



SOCIAL CONNECTEDNESS  
FELLOWSHIP PROGRAM

**Facilitating Resilience-Building and Social  
Connectedness in the Refugee and Asylum  
Seeker Population of Greater Montreal**

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## IMPORTANT ACRONYMS

GAR: Government-Assisted Refugee

PSR: Privately-Sponsored Refugee

UNHCR: United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees

ISO: Immigrant Service Organization

MIDI: Quebec Ministry of Immigration, Diversity, and Inclusion

## ORGANIZATIONS/IMMIGRANT-SERVING ORGANIZATIONS CONSULTED

### **Action Réfugiés Montréal**

**ALPA:** Accueil Liaison Pour Arrivants

(Reception and Liaison for Newcomers)

**BINAM:** Bureau d'Intégration des Nouveaux Arrivants à Montréal

(Office for Integration of Newcomers to Montreal)

**CANA:** Carrefour d'Aide aux Nouveaux Arrivants

(Assistance Crossroads for Newcomers)

**CRIC:** Carrefour de Ressources en Interculturel du Centre Sud

(Intercultural Resource Crossroads of Montreal's Centre-Sud)

**CSAI:** Centre Social d'Aide aux Immigrants

(Social Center Helping Immigrants)

**FGM:** Fondation Grand Montréal

(Foundation of Greater Montréal)

### **HANY**

**SayÇa!**

**TCRI:** Table de concertation des organismes au service des personnes  
réfugiées et immigrantes

(Quebec Roundtable of Services for Refugees and Immigrants)

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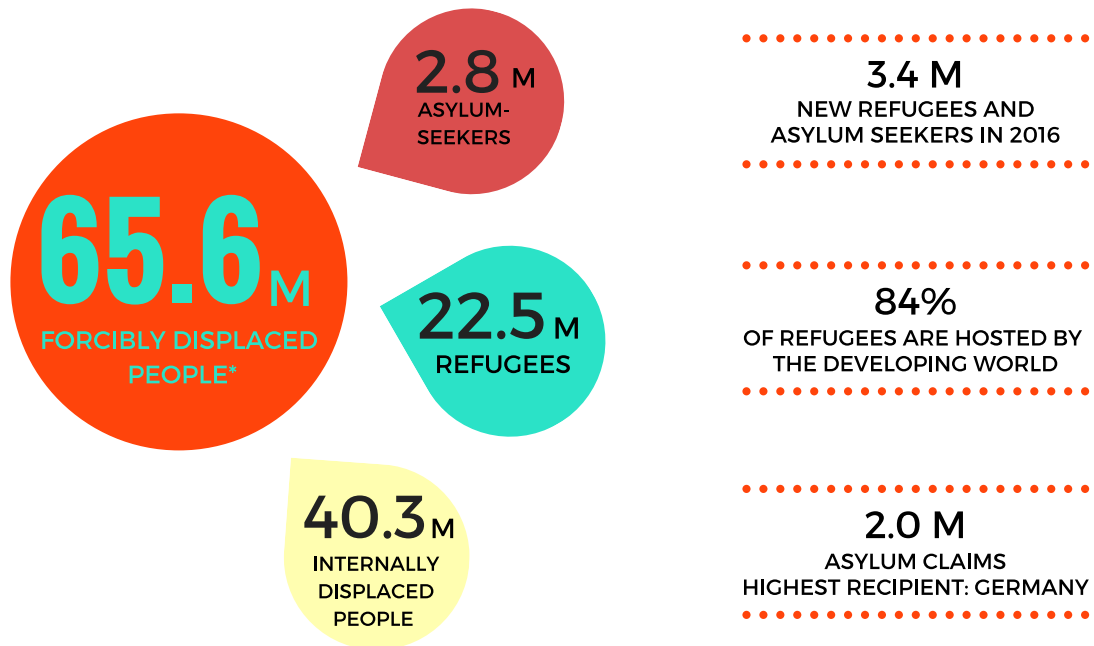
## SUMMARY

This research explores the policies and programs that foster or deter a strong sense of belonging among refugees arriving in Montreal. While social connectedness and resilience-building are developed by people, collaborative and complementary networks of institutions are fundamental in order to create the right conditions for positive exchanges to take place. Recommendations for donors, and federal, provincial, and municipal decision-makers are provided. These findings were informed by in-person interviews with relevant stakeholders as well as independent research.

Key recommendations are:

- Define the resettlement and integration responsibilities of each level of government, in cooperation with relevant stakeholders.
- Suspend the *Safe Third Country Agreement* with the United States.
- Create a Quebec Refugee Sponsorship Training Program in collaboration with ISOs, neighborhood organizations, resettled PSRs, and sponsors.
- Give GARs, PSRs, and accepted asylum claimants, official and long-term roles in resettlement and integration programs.
- Accelerate diploma recognition processes and ensure that the evaluation methods of re-training programs are more practical than theoretical.
- Consider ISO expertise and favour service-complementarity when crafting funding frameworks.
- Prioritize and support intercultural intervention programs.
- Facilitate access to education to all asylum-seekers awaiting acceptance decisions, regardless of their age. At the very least, “lock-in” the age of dependents who were under 18 years of age at the time of arrival to Canada, and allow them to finish their secondary education.

# FORCED DISPLACEMENT AND RESETTLEMENT AROUND THE WORLD: A 2016 SNAPSHOT <sup>1</sup>

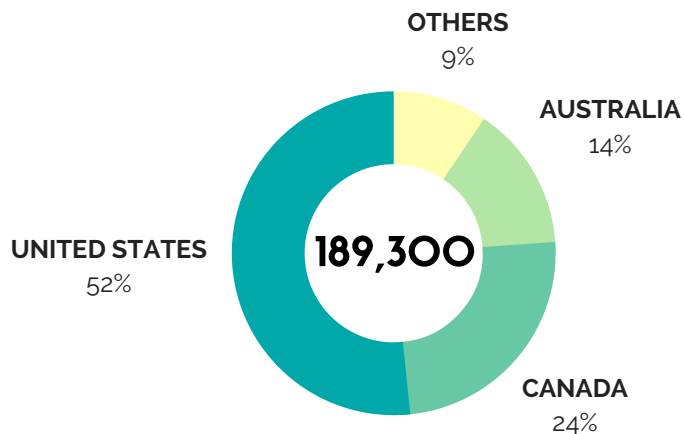


\*This number does not include people granted asylum in countries of arrival.

## RESETTLEMENT

Only a very small portion of refugees will ever be resettled to a third country. In 2016, **less than 1%** (189,300) of the worldwide refugee population was admitted for resettlement.

With the escalation of conflict and violent war in several areas of the world, the need for humanitarian resettlement is pressing, and unlikely to decrease in upcoming years.



### What is resettlement?

When a person seeks refugee in a country where they still remain at risk and/or needs cannot be met, the UNHCR can help resettle them to a third country.

