

**MINISTRY OF JOBS, TOURISM AND SKILLS TRAINING
AND MINISTER RESPONSIBLE FOR LABOUR
INFORMATION NOTE**

Cliff #: 111256

Date: November 23, 2015

PREPARED FOR: Honourable Shirley Bond, Minister

ISSUE: Restoration of the Interim Federal Health Program for Refugees

BACKGROUND:

- Established in 1957, the Interim Federal Health Program (IFHP) provides limited and temporary medical coverage to eligible refugees and protected persons when they arrive in Canada until they qualify for provincial or territorial (PT) health care.
- While primary constitutional responsibility for health care lies with PTs, the federal government provides short-term services through IFHP for humanitarian reasons.
- Once a beneficiary becomes eligible for PT health insurance, the IFHP coverage ends. The only exception is for resettled refugees receiving support through the federal Resettlement Assistance Program (RAP) who continue to receive supplemental coverage, prescription drug coverage and/or Public Health and Safety prescription drug coverage for the duration of their sponsorship (up to 24 months).
- Prior to 2012, the IFHP provided the same coverage for all refugees and protected persons, regardless of whether they were a refugee claimant (aka asylum seeker), privately sponsored refugee (PSR), or government-assisted refugee (GAR).
- This coverage included: essential/emergency health services for the treatment and prevention of serious medical conditions; emergency dental; contraception, prenatal, and obstetrical care; and essential prescription medications (Appendix 1).
- Federal cuts to the IFHP were made in June 2012, severely limiting health coverage for refugee claimants and PSRs not eligible for RAP.
- In July 2014, the Federal Court deemed that the cuts to IFHP amounted to "cruel and unusual punishment" and ordered the government to reverse the changes.
- On Nov. 4, 2014, Citizenship and Immigration Canada (CIC) announced that it would implement temporary changes to the IFHP while appealing the Federal Court decision. Effective Nov. 5, 2014, three basic types of coverage were provided which are still in effect today: health-care coverage, extended health care coverage, and public health or public safety health care coverage (Appendix 2).
- Following the federal election on Oct. 19, 2015, the new Minister for Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship (IRC), Minister McCallum, confirmed that the government will carry-out its platform commitment to drop the appeal and restore the IFHP.
- It is anticipated that the federal government will fully reinstate pre-2012 coverage, including prescription drugs and supplemental care for PSRs and refugee claimants; however, details on the new policy and implementation are forthcoming.

DISCUSSION:

- The restoration of the IFHP will likely have a minimal impact on BC, as the majority of refugees received by the province arrive through resettlement programs as permanent residents and are immediately eligible for the BC Medical Services Plan

(MSP) (Appendix 3). The three-month wait period for MSP is waived for all resettled refugees.

- Increased costs to provincial health care following the 2012 changes were nominal due to the fact that the province was already providing MSP coverage to the majority of refugees; and consistent with the health coverage provided to the majority of permanent residents, BC did not provide extended health benefits to refugees, with the exception of select provincially-funded trauma services.
- The Ministry of Health is unable to confirm whether restricting access to preventive care or treatment for refugee claimants and others led to repeated emergency room visits and/or hospitalizations with cost implications for the province.
- It is anticipated that the restoration of the IFHP will:
 - Extend drugs and supplemental care to all privately sponsored refugees for the duration of their sponsorship (1 year), significantly reducing costs for refugee sponsors in the province and possibly encouraging more private sponsorships of refugees from Syria; and
 - Extend benefits and coverage to refugee claimants who do not yet have BC residency status and are therefore ineligible for MSP.
- While the IFHP does provide Psychotherapy Counselling to GARs, BC medical providers state that it is nearly impossible to access. IFHP does not cover the cost of interpretation and, at present, there is only 1 Arabic-speaking psychologist who can deliver IFHP counselling in the province. Only a handful of clients have successfully accessed these services in Greater Vancouver in 2015.

s.13,s.16

CONCLUSION:

The expected impact of restored IFHP to the province is minimal given that: (a) the forthcoming influx of refugees from Syria will consist of resettled refugees who are already eligible for MSP coverage upon arrival, and (b) BC has the lowest percentage of refugee claimants in the country. The most significant impact will likely be the ability for privately-sponsored refugees to access drugs and supplementary coverage – over and above what is provided by MSP – for the duration of their sponsorship, typically 1 year.

