



Refugee Resettlement Policy

The Question of Belonging

Contents

3	Executive summary
4	Introduction
5	What affects belonging?
8	Policy recommendations
9	References

Executive summary

Belonging has to do with public attitudes as well as preparedness in terms of infrastructure, jobs, and programming for newcomers. ‘Who belongs to Canada’ is a policy question which should be addressed not to newcomers, but to the Canadian public. Who is eligible for which services? Should immigration categories determine who can access basic human rights, such as healthcare? What opportunities are accessible to newcomers to become permanent residents and to benefit from the communities and economies they are helping to build?

This policy brief summarizes a conversation between Ali Duale – MLA for Halifax Armdale and former refugee from Somalia, Dr. Nicole Ives – Associate Professor of Social Work at McGill University, and Sherman Chan – Director of Family and Settlement Support at MOSAIC B.C., in the third and final special episode of CYRRC’s podcast, *The Refuge – Policy Matters*. The discussion covers the importance of newcomers’ sense of belonging, factors affecting belonging, and recommendations on how to improve belonging for newcomers to Canada.



Introduction

Often, government resettlement policy looks at integration defined as economic self-sufficiency (Ives, 2007). However, sustainable integration requires more than economic participation, it requires meaningful social, cultural, and political participation in the host country, and a sense of belonging. Belonging can be difficult to define, but many agree that it has to do with acceptance from those around you.



“This idea that when I look outside my window and I go outside my house, my neighbor says ... there’s my neighbour ... not my neighbor: the refugee, but just my neighbor. ... [I]t’s this sense that even though it will never be the same context as home, it is that feeling that there is a normalcy about the day and in the ways in which your neighbors and others interact with you, so you don’t feel like you’re an outsider”

- Nicole Ives

A sense of belonging is necessary for newcomers’ integration and wellbeing. It is well established that a sense of belonging affects both physical and mental health (Edge et al., 2014; Kitchen et al., 2015; Salami et al., 2019; Shields, 2008). For newcomer youth, a greater sense of belonging is associated with lower depression and higher self-efficacy (Kia-Keating & Ellis, 2007).

A sense of belonging requires mutual accommodation. From government, it requires an investment in cultural brokers and other services that support newcomers. From community, it requires a willingness to step outside one’s comfort zone and genuinely get to know newcomers. For policy on newcomer integration to be effective, it must look at the receiving community as well as newcomers themselves.

What affects belonging?

Language

Language can be a significant barrier to integration and belonging when newcomers are unable to express themselves in a common language (Keyes & Kane, 2004) or access information necessary for settlement, such as information on health, schooling, housing, and banking (Shoham & Strauss, 2008). Language barriers also affect newcomers' ability to socialize and build connections to their new community (Drolet & Moorthi, 2018).



"Canada portrays [itself as a] ... multicultural nation, multi-language nation because we don't speak only one language, that's a fact, but the question is which language we accepted and which one we don't accept. So, I really believe if we want to create a true policy [of] belonging, first of all, we need to adapt ... to cherish people's language and to give space [to] those ... people to communicate ..."

- Ali Duale

Access to services

Knowledge of and access to services can be a particular challenge for refugees (Fozdar & Hartley, 2014). Refugees in Australia identified belonging as resulting from having access to rights and services (Fozdar & Hartley, 2014); conversely, structural exclusion was a barrier to feelings of belonging. Permanent residency and citizenship are ways to legitimize belonging and defend against experiences of discrimination (Fozdar & Hartley, 2014; Kinbrace, 2021).



"[W]hat we are really asking the government or policy maker to consider is, ... don't just look at the immigration status in order ... to get services, looking at the needs, the right of the people as a human being [so] that they could access service[s] for them and to become a Canadian citizen, so that they feel they more belong[ing] to Canada"

- Sherman Chan

Experiences of discrimination

Discrimination is one of the largest barriers to a sense of belonging and integration (Drolet & Moorthi, 2018; Rabiah-Mohammed & Oudshoorn, 2021; Salami et al., 2019). Experiences of discrimination can make refugee youth feel like they will never be fully integrated in Canada (Rabiah-Mohammed & Oudshoorn, 2021). Newcomers experiencing discrimination at school, the workplace, and in the community are made to feel like outsiders (Drolet & Moorthi, 2018).

How to increase belonging

Recreational activities help newcomers connect with others and develop a sense of belonging (Lauckner et al., 2022; Salami et al., 2019). Recreational activities, such as summer camps, for children that also involve their parents can be especially beneficial for increasing the sense of belonging for the whole family (Ives et al., 2019).

Example: Camp Cosmos

Camp Cosmos, a summer camp run by Montreal City Mission, holds places and provides tuition-free spots for refugee children. This allows Montreal-born children and children who arrived as refugees to create friendships. The camp familiarizes refugee children with the city and helps them feel a sense of belonging (Ives et al., 2019). The key ingredients for Camp Cosmos' success include: having camp counselors who could speak the first language of newcomer children; training counselors on working with children who have experienced trauma and having trained therapists on-call; and involving parents with their children and each other to increase their sense of familiarity and inclusion.

Community bridging defined as multicultural friendships and connections between newcomers and community members creates a sense of belonging through social connections (Kinbrace, 2021; Salami et al., 2019). Community bridging can be achieved in many areas of settlement: service provider organizations, workplaces, volunteer opportunities, English- or French-language classes, and community events (Kinbrace, 2021). *Continued on following page...*

Ethnocultural organizations can help newcomers feel an initial sense of belonging due to a shared language and cultural context which can be especially beneficial during early settlement (Bucklaschuk et al., 2018). Mainstream organizations and community groups can facilitate a wider sense of belonging later in the settlement process and play a key role in challenging discrimination that newcomers may feel from mainstream society (Salami et al., 2019).