The receiving State admits them as refugees, grants them legal and physical protection, and ultimately permanent residence **and the rights that go along with it.**

<sup>1</sup> Information retrieved from UNHCR's 2016 Global Trends on Forced Displacement

## INTRODUCTION

During the 2015 Refugee Crisis, Canada became a model for progressive and humane practices and attitudes toward humanitarian resettlement, welcoming 77,090 refugees between January of 2015 and April of 2017.<sup>2</sup> In 2016, Canada reported 16,300 refugee naturalizations, 9,600 less than in 2015, but still the largest number around the world, ahead of 3,200 in France.<sup>3</sup> In light of increasingly restrictive and in some cases discriminatory immigration policies around the world,<sup>4</sup> it is important that Canada reaffirm its status as an open and inclusive host country.

For refugees and asylum seekers who reach third countries, resettlement is not the end of the journey. Following arrival, they must adapt to their new environments, rebuild lives, navigate settlement services, and look forward, all while coming to terms with the lives they left behind. Newcomers contribute to Canada's multicultural social fabric, and many are eager to give back to their host cities. In addition, the journeys of these new Canadians can teach their host-communities "valuable lessons about overcoming adversity" and developing resilience.<sup>5</sup>

The social integration and well-being of new Canadians is greatly influenced by the quality of their host society's reception strategies.<sup>6</sup> Host countries can help build more inclusive societies through public policy. This research identifies some of the factors and practices that currently inhibit or support the resettlement and integration of refugees and asylum seekers in Montreal. The goal is to identify intervention points and provide recommendations to facilitate the integration, resilience, and hence social connectedness of resettled refugees and asylum-seekers arriving in Montreal.

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<sup>2</sup> IRCC April 2017

<sup>3</sup> Naturalization is "the legal process by which a non-citizen in a country may acquire citizenship or nationality of that country". It is used by the UNHCR as a measure of local integration. However is limited by uneven availability of data and poor coverage.

<sup>4</sup> Grandi, Filippo. "UN Agency 'alarmed' by Uncertainty Facing Refugees in the Process of Being Resettled in US." *UN News Center* 30 Jan. 2017

<sup>5</sup> Simich, Laura. "Editor's Introduction." in Andermann, L. *"Refuge and Resilience..."*

<sup>6</sup> Simich, Laura. "Editor's Introduction." in Andermann, L. *"Refuge and Resilience..."*

## RESILIENCE-BUILDING AND SOCIAL CONNECTEDNESS

Resilience is a *process* of positive adaptation to one's environment *despite* hardship, rather than a biologically-determined personality trait.<sup>7</sup> In a context of adversity, it is "both the capacity of individuals to navigate their way to the [resources] that sustain their well being, and their capacity — individually and collectively — to negotiate for these resources to be provided and experienced in culturally meaningful ways."<sup>8</sup> This description is similar to what Maurice, defines as social connectedness. Originally from Burundi, Maurice arrived to Montreal as a privately-sponsored refugee (PSR) in 2015, after spending most of his life in a refugee camp in Malawi:

*"Me knowing a lot of people, knowing resources that will allow me to meet more people. That is social connectedness." –Maurice*

Psychologist Alex Zautra highlights that "in response to trauma, people often display considerable capacity to adapt, and they do so not only through inner strength but also through social connections."<sup>9</sup> Approaching integration through a resilience framework implies harnessing the strengths of vulnerable persons in order to create positive change.<sup>10</sup> Facilitating resilience-building therefore appears to be intrinsically linked to social connectedness.

New Canadians who arrive as refugees are likelier to face unemployment, low educational success rates, unstable jobs, and other types of marginalization.<sup>11</sup> Yet, there is a gap in research regarding how refugees harness their strengths and combat this, as their stories are often viewed through the lens of trauma.<sup>12</sup> The Mental Health Commission of Canada highlights that "over-pathologizing refugee populations is counterproductive to their mental health," and advocates for the promotion

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<sup>7</sup> Cicchetti, Dante & Luthar, Suniya Pg. 2 "The construct of resilience: Implications for interventions and social policies". 2000. National Institutes of Health

<sup>8</sup> Ungar, Michael 2008 "What is Resilience". Resilience Research Center Web.

<sup>9</sup> Zautra, Alex J. "Resilience is Social, After All" Chapter 14 Pg. 185 of Resilience Handbook

<sup>10</sup> Cicchetti, Dante & Luthar, Suniya Pg. 5

<sup>11</sup> Burstein, M. "*Reconfiguring settlement and integration...*"

<sup>12</sup> Shakya, Y. B. et al in Anderman, Lisa & Simich, Laura "*Refuge and Resilience...*" 2014

of resilience and self management at the individual, family, and community level.<sup>13</sup>

*"It's important not to forget that there is a reason why we are refugees. Yes, we want to be treated like everyone else, but there are times and places where you have to realize that you can't expect the same from me".*

*"I am not the same as someone who immigrated here, when my university doesn't exist and I can't have my transcripts"- Farah (Syria)*

Still, post-migration stress factors cannot be overlooked. Like Farah, who arrived from Syria in 2015 as a PSR, many resettled refugees in Montreal are unable to obtain diploma equivalencies. Other stressors include financial instability, communication barriers, culture shock, family role reversals, and social isolation, among others.<sup>14</sup> However, more refugees and forced migrants thrive despite adversity than those who do not.<sup>15</sup> Intervention priorities will depend on each individual's emotional state, strengths, and self-identified necessities, as well as their capacity to navigate resources.<sup>16</sup> This cannot be detached from policy making, as it is those in power who can ensure service navigability.

Effective integration policy will recognize the "social dimensions of refugee resilience," meaning that it will carefully consider the interactions between the newly-arrived individuals and the people, host communities, public services, and other interconnected networks in which they become embedded.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Mental Health Commission of Canada 2016

<sup>14</sup> Paine, Claire "What constitutes treatment? Re-thinking mental health practice for refugees" Oct. 12, 2016

<sup>15</sup> "Simich, L and Roche, B "Defining Resiliency, Constructing Equity" March 2012

<sup>16</sup> TCRI 2017 2 -Tremblay, Monique. *Composer Avec La Complexité Dans L'intervention Psychosociale Auprès Des Nouveaux Arrivants*. Rep. Montreal: Pg. 75.

<sup>17</sup> Kirmayer in Andermann, Lisa & Simich, Laura "Editor's Introduction." In "Refuge and Resilience..." 2014.



## METHODOLOGY

This report is based on field research and literature reviews conducted in Montreal between May and July 2017. All interviews were voluntary and conducted in French or English.

Interviews were conducted with 5 people who arrived to Montreal as PSRs or GARs between 2006 and 2016. Pseudonyms have been used throughout this report to protect their privacy. Three interviewees arrived as government-assisted refugees (originally from Guinea, Democratic Republic of Congo, and Casamance, Senegal) and two arrived as PSRs (originally from Syria and Burundi). Their interviews were arranged following encounters at events catered specifically to refugees and immigrants, which indicates a degree of self-selection in the sample. While their voices do not fully represent Montreal's humanitarian migrant population, the trajectories and concerns that they voice are real, and can inform policy making.

Interviews were also held with staff from 7 Montreal-based immigrant-serving organizations and with staff members of the Refugee Aid Committee of the TCRI (Quebec Roundtable of Services for Refugees and Immigrants), the Fondation Grand Montreal<sup>18</sup>, and BINAM (Bureau d'Intégration des Nouveaux Arrivants à Montréal).