ATTACHMENTS:

Appendix 1: Interim Federal Health Program Coverage prior to June 2012

Appendix 2: Interim Federal Health Program Coverage: pre-2012 v. post-2014

Appendix 3: Volume of Refugee Arrivals and Claims in BC

Contact: Cloe Nicholls, A/ Executive Director

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APPENDIX 1: Interim Federal Health Program Coverage prior to June 2012

Eligible groups included: refugee claimants awaiting determination by the Immigration and Refugee Board (IRB); failed claimants awaiting removal from Canada; resettled refugees; protected persons in Canada waiting to receive their provincial/territorial health insurance coverage; persons detained under the Immigration and Refugee Protection Act

SERVICES COVERED WITHOUT PRIOR APPROVAL

Basic Coverage

Medical Services:

- Doctor Visits
- Standard Immunizations
- Prenatal and Obstetrical Care
- Lab Tests and X-Rays

Hospital Services:

- Medical and Surgical Care, including:
- Anaesthesia

- Psychiatric Care
- Dialysis
- Blood Transfusion
- Chemotherapy
- Radiotherapy
- Diagnostic Imaging (Magnetic Resonance Imaging, Computer Tomography Scans and Ultrasound)

Supplemental Coverage

Vision Care:

- One Pair of Eyewear (glasses and/or lenses every two years)
- One Vision Test per year

Dental Care:

- Emergency Examinations
- X-rays
- Extractions
- Anaesthesia

Pharmaceuticals:

- Essential prescription
- Medications

Community-Based Services:

- Nursing Visits
- Emergency Ambulance
- Immigration Medical Examinations
- Post Arrival Health Assessment for Resettled Refugees
- Pressure Garments, Continence Aids
- Ostomy and Surgical Supplies
- Therapeutic abortion
- Emergency essential surgery
- Essential immunizations

Other Services:

SERVICES COVERED ONLY WITH PRIOR APPROVAL

Supplemental Coverage

Dental Care:

- Certain Fillings
- Dentures
- Non-emergency dental

Community-Based Services:

- Home Care Visits
- Long Term Care Facilities

Other Services:

- Occupational therapy
- Psychotherapy and counselling

Physiotherapy

- Speech therapy
- Oxygen therapy and respiratory aids
- Hearing Aids
- Mobility Aids
- Orthotics & Prosthetics
- Midwife services
- Plastic surgery (for severe disfigurement)
- Alcohol treatment centres

SERVICES NOT COVERED

Medical Care:

- Acupuncture
- Cosmetic Procedures
- Chiropractic Treatment
- Plastic Surgery for Aesthetic Purposes
- Condoms
- Homeopathic and Naturopathic Treatment
- Non-medical Male Circumcisions
- Podiatry
- Third Party Medical Reports/Services
- Medical Advice by Telephone or other Means of Telecommunications

- Renewal of Prescriptions by Pharmacists
- Medical Legal Reports
- Massage Therapy
- Fertility Treatments
- Reversal of Sterilization Procedures

Dental Care:

- Orthodontics
- Root Planning, Root canal
- Cosmetic Services, Crowns, Veneers, Implants

APPENDIX 2: Interim Federal Health Coverage, Prior to June 2012 v. Post Nov. 2014

	Basic (doctor, hospital, and laboratory, including pre- and post-natal care)		Basic for Public Health/Public Safety		Drugs		Drugs for Public Health/Public Safety & Immunization		Supplemental*(psychotherapy counselling; hearing test; post-arrival assessment; home care; assistive devices respiratory aids; residential care; and other coverage)	
	Pre-06/2012	Post 11/2014	Pre-06/2012	Post 11/2014	Pre-06/2012	Post 11/2014	Pre-06/2012	Post 11/2014	Pre-06/2012	Post 11/2014
Gov. assisted refugees, privately sponsored refugees and beneficiaries of Resettlement Assistance Program (RAP)	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Privately sponsored refugees without RAP Support	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✗	✓	✓	✓	✗
Victims of human trafficking with a temporary resident permit	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Protected persons	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✗	✓	✓	✓	✗
Designated country of origin refugee claimant	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✗	✓	✓	✓	✗
Non-designated country of origin refugee claimants	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✗	✓	✓	✓	✗
Rejected refugee claimants with a deferral of removal for generalized risk	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✗
Rejected refugee claimants without a deferral of removal for generalized risk	✓	✗	✓	✓	✓	✗	✓	✓	✓	✗
Individuals who receive a positive decision on their Pre-removal Risk Assessment	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✗	✓	✓	✓	✗
All IFHP beneficiaries who are children (under 19 years of age)	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
All IFHP beneficiaries who are pregnant	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✗
Individuals with ineligible refugee claim but eligible to make a pre-removal risk assessment application	✓	✗	✓	✓	✓	✗	✓	✓	✓	✗