Investing in cultural brokers is a tangible action that governments can take to ensure that newcomers have appropriate interpreters and can fully access settlement information and services. Cultural brokers not only allow newcomers to express themselves fully in their own language, they also provide necessary cultural context for both the newcomer and the service provider. Cultural brokers are needed in schools (Shamim et al., 2020) and health services (Brar-Josan & Yohani, 2016). They have been found to facilitate newcomer youth's access to mental health supports as well as increase their sense of belonging (Brar-Josan & Yohani, 2016).



"[I]f you're making a conscious choice to bring people and provide safety and security and refuge from persecution, you have to put in, and it's an investment and it's a long-term investment"

- Nicole Ives



Policy Recommendations

- Expand eligibility for services so that people are not denied access to basic services on the basis of their immigration status.
- Ensure that information given during early settlement is translated and made available in multiple languages.
- Invest in cultural brokers to allow newcomers to fully access healthcare services, interact with schools, and other necessary services (Shamim et al., 2020). Current examples that could be expanded upon include:
 - Settlement Workers in Schools (SWIS) – while effective, SWIS could be expanded to include a greater cultural brokerage component.
 - Healthcare Cultural Navigators – providing direct language and cultural interpretation for newcomers with disabilities, this IRCC-funded program in Manitoba could be used as a framework.
- Prioritize and fund programs that connect newcomers with community members to create community bonding (Kinbrace, 2021; Kitchen et al., 2015).
- Improve the availability and accessibility of recreational programs for newcomers.

This policy brief draws on research supported by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council.

References

Brar-Josan, N., & Yohani, S. C. (2019). Cultural brokers' role in facilitating informal and formal mental health supports for refugee youth in school and community context: a Canadian case study. *British Journal of Guidance & Counselling*, 47(4), 512-523.

Bucklaschuk, J., Garang, R., & Gobin, J. (2018). Ethnocultural Community Organizations in Winnipeg: A Legacy Document. *Child and Youth Refugee Research Coalition*. <http://hdl.handle.net/10222/74292>

Drolet, J., & Moorthi, G. (2018). The settlement experiences of Syrian newcomers in Alberta: Social connections and interactions. *Canadian Ethnic Studies*, 50(2), 101-120.

Edge, S., Newbold, K. B., & McKeary, M. (2014). Exploring socio-cultural factors that mediate, facilitate, & constrain the health and empowerment of refugee youth. *Social Science & Medicine*, 117, 34-41.

Fozdar, F., & Hartley, L. (2014). Civic and ethno belonging among recent refugees to Australia. *Journal of refugee studies*, 27(1), 126-144.

Ives, N. (2007). More than a "good back": Looking for integration in refugee resettlement. *Refuge: Canada's Journal on Refugees*, 24, 2, 54-63.

Ives, N., Alqawasma, H., Kline, P., Morland, L., Rabiau, M., & Gonzalez, E. (2019). Exploring belonging: Experiences of refugee children and families in Camp Cosmos. *Child and Youth Refugee Research Coalition*. <http://hdl.handle.net/10222/76395>

Keyes, E. F., & Kane, C. F. (2004). Belonging and adapting: Mental health of Bosnian refugees living in the United States. *Issues in mental health nursing*, 25(8), 809-831.

Kia-Keating, M., & Ellis, B. H. (2007). Belonging and connection to school in resettlement: Young refugees, school belonging, and psychosocial adjustment. *Clinical child psychology and psychiatry*, 12(1), 29-43.

Kinbrace. (2021). *From Humanitarian to Human: Changing the Way We Welcome Refugee Claimants*. <https://kinbrace.ca/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/Report-From-Humanitarian-to-Human-Changing-the-Way-We-Welcome-Refugee-Claimants-2021.pdf>

Kitchen, P., Williams, A. M., & Gallina, M. (2015). Sense of belonging to local community in small-to-medium sized Canadian urban areas: a comparison of immigrant and Canadian-born residents. *BMC psychology*, 3(1), 1-17.

Lauckner, H., Gallant, K., Akbari, M., Tomas, G., & Hutchinson, S. (2022). Picturing Recreation: Newcomers' Perspectives on Experiences of Recreation. *Journal of international migration and integration*, 1-23.

Salami, B., Salma, J., Hegadoren, K., Meherali, S., Kolawole, T., & Díaz, E. (2019). Sense of community belonging among immigrants: perspective of immigrant service providers. *Public Health*, 167, 28-33.

Shamim, A., Lindner, K., Hipfner-Boucher, K., & Chen, X. 2020. The Experiences of Syrian Refugee Children at School in Canada and Germany: Interviews with Children, Parents & Educators. *Canadian Diversity*, 17(2), 28-31

Shields, M. (2008). Community belonging and self-perceived health. *Health reports*, 19(2), 51.

Shoham, S., & Strauss, S. K. (2008). Immigrants' information needs: their role in the absorption process. *Information research*, 13(4), 13-4.

Further Reading

Kinbrace. (2021). *From Humanitarian to Human: Changing the Way We Welcome Refugee Claimants*. <https://kinbrace.ca/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/Report-From-Humanitarian-to-Human-Changing-the-Way-We-Welcome-Refugee-Claimants-2021.pdf>



THE REFUGE

POLICY MATTERS



CYRIRC

CYRIRC

Listen to *The Refuge* Podcast, and access more resources at:

www.cyrrc.org