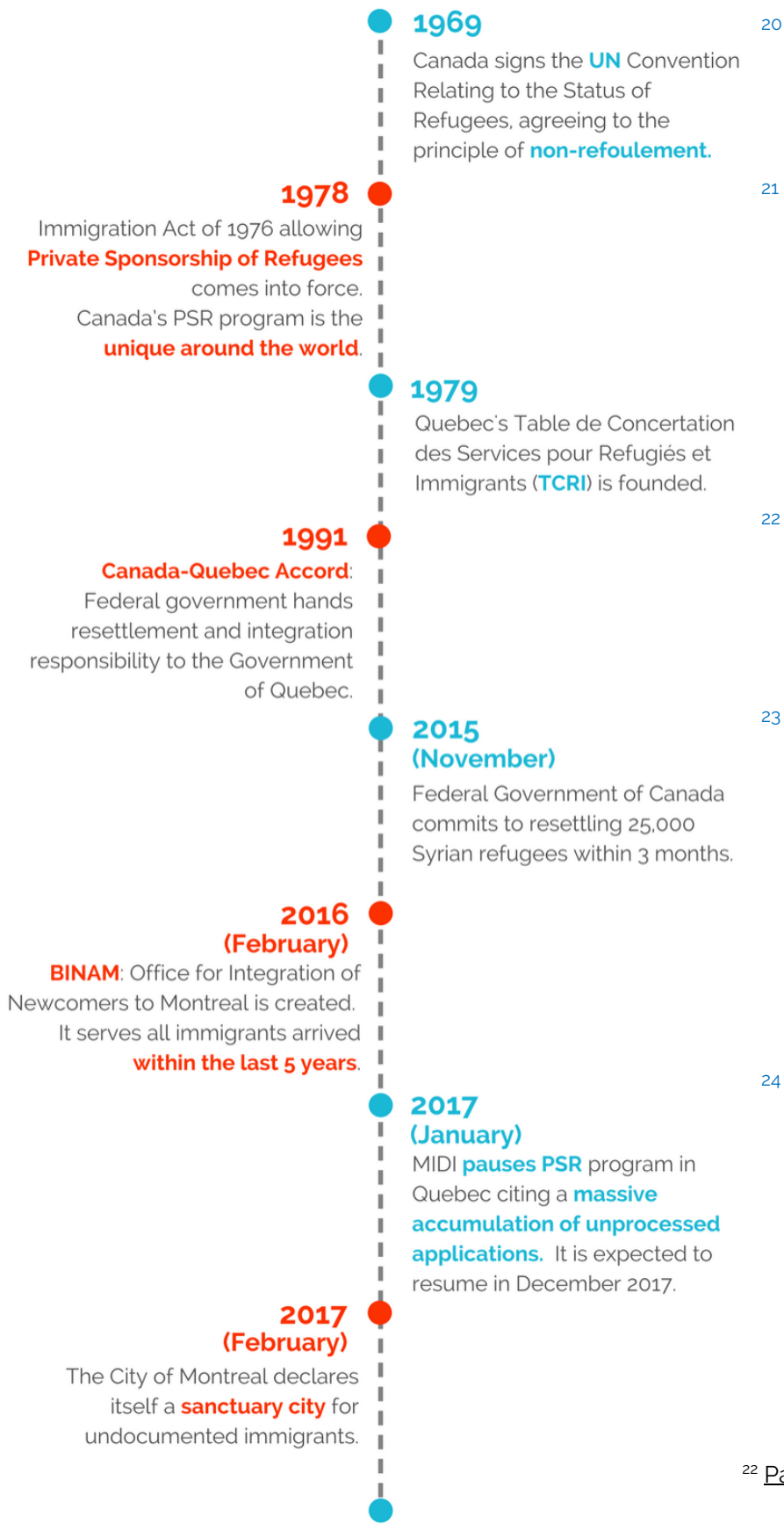
Additional research in this area should incorporate the voices of other relevant stakeholders such as people who arrived as asylum seekers, accepted refugee claimants, representatives of the Government of Quebec, including its Ministry of Immigration, Diversity, and Inclusion, members of host-communities, and public employees working directly with refugees, among others.

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<sup>18</sup> FGM is the leading community organization and philanthropic fund in the Greater Area of Montreal. FGM managed the Montreal branch of Community Foundations Canada's Welcome Fund for Syrian Refugees.

# HUMANITARIAN IMMIGRATION TO MONTREAL<sup>19</sup>

## A BRIEF HISTORICAL CONTEXT



<sup>19</sup> CIC 2017

<sup>20</sup> UNHCR 1977

<sup>21</sup> Canadian Council for Refugees 2016

<sup>22</sup> Parliament of Canada 2008

<sup>23</sup> City of Montreal

<sup>24</sup> 2017

## MONTREAL'S SPECIFICITY

Montreal receives over 70% of all new immigrants of Quebec, and over 50% of all refugees resettled in the province. Given the Canada-Quebec Accord, the responsibility of resettlement in Quebec falls on the provincial government, as opposed to the rest of Canada where this is handled at the federal level. Federal funding is funneled through Quebec's Ministry of Integration, Diversity, and Inclusion (MIDI) to the City of Montreal and local resettlement organizations.

Although, MIDI has implemented an "aggressive regionalization process regarding GARs in Quebec,"<sup>25</sup> significant secondary migration to Montreal takes place after initial refugee resettlement.<sup>26</sup> Hence, Montreal has no control over the number of refugees it receives.<sup>27</sup>

Breakdown of refugee population by resettlement category January 2015 to April 2017 <sup>28</sup>		
	MONTREAL (Greater Metropolitan Area)	QUEBEC (including Montreal)
PSR	6,200	9,350
GAR	1,135	5,230
BVOR	15	20
TOTAL	7,350	14,600

The Greater Area of Montreal has a long history of humanitarian immigration, and this is reflected by the existence of over 90 Immigrant-Serving Organizations (ISOs), many of which belong to the Quebec Roundtable of Services for Refugees and Immigrants (TCRI). However, the composition of the refugee population in the city has changed drastically in recent years. Unlike the rest of Canada, where only 41% of resettled refugees were PSRs in the past 2 years, 84% of those resettled in Montreal were PSRs.<sup>29</sup>

<sup>25</sup> City of Montreal. Coordination montréalaise pour l'accueil et l'intégration des réfugiés syriens 2015-2016. Report. Ville De Montreal, 2016

<sup>26</sup> City of Montreal. 2016

<sup>27</sup> Four ISOs including ALPA, are mandated to support all immigrants who are in the process of resettling outside of Montreal

Interview with Leonardo Cardoso (Communications Coordinator at ALPA). 22 June 2017.

<sup>28</sup> IRCC April 2017

<sup>29</sup> IRCC April 30, 2017.

Thus, most of the responsibility and groundwork of integration falls on the shoulders of community organizations and local municipalities. While the goodwill and commitment of civil society to refugee resettlement have been essential, the rapid arrival of thousands of refugees strained the city's immigration and integration systems.