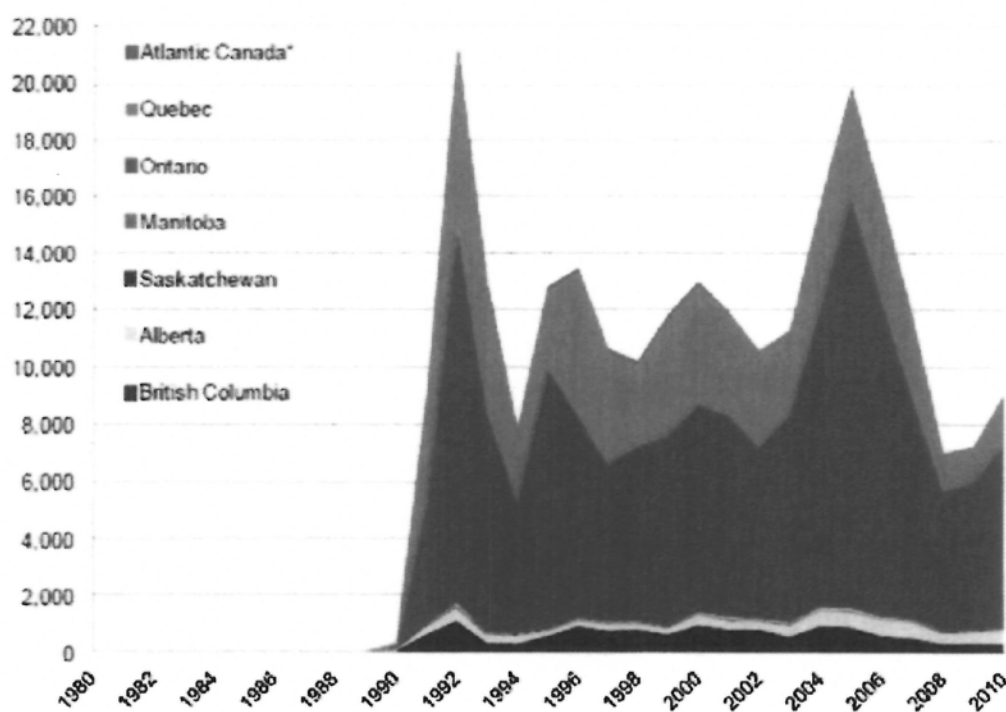
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APPENDIX 3: Volume of Refugee Arrivals and Claims in BC

Table: Refugee arrivals to British Columbia 2010-2014

Refugee category	Year				
	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014
Government-assisted refugees	743	672	530	610	834
Privately sponsored refugees	485	496	355	672	190
Refugees landed in Canada	296	494	366	323	364
Refugee dependants	143	148	187	143	126
Blended Visa Office-Referred refugees				5	14
Refugees Total	1,667	1,810	1,438	1,753	1,528

Figure: Successful refugee claimants by province (1990-2010)



*Prince Edward Island, Newfoundland and Labrador, Nova Scotia, and New Brunswick
Source: CIC, Facts and Figures, RDM, 2010

Source: IMDB 2008 Immigration Category Profiles, Refugees Landed in Canada Findings from the Longitudinal Immigration Database (IMDB).

