRCC, 2019). Yet despite this fact, there is a void in Canadian federal policy specific to the resettlement and integration of these young people. Refugee youth come from a variety of contexts, and often have experienced very difficult and traumatic circumstances. It is thus imperative for host communities to understand these issues in order to have relevant programs and resources available to them.

Cities across the country are trying to find ways to support the integration of refugee young people. Resettlement and integration require cities to be key players in creating welcoming environments for newcomers. The existing literature on refugee young people in Canada largely focuses on the three largest cities in the country- Toronto, Vancouver, and Montreal- with more research needed in smaller urban settings. This is a gap that this research has attempted to address through its case study of the experience of Halifax.

I recently completed my PhD research on Canada's response to refugee youth, in which I did a case study of Halifax, Nova Scotia. I was looking at how smaller urban centres in Canada, like Halifax, are prepared to support refugee youth in their resettlement and integration. My findings show that Halifax

has the capacity to provide better integration support for refugee youth, but we need to find ways to mobilize the resources we have as a city to better serve them. What is important for effective integration in the community is for supports for newcomers to exist not solely in settlement service organizations, but across public services and sectors throughout the city.

This concept of a "small city" is an inherently relative one. In relation to Canada's largest cities, such as Toronto (2.93 million) (World Population Review, 2020) or Montreal (1.78 million) (World Population Review, 2020), Halifax is a smaller city, with a population of just over 400,000 people. Other cities of comparable size include Kitchener, ON, Saskatoon, SK, and Oshawa, ON. Halifax is the main urban centre in Nova Scotia, and there are important comparisons to be drawn with smaller cities in the Atlantic region, including St. John's, NL and Moncton, NB, who also function as hubs in each province for government, business, transportation, and services.

One key feature of refugee resettlement support in smaller cities is that resettlement services are usually provided by one settlement organization, as opposed to several organizations in larger cities (Akbari & Ramos, 2019). For example, according to the Canadian Council for Refugees (CCR) Montreal has 28 different organizations involved with the resettlement support for refugees and newcomers in general (Canadian Council for Refugees, 2019); these are just the ones who are members of the CCR. In the case of Halifax, ISANS (Immigration Services Association of Nova Scotia) is the one body responsible for the settlement of refugees, with 5 other organizations in the city that also provide newcomer-specific supports. ISANS' offices are in the Halifax area, where government-assisted refugees (GARs) are settled. In addition to ISANS, there are 4 other sponsorship agreement holders in Nova Scotia who can privately sponsor refugees to come to the province. ISANS is responsible for providing resettlement support to refugees, operating with a case-management approach. In Canada, government support for refugees through the Resettlement Assistance Program (RAP) lasts for the first year of that refugee's time in Canada. The other sponsorship agreement holders are themselves responsible for providing that same support to the refugees they sponsor.

Halifax has received refugees from all over the world for decades. While there have been times during which larger refugee groups have been settled in the province, the largest influx to date were the Syrian refugees who were settled between 2015 and 2018. January 2015 and August 2018, following the Canadian government's commitment to resettle 25,000 Syrian refugees, Nova Scotia received 2,435 Syrian refugees (IRCC, 2018).

This is almost 5 times the usual number of refugees who are settled in the province each year.

In 2016, a donations centre was opened in a warehouse just outside of the main city core. A 100,000 square foot building was soon filled with donations of clothing, furniture, toiletries, and school supplies, in response to the needs of the Syrian refugees. This is just one example of how the city was able to mobilize people and resources quickly in order to meet an urgent need. They had the infrastructure in place to make this provision of goods to refugees as efficient as possible. This was a short-term project that did a lot of good for the Syrian newcomers, though once the crisis began to slide off the public's newspapers, it has been more difficult to rally the same public support for the needs of refugees in the city.

This influx of newcomers shone a bright light on the current resettlement process in our province. In terms of services specifically for newcomer youth, ISANS and the YMCA are the two main organizations in Halifax that provide these supports. The young adult services provided through ISANS are targeted at people between 18 and 25 years old, while youth programs through the YMCA include those as young as 12. The young adult services provided through ISANS are targeted at people between 18 and 25 years old. These services include employment support, life skills development, recreation partnerships in the community, support groups, and language support.

The reality is that resettlement is a temporary, short-term process, while integration is a long-term requirement of refugee youth. However, a lack of available funding and resources for long-term integration support can impede potential resilience resources. There are no federal mandates in Canada to set a standard for settlement agencies concerning what they must provide to young people (outside of immediate settlement needs). That makes their integration experiences of exceptional importance for us to understand and improve upon. They are a unique part of the newcomer population and understanding their needs can help services be more effective in supporting them.

Employment opportunities are an essential part of the successful integration of refugee families (Hyndman, et al., 2006). Fostering these opportunities for refugee young people in smaller cities is an integral part of resettlement. Organizations, like "Helping Newcomers Work.ca" (Helping Newcomers Work.Ca, 2019) have started in recent years, connecting refugees with work opportunities across Canada. In Halifax, the Atlantic Immigration Pilot (Nova Scotia Immigration, 2019) is an important initiative explicitly focused on supporting employers to sponsor and hire newcomers in their business. The pilot has been an important incentive program for employers in Nova Scotia to hire foreign workers, including refugees.