MIDI and the City of Montreal consider francization<sup>30</sup> and intercultural integration in communities as vital processes following arrival, as these lead to increased access to education and employability.<sup>31</sup> After Canada's commitment to resettling 25,000 Syrian refugees in 2015, Montreal's refugee reception strategy underwent significant changes. This included the creation of an office for the integration of newcomers to Montreal (BINAM). Between 2016 and 2018, BINAM will provide 1 million dollars in funding to multiple community organizations and ISOs that offer sponsorship and support services for Syrian refugees.

In addition to official resettlement, Quebec also receives asylum claimants at points of entry and inland immigration offices. Under the *Safe Third Country Agreement*, virtually all asylum seekers who claim refugee status at the border are instantly denied and returned to the United States.<sup>32</sup> They are not eligible for appeal and cannot claim refuge again.<sup>33</sup> This does not apply to those who cross the border irregularly or those claiming asylum from within Canada. Therefore, hundreds attempt border crossing every year, sometimes facing harsh weather conditions and abuse by smugglers. The agreement is contingent on the United States being "safe" for immigrants, yet this is contested by human right organizations.<sup>34</sup>

Approximately 60% of asylum seekers are granted refugee status, which subsequently allows them to apply for permanent residency. This is a lengthy process, which can last over 3 years.<sup>35</sup> In the first 4 months of 2017,

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<sup>30</sup> MIDI offers and strongly encourages free and sometimes remunerated French courses to all immigrants who have been in Quebec for less than 5 years.

<sup>31</sup> City of Montreal. *Coordination montréalaise pour l'accueil et l'intégration des réfugiés syriens 2015-2016*. Report. Ville De Montreal, 2016

<sup>32</sup> CCR. *Safe Third Country Agreement Must Be Suspended*.. Press Release Web. 25 July 2017.

<sup>33</sup> Ciubanu, Costin et al. *Jeanne Sauvé Fellows' Position Paper*. 2016. Print

<sup>34</sup> CCR. *Safe Third Country Agreement Must Be Suspended*.. Press Release Web. 25 July 2017

<sup>35</sup> Interview with Paul Clarke, Director at Action Réfugiés Montréal. 7 July 2017.

5,310 people claimed asylum in Quebec, a sharp increase from the total of 5,505 in 2016.<sup>36</sup> This surge must be seen through a historical lens.<sup>37</sup> It is not a crisis, but will undoubtedly put a strain on Montreal's resettlement services.<sup>38</sup>

## IMMIGRATION STATUS AND ACCESS TO SERVICES

### CANADA'S RESETTLEMENT CATEGORIES\*

- **Government-Assisted Refugees (GAR):** GARs are picked by the UNHCR which refers them to the Canadian government. GARs receive financial and settlement support from the government during their first 12 months.
- **Privately Sponsored Refugees (PSR):** PSRs are designated by a private sponsor (a family member, a sponsor organization, or a group of 2 to 5 Canadian citizens). On paper, sponsors commit to providing PSRs with financial and settlement support for 12 months.
- **Blended Visa Office Referred Refugees (BVOR):** BVOR refugees are referred by the UNHCR, financially supported by both the federal or provincial government, and by private sponsor(s) for a period of 6 months each. Settlement support is provided by the sponsor.
- **Refugee Claimants & Asylum-seekers:** Individuals who ask for asylum at the US-Canada border or from within Canada. They are undocumented until their acceptance as refugees or 'protected persons', or their denial of asylum, in which case they are deported or remain undocumented in Canadian territory.

*\*The screening of all immigrants to Quebec is conducted by the federal government. Once admitted, GARs, PSRs, and BVOR arrive to Canada as permanent residents.*

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Upon arrival to Canada, legal status heavily influences a person's exposure to resettlement information and can determine the way in which immigrant-serving organizations (ISOs) and public services support each individual. There are three main reasons for this:

### 1. LEGAL ADMISSIBILITY TO SERVICES

An immigrant's admissibility to certain services, such as healthcare,

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<sup>36</sup> [Citizenship and Immigration Canada - June 2017](#)

<sup>37</sup> [Citizenship and Immigration Canada - March 2017](#)

<sup>38</sup> Interview with Paul Clarke, Director at Action Réfugiés Montréal. 7 July 2017.

<sup>39</sup> "All refugee claimants are asylum-seekers, but not all asylum seekers are refugee claimants." This is because refugee claim to Canada can only be made once. Those who demand refuge a second time must do so on the grounds of humanitarian compassion, and become asylum seekers. (Interview with Paul Clarke, Director at Action Réfugiés Montréal)

employability programs, governmental aid, and subsidized daycare, is contingent on their legal status.<sup>40</sup> From a legal standpoint, asylum-seekers are the most vulnerable, since their temporary status does not accord them the same benefits as the other three categories. Access to education is a stark example of this. Only asylum-seekers under the age of 18 have access to schooling and student loans. This is a massive gap in the resettlement system, as asylum-seekers who reach the age of 18 are automatically blocked from finishing school. In this way, the education and career advancement of hundreds of adult asylum seekers is delayed.<sup>41</sup> Additionally, the application and acceptance of an asylum-seeker as a 'protected person' can last years. Therefore, once they are accepted as a protected person or refugee, the resettlement, integration, and personal development of asylum seekers is already significantly impacted.<sup>42</sup> Paul Clarke, Director of Action Réfugiés Montréal provides a real example of how this can play out:

A handicapped woman claimed asylum and obtained refugee status. She was put at the top of the waitlist of the housing system. However, she needed permanent resident status to access housing. PR applications can take up to 3 years following acceptance as a refugee. Due to this, she could not access an affordable and handicap-accessible apartment.

## 2. SCOPE OF ISO MANDATES

The mandates and programs of most ISOs are tied to funding frameworks which are specified by donors. These can be defined in terms of legal status of the immigrant, date of arrival to Canada, and support of specific programs such as francization, among other factors. These rigid funding structures exclude some groups of people from services.<sup>43</sup> Again, undocumented people are the most vulnerable, given that ISOs are not funded to support them, even if a majority of them are later accepted as refugees.

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<sup>40</sup> A detailed breakdown of access to services per immigration status is available upon request at the TCRI.

<sup>41</sup> Interview with Veronica Islas (Director at CRIC)." 20 June 2017

<sup>42</sup> Interview with Veronica Islas (Director at CRIC)." 20 June 2017

<sup>43</sup> Interview with Paul Clarke, Director at Action Réfugiés Montréal. 7 July 2017.

*"You cannot leave someone on standby for years until she gets an answer. It's not humane, and it is also not effective in terms of facilitating inclusion".*

*- Veronica Islas (CRIC)*

In addition, many ISOs are restricted to serving immigrants who have been in Quebec for less than 5 years. Yet, integration is a nuanced process and is relative to each person's priorities. For example, if a resettled refugee's priority is to support their family and achieve financial stability, they might choose to go into manual labor or jobs where French is not required.<sup>44</sup> More than 5 years later, if they decide to advance the career they left back home, free access to francization and employability support from MIDI through Emploi-Québec will no longer be available.<sup>45</sup> Therefore, the likelihood of resettled refugees leaving low-paying jobs is much lower after 5 years.<sup>46</sup> In practice, access to resettlement support is case-specific and contingent on the goodwill and expertise of social workers at ISOs. In reality, mandates are surpassed by the demand for services.<sup>47</sup> This research found that funding from governmental entities such as MIDI is generally more restrictive, whereas civil society funding gives ISOs more flexibility within their mandates.<sup>48</sup> Some ISOs chose not to request government aid or are not eligible to apply for this reason.<sup>49</sup>

### **3. SOCIAL SUPPORT SYSTEM**

Immigration status can also impact the social support systems available to newcomers in their host-communities. This will in turn shape their agency and capability to seek out integration opportunities. The weaker the

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<sup>44</sup> Interview with Luz Elena Cáceres (Coordinator of Social Interventions and Refugees at CSAI). 21 June 2017.