MINISTRY OF JOBS, TOURISM AND SKILLS TRAINING
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INFORMATION NOTE

Cliff #: 111360

Date: November 27, 2015

PREPARED FOR: Honourable Shirley Bond, Minister

ISSUE: Update on the Syrian Refugee Resettlement Operation

BACKGROUND:

- On November 24, 2015, the federal government announced that 10,000 Syrian refugees (80% privately sponsored (PSR), 20% government sponsored (GAR)) will be arriving in Canada by December 31, 2015, and 15,000 more (20% PSR, 80% GAR) will arrive by the end of February 2016.
- BC is expected to receive up to 3,500 refugees between December 2015 and February 2016, 80% as GARs. For comparison, in 2014 BC received a total of 1,528 refugees, 67% as GARs.
- The federal government funds the Immigrant Services Society of BC (ISSBC) to provide services under the Resettlement Assistance Program (RAP). ISSBC is currently the only RAP provider in BC.
- RAP provides GARs with immediate support upon their arrival in Canada, including arranging housing, providing household goods, and a year of income support.
- The federal government has committed to providing an additional \$377M over six years for settlement supports to refugees, as well as fully restoring the Interim Federal Health Program, but details of these commitments are not yet known.

DISCUSSION:

Refugee Inventory and Arrival Timelines

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- It is anticipated that the first flight from overseas will happen in mid-December.
- BC expects to receive approximately 200 PSRs in December and only a handful of GARs. The PSRs will be destined for whichever community their sponsorship community is located in – over half will be in either New Westminster or Vancouver.
- The flow of GARs to BC will increase in January and February^{s.13}

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BC Action Plan and Settlement Locations

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- The Action Plan is still draft and is subject to change based on input from the cross-Ministry ADM committee, discussions with communities, and negotiations with the federal government.

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Refugee Readiness Fund Procurement:

- The Refugee Readiness Fund is nearing finalization and is ready to announce at the direction of the Minister.
- The current proposal is to direct award up to \$500,000 to ISSBC for an online information hub, trauma-related clinician supports, and refugee readiness workshops in several communities throughout BC.
- The remainder of the Fund would be procured through a Call for Responses to create Refugee Response Teams in the proposed settlement communities.
- A Decision Note regarding the procurement is forthcoming.

Profile of Syrian Refugees

- IRCC recently prepared a profile of Syrian refugees' culture, religion, health, education, and employment. See Appendix C for a summary of key points.
- The profile will be shared with the cross-Ministry ADM committee to inform ministry planning and preparedness.

NEXT STEPS:

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- Finalize the Fund procurement and make a public announcement.
- Continue to monitor federal plans for the timing of refugee arrivals.

ATTACHMENTS: Appendix A

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Appendix E

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Appendix C Summary of IRCC Syrian Refugee Profile

Contact: Cloe Nicholls A/Executive Director, Immigration Policy Branch, Telephone: 250.216.9102 (cell)

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Appendix C: Summary of IRCC Syrian Refugee Profile

Age

- There is no age data available for the current inventory of refugees
- Data from refugees resettled to Canada in 2014 shows that 34% are children under 15; 15% are youth (15 to 24) and 48% are working age (25 to 64).

Language

- The primary language spoken in Syria is Arabic (90%). Other languages include Kurdish, Armenian and Aramaic.
- Of the Syrian refugees settled in Canada in 2014, only 46% spoke English or French. Language barriers are likely to be an issue.

Literacy

- Prior to the civil war, universal literacy was a main government focus. Approximately 84% of the population is literate – 90% of men and 77% of women.

Ethnic Groups

- Syria is composed of Arabs (90%) and a minority of Kurds and Armenians.

Urbanization

- Prior to the conflict close to 60% of Syrians lived in urban areas.

Religion

- 87% of the Syrian population is Muslim – 74% Sunni and 13% Alawi, Ismaili and Shia. Approximately 10% identify as Christian; 3% are Druze.

Education

- Prior to the conflict, school attendance was high as public education is free. Urban areas had higher education attendance than rural.
- Since the conflict started in 2011, most children have not attended school.
- Prior to the conflict, approximately 26% of the population had post-secondary education; however attendance has declined since 2011.

Preliminary Health Characteristics

- Prior to the civil war, many Syrians had access to good health care and supports. UN research on Syrian refugees in camps indicates that the main health concern is trauma and mental health, particularly among adolescents. Most of the refugees have experienced trauma, witnessed violent acts or are suffering from conflict-induced disabilities.
- 43% of Syrian refugees referred for resettlement by the UN fall under the category of Survivor of Violence and/or Torture. Sexual violence has affected many refugees, primarily women and girls.
- A high number of refugees also have disabilities and/or injuries – up to 11% of the refugees in Jordan. Many of those (40%) are children.