Another noteworthy project is the Halifax Local Immigration Partnership (HLIP)-(Halifax Regional Municipality, 2019), which was founded in 2013. Such local immigration partnerships are a type of initiative taking place across Canada. HLIP builds alliances across sectors in the city to make Halifax a more welcoming and inclusive place for newcomers. They

work with partners to improve access to the labour market for newcomers, help coordinate newcomer services, and strengthen cultural competency in the community, all to support integration. These local immigration partnerships exist across the country. In a recent evaluation of the immigration settlement program (IRCC, 2016), one of the main recommendations to the IRCC was to develop a plan for realizing the potential contributions that these groups can make to the settlement process.

Recreation is one crucial space for social integration to be supported (Benimmas, et al., 2017). Community initiatives that exist outside of newcomer-specific services have the potential to support this long-term integration. The opportunities for this in Halifax, like other cities, are much more prevalent than they would be in more rural areas. One of the barriers to refugee youth engaging in municipal recreation programs is money. While local sports clubs do offer subsidies to newcomer youth, the subsidized fees, in combination with the gear to participate and the transportation to and from the location, remains an obstacle.

School-based supports are also an important space for integration. In areas with smaller populations, however, the diversity of services available in schools is limited. In Halifax, certain neighbourhoods have more diverse populations than others. For the most part, refugees are settled within a few central areas in the city, meaning that local schools are faced with the task of helping these newcomers settle in and adjust to a new education system. There are fabulous EAL (English as an Additional Language) teachers but their caseload is unrealistically large. Youth can turn to ISANS for language support, though spaces are limited. Language is such an important part of the integration, and in a smaller city with few language training opportunities, this can be a barrier for young people.

In the same way, limited access to mental health services is a significant struggle for small cities. The pre-migration experiences of both groups do influence a different integration experience, as refugees often come from more unstable situations and are more likely to have experienced violence and/or trauma. Often a young person needs to be in crisis before care can be accessed, and even then, it is a struggle. There is a void in Halifax of more community-based psychosocial support for refugee youth that could help prevent them from reaching a crisis to begin with (Ferede, 2010).

As Canadian cities become more diverse, local institutions need to be intentional about promoting integration and preventing the exclusion of newcomers from the labour market as well as the city's more extensive resources. Creating environments that attract industry and innovation complement policies that aim to reduce the exclusion of newcomers (Papillon, 2002). For smaller cities like Halifax, retaining refugees after the first year of settlement has proved difficult. The retention rate of refugees in Atlantic Canada following their first year in the country is low. According to Statistics Canada (Statistics Canada, 2015), 60% of refugees who are settled in Nova Scotia stay, while the retention rate in New Brunswick is 43.5%, and in PEI 37.5%. One of the outcomes of this concentration of refugees in larger cities is the presence of more resources for them.

Several cities across the country, including Toronto and Winnipeg, have become signatories to immigration agreements with the federal government (Frideres, 2011). These agreements are intended to streamline resources available to newcomers as well as include cities in the decision-making process. Intergovernmental cooperation can promote better coordination of resources for resettlement programs and services. Unfortunately, these agreements with municipal governments have not caught on in other parts of the country, and there has been significant criticism as to the meaningful involvement these cities have in decision-making (Rose & Preston, 2017).

Cities with smaller populations, like Halifax, have an opportunity to learn from each other. They can optimize the inherent strength in coordinating their services to create a wrap-around support network for young refugees. The research undertaken to date with refugee youth in Canada suggests that the solution to the integration needs of newcomers is not separate programs and services but an increase in the cultural competency of existing services to reach out to the population in an effective way while not segregating them from the rest of the population. The current literature shows us that there are some significant barriers to their integration that often stem from a lack of policy or insufficient policy. Whether it is the education system, transportation, community services, or health care, when policy decisions are made without accounting for newcomers, this becomes a significant obstacle to effective service provision. The "system" is not an amorphous structure beyond our control. It is the result of policy and its implementation. Therefore, responding to this obstacle requires a concerted effort by policymakers and service providers to evaluate how programs need to be provided or adapted to meet the objectives of policy and meet the needs of refugees in their resettlement and integration.

So how can cities, like Halifax, move forward in serving refugee youth effectively? While there are challenges related to the capacity of a small city like Halifax to respond to the needs of refugees, there are also advantages to being a smaller, more closely inter-connected city. The importance of collaboration in providing services cannot be overstated, as supporting people through the settlement process requires different moving pieces, such as housing, education, financial support, recreation, and health care, to operate in conjunction with each other ideally (Burchard, et al., 2002)

In Dutch scholar Maarten Hajer's work, he presents an argument for "policy without polity." He argues that policymaking today often takes place in an 'institutional void' between the bound-

aries of the traditional polity. Cities provide an epicentre for such polities to be crossed in order to address issues like support for refugee youth. Solutions for resettlement and integration require the crossing of traditional lines for effective and cohesive, municipal policies to be created (Ratkovic, et al., 2017). The answers we seek will not come from one organization or government agency, but rather in their collaboration. Urban centres can optimize their geography to see this goal of partnership realized by facilitating connections between agencies and individuals who can all contribute to better services for these young people.

This collaborative provision of services has not been fully realized in Halifax, mainly because of the siloed nature of service provision and funding. Some traditional youth-serving organizations in the city did not participate in my Ph.D. research because they felt they did not have a newcomer-specific lens from which to discuss how to serve this population. There needs to be more dialogue around what integration support looks like, and how communities can be involved, even if they do not target newcomers specifically in their programming. Potential still exists for Halifax. The solution to this is not to create new organizations or programs, but rather to optimize and improve upon the current array of services we have so that they can better meet the needs of this population. Though there are challenges to effectively meeting the needs of young refugees in smaller cities in Canada, there are also opportunities to creatively and resourcefully responding to and serving these young people.

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