<sup>45</sup> Interview with Leonardo Cardoso (Communications Coordinator at ALPA). 22 June 2017.

<sup>46</sup> Interview with Luz Elena Cáceres (CSAI)

<sup>47</sup> Interview with Luz Elena Cáceres (CSAI)

<sup>48</sup> Interview with Marjolaine Granger (Reception Agent/ Social Worker at CANA 9 June 2017  
Interview with Veronica Islas (Director at CRIC)." 20 June 2017

<sup>49</sup> Interview with Veronica Islas (Director at CRIC)." 20 June 2017, Interview with Florence Chaussé (Founder at HANY).. 19 June 2017.

social support system, the more vulnerable the person is to social isolation and disenfranchisement.

All GARs in Montreal go through the CSAI. They are accompanied through registration in basic services (including housing), and are referred to third-party organizations such as Emploi-Québec, which works in employability support. Technically, GARs have closer follow-up and receive more homogenous information about services overall, but this can lack a sustained human connection.<sup>50</sup> While CSAI support is mandated for one full year, resources for one-on-one accompaniment are limited. This is problematic because GARs come from very vulnerable backgrounds, and often require immediate mental and physical health support, as well as professional resettlement services.<sup>51</sup>

On the other hand, PSRs receive no formal accompaniment or follow-up from the government; therefore, their access to information about resettlement and integration services depends on their sponsor's preparedness as well as their own.<sup>52</sup> On one hand, there are sponsors who plan the arrival of PSRs and seek support from ISOs. On the other, there are distant relatives of PSRs in Montreal who sponsor them on paper, but in practice do not provide financial or social support.<sup>53</sup> As a result, some newcomers are left to navigate unfamiliar systems on their own.<sup>54</sup> While a Refugee Sponsorship Training Program exists in the rest of Canada, PSR sponsorship in Quebec was, until recently, limited to an administrative form where the sponsor would provide their information and proof of financial capability to receive PSRs.<sup>55</sup>

In contrast to GARs, PSRs' arrival into a community can facilitate the growth of their social network and their sense of belonging.<sup>56</sup> This is a double-edged sword, however, as ghettoization can occur. This is common within

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<sup>50</sup> Interview with Paul Clarke, Director at Action Réfugiés Montréal. 7 July 2017.

<sup>51</sup> Interview with L.Elena Cáceres (CSAI) / CCR 2016. "Refugee Resettlement"

<sup>52</sup> Interview with Anna Calderón (Executive Director at SayÇa!) 6 June 2017

<sup>53</sup> Interview with Florence Bourdeau (Coordinator at TCRI) 22 June 2017.

<sup>54</sup> Interview with Farah. (PSR from Syria)." 19 June 2017

<sup>55</sup> This was until the February 2017 pause in Quebec's PSR program. Interview with Florence Bourdeau (Coordinator at TCRI) 22 June 2017.

<sup>56</sup> Interview with Paul Clarke, Director at Action Réfugiés Montréal. 7 July 2017.



Montreal's Syrian diaspora. Farah, a PSR from Syria, who also works for a program that addresses the integration of Syrian refugees, notes:

*"Most of them [Syrian refugees] don't feel connected to the rest of Montreal. Everything they need is close to them [...] and everyone speaks Arabic in their neighborhood."*

The social support of refugee claimants and asylum seekers is also variable. They are provided with short-term accommodations and assistance by PRAIDA,<sup>57</sup> but "have to fight bureaucracy on their own,"<sup>58</sup> as their access to ISO services is limited until the federal government determines their status.

## **HURDLES FACED BY REFUGEES IN MONTREAL**

### *1. SERVICE NAVIGABILITY*

*"If I had known [CANAI] existed and was in my neighborhood, it would have been easier when I arrived" – A young PSR to a social worker at CANA*

Resettlement services are widespread in Montreal, yet they are often unknown to newcomers.<sup>59</sup> This information gap can increase the risk of misinformation. For example, in 2016, disagreements over PSRs' right to services arose. Many PSRs avoided seeking help from ISOs, fearing that their sponsors would have to reimburse the government, when in reality, the only help that was inadmissible was financial aid and welfare.<sup>60</sup> Language is the first barrier to information, as most information sessions and online resources are provided in French, and only a minority of organizations offer online information in other languages.

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<sup>57</sup> PRAIDA: Regional Program for Welcoming and Integration of Asylum Seekers

<sup>58</sup> Interview with Paul Clarke, Director at Action Réfugiés Montréal. 7 July 2017.

<sup>59</sup> This was mentioned in several interviews with resettled refugees and ISO employees.

<sup>60</sup> Interview with Yvan Gauthier (President at FGM Fondation Grand Montreal).. 14 June 2017.

*"I was left on my own to navigate the system as a student and a single mother [...]. I didn't have the drive to go out because I didn't even know where to go"*

- Simone, arrived from Guinea as PSR, when she was 6 months pregnant

*"Coming from a cultural background where asking for help is hard, I did not know if there was someone who was readily available to help."*

- Maurice, PSR from Burundi

After this information gap became apparent in the midst of the Syrian crisis, Montreal's BINAM began working on the online data base, "*Nouveau Départ*" ("A New Beginning"). The pilot project was launched in 2017. Its goal is to compile existing services and provide information adapted to each individual's journey by classifying services based on specific needs.<sup>61</sup> The platform currently addresses 4 immigration categories — refugees, temporary workers, international students, and permanent residents — and was developed through focus groups, online surveys, and individual meetings. At the moment it is only translatable via Google, but it will be officially translated to the 5 languages most spoken in Montreal. There is only one refugee category and asylum seekers or undocumented immigrants were not yet included at the time of writing.

## **2. EMPLOYABILITY OF REFUGEES AND ASYLUM SEEKERS**

A major barrier faced by refugees and accepted asylum seekers in Montreal is employability.<sup>62</sup> Language is one important factor behind this, since employability programs require that the person is fluent in French prior to job insertion. Another major cause is the process of diploma equivalency, which is slow, costly, and detached from the reality of resettled refugees.