- In addition to trauma and disability, refugee screening has also indicated instances of hypertension, diabetes, visual impairments and cardiovascular disease. There have been very low rates of communicable diseases thus far.

Preliminary Employment Data

- There has not been fulsome screening of refugees in the inventory to establish skills and education.
- However, an analysis of Syrian refugees in Lebanon determined that the majority worked in construction (70%). Further research from 2013 found that the main areas of occupation were construction, driving/housekeeping and agriculture. Many Syrians with previous jobs that have high levels of qualification (e.g. engineering, finance) were either unemployed or working in other sectors.

MINISTRY OF JOBS, TOURISM AND SKILLS TRAINING
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MEETING NOTE

Cliff #: 111429

Date: December 4, 2015

PREPARED FOR: Honourable Shirley Bond, Minister

DATE AND TIME OF MEETING: Tuesday, December 8, 2015 at 530 Drake Street,
Vancouver, BC

ATTENDEES: Patricia Woroch, CEO of Immigrant Services Society of British
Columbia (ISS)
Chris Friesen, Director, Settlement, ISS

ISSUE(S): ISSBC history and role in providing settlement services

BACKGROUND:

ISS was incorporated in 1972 as a response to the need to resettle approximately 800 Ismaili refugees fleeing Idi Amin's Ugandan regime (for history see Appendix 1). At the time ISS was the first settlement service provider in British Columbia. Since then, ISS has expanded to 14 communities in BC, with a main office in Vancouver. The organization has over 400 staff and 1,000 volunteers. The current CEO is Patricia Woroch; Manchan Sonachansingh is Chair of the Board of Directors. Chris Friesen is the Director of Settlement Services and is also the current head of the Canada-wide settlement organization CISSA (Canadian Immigrant Settlement Services Association).

ISS is the only settlement service organization in BC that provides the full suite of programs under the federal government's Refugee Assistance Program (RAP) and has done so since 1998. Additionally, ISS provides settlement, education, language and employment services for approximately 25,000 immigrants and refugees annually in Metro Vancouver, Squamish, and the Okanagan. ISS receives both provincial and federal funding to deliver a range of programs to newcomers, with a particular focus on refugees. ISS also delivers provincially funded services to federally ineligible clients, including temporary foreign workers, students and naturalized citizens.

Since 2014, ISS has been building Welcome House, an integrated reception centre focussed on welcoming recent refugees and ensuring they are connected to health, language, employment and settlement services all in one area. ISS is partnering with the Vancouver Coastal Health Authority for the health aspects delivered through the Bridge Clinic and has also received funding from BC Housing.

DISCUSSION:

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The provincial government currently has a number of contracts with ISS valued at \$2,813,531; \$1,542,052 of which is provincial funding and \$1,271,479 of which is deferred federal funding from the Transition Settlement Agreement:

- \$1,184,400 (\$907,842 in deferred federal funds and \$276,557 in provincial funds) to connect skilled immigrants to employment in BC through the Skills Connect program;
- \$770,000 in provincial funds to provide services to clients who are ineligible for federal funding, such as Temporary Foreign Workers, Naturalized Citizens, and Refugee Claimants;
- \$495,493 in provincial funds through the Refugee Readiness Fund to provide provincial coordination and supports to refugee serving organizations and individuals, and for trauma-related clinical support; and
- \$363,920 in deferred federal funds for two contracts for short term language training to assist immigrants in attaching to the labour market.

Although Welcome House is nearly complete,^{s.17}

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KEY MESSAGING:

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ATTACHMENTS: Appendix 1: Historical Timeline of ISS

Contact: Rob Mingay, ADM, Workforce Development and Immigration Division
Telephone: (cell) ^{s.17}

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Appendix 1: Historical Timeline of ISS

2014

ISSo/BC begins construction of the New Welcome House facility, the first of its kind in Canada. With a groundbreaking ceremony on June 20th, UN World Refugee Day, ISSo/BC begins a new chapter in providing service and assistance to immigrants and refugees in BC.

2013

ISSo/BC officially opens locations in Richmond and Maple Ridge expanding services for immigrant and refugee children, youth and young adults; ISSo/BC Director of Settlement Services co-chairs leading UN-led refugee resettlement conference.