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<sup>61</sup> Interview with Aude Mary and Mourad Benzidane from BINAM. 7 July 2017

<sup>62</sup> This was mentioned by every resettled refugee interviewed

*"I cannot access my real job as an electrician because I must go back to school and pass French and Mathematics tests. If I had my diplomas, I could accredit them, but unfortunately, I lost them all"*

-Theo, GAR from Casamance, Senegal, who arrived in 2016

*"They asked me to certify the copies at the embassy in DRC"- Philippe, a GAR from DRC, asked for the copies of his diploma in 2015. Until today, he has not received them. Instead, he completed a Diploma Equivalency Program (DEP). "It was almost \$500 overall"*

*"Services that deal with the reality of being a refugee must be improved. Especially when it comes to acknowledging qualifications and giving people the stability of a job and an income".- Farah, PSR from Syria*

Failure to attain diploma recognition can delay financial independence and prevents the organic social networking that occurs in the workplace, potentially building anxiety and isolation among resettled refugees.<sup>63</sup> Simone and Theo, two of the resettled refugees interviewed, mentioned that programs where incoming refugees are paired with professionals in their area of expertise could be beneficial. Farah, another interviewee, suggested that more refugees should be hired by resettlement programs, which not only would improve them but would also give those individuals valuable work experience.

### 3. SENSE OF BELONGING

All resettled refugees interviewed mentioned having difficulty in building social connections. The reasons behind this are plentiful, ranging from ghettoization to culture shock and prejudice in host societies.

For Maurice, culture shock was isolating. Despite the support of his sponsors, he feels that they often assumed that he was familiar with Canadian culture and skipped "trivial" explanations, which he would have found useful.

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<sup>63</sup> Interview with Marjolaine Granger (Reception Agent/ Social Worker at CANA 9 June 2017

Refugees who already lived in at-risk conditions prior to fleeing their country of origin must sometimes be guided through completely new realities, cultural notions, and even everyday objects.<sup>64</sup>

On the other hand, Theo mentions he does not feel isolated, but he does worry that, after 11 months in Montreal, his social circle still does not include permanent residents who are not immigrants or refugees.

For Farah, the word "refugee" is problematic, as it evokes perceptions of helplessness or under-qualification, which results in patronizing attitudes or exclusion.

*"We refugees are often invited to speak at events and give our opinion. After the data is collected, it is the researchers that go into a room and decide what is done [...] Refugees must be in the action process not just in the idea phase."*

For Philippe, GAR from DRC, building a network has been hard. He has found spaces for social connection in LGBT community organizations and online sites; however, he also mentions facing prejudice and racism in educational institutions. He roots this in the unpreparedness of educators, as well as in the imbalanced representation of people of color in Montreal media:

*"Look at how many black people were included in the organization and events of Montreal's 375<sup>th</sup> birthday celebration. There are not many..."*

Prejudice also affected the journey of Simone, a PSR from Guinea, who felt excluded and patronized when she began a university degree in Montreal. This, as well as the pressures of being a single mother, ultimately led her to withdraw from school. This is not an isolated case. According to Marjolaine Granger, a social worker at CANA, mothers with young children are particularly vulnerable to isolation because they often stay at home as caregivers, which isolates them further.<sup>65</sup> Simone mentions not knowing

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<sup>64</sup> Interview with Luz Elena Cáceres (Coordinator of Social Interventions and Refugees at CSAI. 21 June 2017.

<sup>65</sup> Interview with Marjolaine Granger (Reception Agent/ Social Worker at CANA 9 June 2017

anyone going through a similar situation at the time.

#### 4. FAMILY REUNIFICATION

Many resettled refugees arrive to Montreal alone or accompanied by only a few of their immediate family members.

*"It is my priority"* – Theo, GAR from Casamance, on sponsoring his oldest son, who is still in Dakar, Senegal

*"I still have friends and family in Aleppo, half of me is looking backwards."*

– Farah, PSR from Syria

Family reunification applications currently take years to process, often breaking families apart, with children or their parents left behind.<sup>66</sup> Some families are never reunited. This can occur when a dependent turns 18 before the principal applicant (accepted to Canada) receives permanent residence.<sup>67</sup> Leaving family and friends behind in war-torn countries or life-threatening situations is a major source of stress to resettled refugees and can negatively impact their integration process.

## CROSS-INSTITUTIONAL CONSTRAINTS

### 1. UNCLEAR POLITICAL GUIDELINES

The roles and responsibilities of the Government of Quebec and the City of Montreal are not clearly defined, which causes misunderstandings throughout Montreal's resettlement and integration system.<sup>68</sup> This causes a lack of stability, transparency, and accountability in resettlement and integration programs, leaving some newcomers falling between the cracks of the system.<sup>69</sup> The TCRI states that this lack of political will puts the burden of

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<sup>66</sup> CCR. *Express Entry Family Reunification*. Canadian Council for Refugees.. Web. 25 July 2017.

<sup>67</sup> Ciubanu, Costin et al. *Jeanne Sauvé Fellows' Position Paper*: 2016. Print

<sup>68</sup> Interview with Paul Clarke, Director at Action Réfugiés Montréal. 7 July 2017.

<sup>69</sup> TCRI 2017 2 -Tremblay, Monique. Pg. 75.

integration on civil society and ISOs, without the necessary coordination or resource distribution.<sup>70</sup>

There are severe consequences for the integration of incoming refugees and asylum-seekers when the visions of the City of Montreal and the Government of Quebec are disconnected.<sup>71</sup> Montreal operates under political guidelines of the provincial government. Until major discrepancies in their visions for integration are addressed, cross-institutional collaboration and efficient resource distribution throughout the city will be hindered.

*"Education and health are delivered at the provincial level: what does it mean that Montreal is a sanctuary city, if Quebec isn't a sanctuary province?" - Director of Action Réfugiés Montréal*

Indeed, multi-party dialogue and coordination are necessary if Montreal is to be a sanctuary province where resettled refugees and asylum seekers can feel socially connected and thrive. ISOs, refugees, and asylum-seekers must have a voice in this dialogue. Currently, policies, programs, and funding directives for integration and resettlement are crafted with insufficient input from refugees, asylum-seekers, and the ISO employees who work with them on the ground.<sup>72</sup>

*"There are too many decision-makers who have no idea of the reality of an immigrant or a refugee"*

- Coordinator at the TCRI

*"If you leave ISOs out of policy, you exclude the part where immigrants are received by real people who help them build networks and human connections."*

- Communications Coordinator at ALPA

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<sup>70</sup> TCRI 2017 2 -Tremblay, Monique.: Pg. 75.

<sup>71</sup> Interview with Yvan Gauthier (President at FGM Fondation Grand Montreal). 14 June 2017.

<sup>72</sup> Interview with Florence Bourdeau (Coordinator at TCRI) 22 June 2017.

Interview with Leonardo Cardoso (Communications Coordinator at ALPA). 22 June 2017

*"The people who are affected by initiatives should be consulted to see how they envision the projects that are supposed to serve them. A sense of belonging will only come from feeling included in those processes. »*

-President of Fondation Grand Montreal

When the voices of affected stakeholders are not given enough weight, effective and evidence-based programs are left underfunded. An example of this is *jumelage* or "twinning".<sup>73</sup> Although twinning programs have proved to be an extremely effective tool for integration, provincial funding for these initiatives has been inconsistent.<sup>74</sup> A coordinator at the TCRI mentioned that funding from MIDI for the renewal of a TCRI-led twinning project was not yet confirmed 8 days before its start date.

Furthermore, when donors are unaware of the realities faced by ISOs, their funding directives can be misplaced. This was evidenced in 2015-16 when the Syrian crisis was strongly mediatized. At that time, some donors demanded that ISOs channel their donations exclusively to Syrian refugees, a request which undermined the expertise of ISOs and which many of the social workers interviewed for this paper considered to be discriminatory.

## 2. INFORMATION GAPS

Given the complexity of Montreal's resettlement system, gaps in cross-institutional coordination occur. As explained in the previous section, this can result in ineffective information distribution to resettled refugees and asylum-seekers. However, information gaps also affect ISOs, sponsors, and public employees, who interact with immigrants on a daily basis.

### Service Redundancy

Lack of coordination can leave ISOs working in silos, which obstructs their work by increasing misinformation amongst beneficiaries and employees. For example, the CSAI has had situations where, after finding

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<sup>73</sup> A description of twinning is provided in the next section.

<sup>74</sup> TCRI 2017-1 Guerlotté, Charlotte, and Grausem, D. Pg. 79. "*Le Jumelage Interculturel...*" Interview with Paul Clarke, Director at Action Réfugiés Montréal. 7 July 2017.

accommodations for a resettled family, a third party convinces them that there is a “better” option, which in reality does not fit their budgetary needs.<sup>75</sup>

Service redundancy is not only inefficient; it can also be harmful. Projects which double services that already exist can foster ghettoization. By preventing newcomers from taking advantage of their host community's services, they are less likely to become familiar with other cultural groups in their neighborhoods.<sup>76</sup> In particular, donors can foster redundancy when funding hyper-specific projects. Since there is a lot of competition for funds, financing hyper-specific projects can obstruct collaboration.<sup>77</sup> However, most of the ISOs interviewed pointed to their partnering organizations or neighborhood groups as their most important assets after their employees.

### Information sharing

Newcomers navigate several services where they come across public employees such as educators, family counselors, or health workers, who have not been trained in issues of migration, intercultural intervention, or Montreal's resettlement structures. There is an untapped potential for social connectedness and information distribution in these exchanges; however, misinformation may be shared instead, especially when knowledge about access to services in relation to migratory status is lacking.<sup>78</sup> Similarly, PSR sponsors are ill-equipped to receive resettled refugees. At the moment, there is no official set of guidelines surrounding sponsor responsibilities, beyond their financial obligations.

## BEST PRACTICES AND ENABLERS TO INTEGRATION

The people interviewed for this research identified some barriers to integration at both the micro and macro level in Montreal. They also identified some of the practices and programs that have been successful in contributing

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<sup>75</sup> Interview with Luz Elena Cáceres (CSAI)

<sup>76</sup> Interview with Veronica Islas (Director at CRIC)." 20 June 2017

<sup>77</sup> Interview with Florence Chaussé (Founder at HANY).. 19 June 2017.

<sup>78</sup> Interview with Florence Bourdeau (Coordinator at TCRI) 22 June 2017.



to resilience-building and integration among Montreal's refugee and asylum-seeker population.

### 1. SERVICE COMPLEMENTARITY AND COLLABORATION

The work of ISOs is most effective when different sets of expertise are combined, as service complementarity multiplies the availability of services for the participants of multiple organizations. For example, CANA offers preparation courses for the Canadian Citizenship Exam to beneficiaries of multiple ISOs. At the same time, another ISO in their area, which is more experienced in employability, offers workshops that are also open to CANA participants.

### 2. INTERCULTURAL INTERVENTION

#### Twinning Programs (*Jumelage*)

Intercultural twinning or *jumelage* consists of pairing a newcomer with a member of their host community, creating a sustained social bond. This not only supports the immigrant throughout their integration, but also helps prepare members of the host society to receive newcomers.<sup>79</sup> All ISOs interviewed mentioned twinning as very effective integration strategy.

Quebec's policy for immigration advocates for interculturalism, or the cultural exchange between the "francophone majority" and other "cultural communities" on Quebec territory.<sup>80</sup> Paul Clarke, Director at Action Réfugiés Montréal explains why twinning is so fitting to Quebec:

*"Interculturalism is about learning about each other's cultures, whereas multiculturalism is the coexistence of cultures. Jumelage builds interculturalism."*

#### Cultural Mediation Initiatives

Fostering encounters between members of different cultures can

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<sup>79</sup> This was mentioned by all ISO interviewees.

<sup>80</sup> TCRI 2017-1 Guerlotté, Charlotte, and Déborah Grausem. Pg. 79. *Le Jumelage Interculturel Au Québec Pratiques Des Organismes Communautaires En Immigration Et Impacts Du Programme De Jumelage*. Rep. Montreal

address prejudice and stereotypes that appear when cultural communities coexist.<sup>81</sup> An example of a successful cultural mediation program is CRIC's "Etes-vous de bonne rumeur" workshop. Inspired by an initiative from the city of Barcelona, this workshop seeks to mitigate prejudice about cultural communities by demystifying rumours, which are relayed from immigrants to Quebec residents and vice versa. It is a one-time workshop that serves as a conversation starter and has had positive results. CRIC partnered with other ISOs across Montreal to replicate this initiative. Cultural mediation can occur through formal and informal spaces. Philippe, a GAR from DRC, suggests play and gamification of spaces as a way of building connectedness amongst cultures:

*"I think the city must create spaces and even games where people have to count on each other to do stuff. That brings people together"*

### 3. BUILDING AUTONOMY

The urgent and basic needs of refugees and asylum-seekers must be met once they arrive. After that, programs must focus on harnessing individuals' strengths and empowering them with the resources and support needed to further their own paths and projects. It is important to sensitize volunteers, employers, and the general public in order to avoid paternalistic attitudes that prevent autonomy and resilience-building.<sup>82</sup>

### 4. POSITIVE RELATIONSHIPS WITH RESETTLEMENT WORKERS

*"They gave me the confidence that I lacked and told me to go as far as I wanted."*  
- Simone, PSR from Guinea

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<sup>81</sup> Interview with Veronica Islas (Director at CRIC)." 20 June 2017

<sup>82</sup> Interview with Luz Elena Cáceres (Coordinator of Social Interventions and Refugees at CSAI. 21 June 2017.

The role of one individual can be pivotal in building resilience and self-confidence in the journey of a refugee or asylum-seeker. Although relationship-building is fluid and cannot be directed, social workers and staff at ISOs must be given the appropriate support, tools, and resources to foster spaces where human connections with and among participants are possible. Providing spaces for active listening and empathic encouragement is crucial in this process.<sup>83</sup>

## 5. PHYSICAL ACCOMPANIMENT

Physical accompaniment to banking services, health centers, and academic institutions can help people navigate the resettlement system in the first months after arrival. Although many of these institutions are supposed to adapt their services to immigrants by offering translation and accompaniment, this is not always the case. It is especially important that individuals who do not speak French have access to accompaniment. Unfortunately, funding for physical accompaniment initiatives is scarce and social workers often go beyond their mandates to provide this service.<sup>84</sup>

An alternative is to hire intercultural social workers to provide psychosocial support, not only in hospitals but also other settings such as schools and community centers.<sup>85</sup> BINAM currently funds three intercultural social workers in primary schools attended by many resettled refugee children. Their work has proved to be immensely valuable in improving the relationships between students, families, and schools. CSAI is currently advocating for the addition of intercultural social workers in hospitals, who could orient users and aid hospital employees in better addressing their needs.