2011

ISSo/BC expands delivery of Settlement and Integration Services (SIP) through opening of new locations in Langley, Maple Ridge and Richmond; as well as ELSA L-5 programs in Maple Ridge, Squamish and Burnaby; starts Targeted Skills Shortage Pilot.

2010

The organization opens a second office in Richmond to deliver ELSA L-5 programs; starts the Job Options program in Vancouver, Surrey and Port Coquitlam.

2009

ISSo/BC delivers Youth Connections to provide services for Older Refugee Youth and Young Adults; starts the Public Legal Education for Immigrants (PLEI) services in Tri-Cities (as part of the Justice Education Society-led consortium); starts the Skills Connect for Immigrants program for newcomer immigrants; accredited by Language Canada.

2008

The organization delivers the first Refugee Trauma Information and Support Program; opens ELSA in New Westminster and Mentoring Connections Program; starts New Beginnings Refugee ECD programming (as part of the SHARE-led consortium in the Tri-Cities); opens the Burnaby-New Westminster Career Centre.

2007

ISSo/BC provides Step Ahead (as part of the MOSAIC-led consortium); begins delivery of "Employment Outreach Services", a Tier 2 Settlement Related Labour Market program to serve newcomer refugees and immigrants in Vancouver, Burnaby and Coquitlam; opens ELSA 4-5 classes in Tri-Cities.

2006

ISSo/BC opens the Burnaby Settlement office; introduces Labour Market Focused

ELSA 4-5 classes in Richmond, Vancouver and Coquitlam.

2005

The organization opens Settlement services in Coquitlam; opens the Surrey Multilingual Employment Resource Centre; opens ELSA offices in Coquitlam and Richmond.

2004

Staff launch the beginning of targeted newcomer children and youth programming; introduce Enhanced English Language Services for Adults (ELSA) 4-5 programming in Richmond and Coquitlam.

2003

ISSo/BC settlement workers deploy into Burnaby and New Westminster.

2001

ISSo/BC opens up the Richmond Career Centre.

1999

Staff introduce ISSo/BC's first performance-based contract - Crossroads (Workplace Based Training); responds to the emergency evacuation of over 900 Kosovo refugees.

1998

ISSo/BC becomes the sole deliverer of the Resettlement Assistance Program for Government Assisted Refugees destined to BC.

1995

The organization introduces the Adult and Continuing Education Program (ISSo/BC's fee-for-service language and training program).

1994

ISSo/BC co-founds the Bridge Community Health Clinic for refugees; begins providing targeted primary health care for refugees.

1993

ISSo/BC purchases the Drake St facility in downtown Vancouver; introduces specialized service to refugee claimants (SOS founding member).

1991

The organization delivers its first federally-funded Employment Assistance Services for unemployed immigrants with limited or no English.

1989

Staff delivers ISSo/BC's first government-funded ESL training programs.

1986

The organization opens the Welcome House facility, offering temporary accommodation to all government assisted refugees destined to BC; pioneers refugee reception services in the province.

1985

ISSo/BC begins delivering one of the first refugee newcomer-volunteer matching "Host programs" in Canada; registers as a Training Institute.

1983

ISSo/BC starts the first training program for immigrants: housekeeping services.

1979

The organization responds to the plight of the Vietnamese Boat People.

1978

ISSo/BC begins delivering settlement services under the federal government's first immigrant integration policy and program framework - Immigrant Settlement Adaptation Program (ISAP).

1975

Staff set up branch offices in Surrey, South and North Vancouver, Kamloops, Prince George, Richmond, and Victoria –which have since gone on to become their own separate legal entities.

1974

The organization changes its name to Immigrant Services Society of British Columbia.

1973

Staff Initiate volunteer-led English as a Additional Language (EAL) language classes.

1972

ISSo/BC incorporates as the Immigrant Services Society of Greater Vancouver - the first immigrant serving agency in BC in direct response to the resettlement of close to 800 Ismaili refugees fleeing Uganda's Idi Amin; pioneers what is today commonly referred to as "settlement services".

1968

A group of local volunteers convene at the request of Canada's Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau, including Vancouver East MP Harold Winch and Eleanor Strong (later to become first Executive Director) as a response to the growing unrest in East Africa and possible future organized refugee resettlement movement to BC.