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<sup>83</sup> Interview with Leonardo Cardoso (Communications Coordinator at ALPA). 22 June 2017.

<sup>84</sup> Interview with Luz Elena Cáceres (Coordinator of Social Interventions and Refugees at CSAI). 21 June 2017.

<sup>85</sup> Ciubanu, Costin et al. *Jeanne Sauvé Fellows' Position Paper* 2016. Print

## 6. COMMUNITY BUILDING

Community building activities such as meet-ups, information hubs, and volunteering spaces are increasingly being used by ISOs as tools for building integration. These activities can be private spaces intended for specific populations, as well as activities open to the general public. One example of this is ALPA's coffee-meetup program for immigrant parents. Another is CANA's Friday Cafés which are open to the community. The resettled refugees interviewed for this research also saw valuable opportunities for networking and social connection in community-building activities both at the local and city level.

*"I want to join a volunteer group where I can contribute my knowledge and life experience, and make connections, but I am not sure where to find it".*

-Theo, GAR from Casamance, Senegal

*"I volunteered at a center. They had this placement, and they found me a job."*

- Simone, PSR from Guinea

## COMMUNITY MOBILIZATION

Following the widespread media coverage of the Syrian crisis in 2015-16, there was an overwhelmingly positive response from Montreal's civil society to receiving refugees. This was reflected in the large amount of PSR applications and the generosity of Montreal residents seeking to volunteer in community organizations. However, ISOs often lacked the logistical resources to put together programs that harnessed this increase in volunteers.

This is how HANY was started. Florence Chaussé, a university student, saw a gap in the large supply of energetic university students willing to volunteer their time and the little amount of volunteering opportunities. She decided to "jump on the media wave" and partnered with experienced ISOs such as ALPA to offer a language tutoring service for adult refugees:

*"I capitalized on students' energy to help refugees, immigrants, and asylum seekers. [...] I looked around me and identified the gaps [in resettlement]"*.

The commitment of thousands of Montreal's citizens to integrate newcomers is commendable and absolutely necessary. However, it is also important to distinguish the role of civil society and governments. Civil society must reinforce this distinction and engage with their political leaders by demanding clarity and accountability from their members of Parliament and local representatives. In this way, the resettlement and integration system of Montreal will advance further.<sup>86</sup>

*"Civil society cannot fill the role that a government — federal, provincial, or municipal — has to play. Neither can the Red Cross."*  
- Director at Action Réfugiés Montréal

## RECOMMENDATIONS

### To the Canadian Government:

- Increase resources for application processing in Canada and abroad.
  - Accelerate family reunification files.
  - Reduce the wait times of accepted asylum seekers waiting for permanent residence in Canadian territory.
- Implement the CCR's Express Entry Program<sup>87</sup> for family reunification.
- Suspend the *Safe Third Country Agreement* with the United States
- Collaborate with the Government of Quebec and Statistics Canada to implement a monitoring system of Quebec's refugee population.
  - Monitor the use of resettlement services by neighborhood and the effectiveness of psychosocial support systems.<sup>88</sup>

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<sup>86</sup> Interview with Paul Clarke, Director at Action Réfugiés Montréal. 7 July 2017.

<sup>87</sup> CCR. *Express Entry Family Reunification*. Canadian Council for Refugees. Web. 25 July 2017.

<sup>88</sup> The IRCC currently collects information on "Settlement Service Clients by Province/Territory of Settlement Provider Organizations, Gender, Age Group at Service and Immigration Category". This information is available for every province excluding Quebec.

#### To the Government of Quebec:

- Clarify the role of the provincial government regarding humanitarian immigration and refugee resettlement in Montreal.
  - Specify the roles of MIDI, the Quebec Minister of Education, and the Quebec Minister of Health and Social Services. This must be done in coordination with the City of Montreal and in open dialogue with ISOs, the TCRI, immigrants, and non-profit organizations working for refugee rights such as the Red Cross.
- Install a Quebec Refugee Sponsorship Training Program, which must include (at the very least) a comprehensive welcome package for PSRs and their sponsors. This must be created in collaboration with ISOs, neighborhood organizations, and resettled PSRs.
- Accelerate diploma recognition and ensure that the evaluation methods of re-training programs are practical, rather than heavily theoretical.
- Create an interim employability program that supports and tracks non-francophone refugees.
- Make education accessible to all asylum-seekers awaiting acceptance decisions, regardless of their age. Or, at least, "lock-in" the age of dependents who were under 18 years of age upon arrival to Canada, and allow them to finish their secondary education.
- Fund positions for intercultural social workers in schools and health centers through ISOs.
- Clarify admissibility to health services for each refugee category and ensure that no one is unrightfully turned away from hospitals and clinics.
- Increase transparency in immigration budget reporting.
- Fund physical accompaniment projects and prioritize accompaniment through access to health and legal services.

#### To the City of Montreal:

- Clarify the roles of the city regarding humanitarian immigration and refugee resettlement in its territory. This must be done in coordination

with the Government of Quebec and in open dialogue with ISOs, the TCRI, immigrants, and non-profit organizations working for refugee rights.

- Strengthen Montreal's: *Bureau d'Integration des Nouveaux Arrivants à Montréal* (BINAM) as a coordinating body that can address those that fall between the cracks of funding frameworks and resettlement programs.
- About the "*Montréal Nouveau Départ*" pilot website:
  - Include pending, accepted, and refused asylum seekers as separate categories.
  - Provide a detailed explanation of access to services by status.
  - Bring ISO voices to the table in future developments of the project.
- Implement city-wide trainings in matters of immigration and intercultural intervention for public employees who interact with resettled refugees. Prioritize health workers and educators.<sup>89</sup>
- Give GARs, PSRs, and accepted asylum claimants roles as co-authors of refugee integration policy and programs. This will strengthen these programs, and give newcomers valuable work experience.
- Stimulate, increase, and improve the representation and presence of minorities in media and city projects.

#### To Donors (including provincial and municipal government agencies):

- Prioritize intercultural interventions such as twinning and cultural mediation.
  - Encourage specialized twinning programs where individuals are paired based on professional interest.
- In order to ensure collaboration and complementarity:
  - Fund projects that bridge gaps between existing services
  - Fund projects submitted as joint applications by multiple ISOs.
- Confirm funding in a timely manner, particularly for project renewals.

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<sup>89</sup> Collaborate with the TCRI, who already offer a similar workshop (Immigration 101)

- Respect and consider ISO mandates and expertise when crafting funding frameworks.
- Avoid restricting funding for integration projects to refugees from specific nationalities.

## **CONCLUSION**

Montreal holds a fundamental position in the reception, resettlement, and integration of refugees and asylum-seekers. The city's leadership and openness to humanitarian migration is commendable. Yet, more can be done; integration and resilience cannot depend on goodwill.

In order to build immigration programs that are progressive, humane, and effective, newcomers and immigrant-serving organizations must be put at the center of policy development and implementation. Political decision is key; so is open dialogue between the federal, provincial, and municipal governments and other relevant stakeholders, including ISOs, donors, resettled refugees and asylum-seekers. This research is a small contribution to this necessary dialogue.



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