**MINISTRY OF JOBS, TOURISM AND SKILLS TRAINING
AND MINISTER RESPONSIBLE FOR LABOUR
INFORMATION NOTE**

Cliff #: 111457

Date: December 10, 2015

PREPARED FOR: Honourable Shirley Bond and Honourable Rich Coleman

ISSUE: Housing for Refugees in British Columbia

BACKGROUND:

Approximately 3,500 Syrian refugees are expected to settle in BC by the end of 2016. The flow of refugees will begin arriving in December 2015 with higher volumes arriving through January and February 2016. Approximately 1,700 government-assisted refugees are expected to have arrived in BC by the end of February, as well as several hundred privately sponsored refugees (exact numbers are not yet known).

Finding suitable housing is an immediate priority and is essential for the successful settlement of Syrian refugees in BC. The federal government has no national program addressing refugee housing needs.

Most of the refugees who arrive will be either government sponsored (GARs) or privately sponsored (PSRs). For PSRs, housing is arranged by the private sponsorship group in the sponsors' community and the cost of housing covered by the group for up to one year. For GARs, the federally funded Resettlement Assistance Program (RAP) arranges housing, greets the refugees at the airport, and provides initial settlement support. RAP also provides GARS with income support for up to one year at a rate equivalent to provincial income assistance rates. For a couple with two children, the housing allowance is \$700 per month.

Currently, the only RAP service provider in BC is the Immigrant Services Society of BC (ISSofBC) based in the Lower Mainland. As a result, historically GARs destined for BC are settled in the Lower Mainland. The Province is working with the federal government to explore options for settling future GARs in other communities.

DISCUSSION:

In some BC communities it is a challenge to find suitable accommodation that is affordable within income assistance rates. Anecdotally, finding affordable housing is a bigger challenge for GARs than for PSRs. The RAP providers generally have to find housing for GARs through the private market if subsidized housing is not available, whereas often the private sponsorship group is able to leverage their personal networks to secure housing at a below-market rate. However, PSRs may require provincial subsidized housing over the medium to long term after the sponsorship period ends. Some PSRs are settled in smaller communities where housing is generally more

affordable, but the challenge for GARs is exacerbated by the fact that they are settled in the Lower Mainland where housing is particularly expensive.

BC Housing provides subsidized housing to low-income families in BC. BC Housing is committed to supporting refugees' settlement by connecting them to affordable, long-term housing. Refugees have always been eligible to apply for housing through the Housing Registry and this will continue to be the case. BC Housing is looking at ways of identifying applicants as Syrian refugees, but ultimately the participating housing providers will determine if they wish to provide priority for any available units to Syrian refugee applicants.

BC Housing is also conducting a review of their directly managed housing stock to determine if there is capacity to assist Syrian refugees. Any decisions further to this will take into consideration the needs of those currently waiting for housing and BC Housing will provide any update on this as it becomes available.

ISSofBC has created a web site where British Columbians across the province can indicate their willingness to offer housing to refugees at a cost that is affordable within income assistance rates. Other settlement agencies throughout the province are also receiving and tracking housing offers. As of December 7, ISSofBC had received 990 housing leads and is in the process of vetting these offers and/or referring them to the settlement agencies in the respective communities. The safety and suitability of each private housing offer needs to be validated. Some settlement providers have expressed an interest for the province or municipalities (through bylaw enforcement) to help settlement agencies assess the safety/validity of the offer.

To help the Syrian refugees understand their housing options and tenancy rights in BC, the Province has arranged for GARs to receive a BC Newcomers Guide (in Arabic) when they arrive at the Vancouver airport. The Newcomers Guide includes a full chapter dedicated to housing. The Newcomers Guide is also available online at: http://www.welcomebc.ca/newcomers_guide/newcomerguide.aspx.

SUMMARY:

The need for Syrian refugees to find affordable, long-term housing is immediate and essential for successful settlement outcomes. The housing challenge is particularly acute for GARs. BC will continue to press the federal government to settle GARs outside the Lower Mainland where housing is more affordable and there are better job opportunities. In addition, BC Housing and settlement agencies will continue to explore options for identifying affordable housing options and connecting refugees with these opportunities. Any housing response to address the refugee situation must balance the needs of refugees with the needs of other low-income British Columbians.

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