

## NEW SCHOLAR REPORT

---

# BMRC-IRMU KNOWLEDGE EXCHANGE EVENT



## WHAT DID WE LEARN?

---

### PREPARED BY:

Marshia Akbar  
Adriana De Los Monteros Romo  
Gabrielle Désilets  
Virginie Mesana  
Jessica Praznik

## What did we learn from settling Privately Sponsored and Government Assisted Refugees?



### Jessica Praznik

Research Assistant, Ryerson University

As Research Assistant for Dr. John Shields, Jessica Praznik conducted research on federal, provincial and municipal immigration and settlement policies and programs for the SSHRC funded Building Migrant Resilience in Cities/Immigration et resilience en milieu urbain (BMRC-IRMU). She was also the administrative support for the BMRC's Toronto City Network and was a member of the planning committee of the Knowledge Exchange Event.

[Read more](#)

### What is next?

- Flexible & holistic traditional government funding for settlement to meet the needs of refugees
- Private sponsors need help to find employment for refugees
- Rethinking how language services are provided to GARS (including the provision of child care for refugees)
- Collaborating more between faith-based organizations and settlement agencies
- Research on the role of faith-based organizations in the settlement of refugees

## THE SYRIAN REFUGEE INITIATIVE TRANSFORMED THE WORK OF THE SETTLEMENT SECTOR

The settlement sector in Canada is constantly adapting to international events. In November 2015, the federal government made a commitment to resettle 25,000 Syrian refugees fleeing the war in Syria. By April 2017, almost 45,000 Syrians were resettled in Canadian communities.

In this panel, academics, settlement service providers and a faith-based organization discussed their research and experiences of resettling Syrian refugees. There was a consensus that the mobilization of civic society and multi-sectoral collaborations facilitated the Syrian refugee resettlement initiative.

### A welcoming community

According to Mario Calla, Executive Director of COSTI Immigrant Services, welcoming communities make it easier for refugees to settle and integrate than hostile communities. With the Syrian refugee initiative, many groups without previous sponsorship experience became private sponsors. Diverse players were involved in the settlement efforts and many volunteered for the first time with the Syrian community. While these new groups, especially volunteers, offered great opportunities for innovative services to support Syrian refugees, they also created additional management challenges for settlement service providers.

In addition to traditional settlement service providers and volunteers, faith-based organizations played a key role in resettling Syrian refugees. Pastor Nestor Abdon, from the People's Church, explained how his church provides resettlement and settlement support for many refugee groups including Syrians, through a volunteer-led, vocational, holistic, and strategic partnership approach. They even provide support in some refugee camps thanks to the help of many volunteers.

### A model that is still a work-in progress

While the resettlement operation was generally viewed as a success, the experiences of Syrian refugees varied depending on the cities where they were established and on the way that they settled. According to Michaela Hynie, researcher at York University, privately sponsored (PSR) and government assisted (GARS) refugees have different settlement experiences. GARS were on average a younger group that had been displaced for a longer period and had less language skills. They were also less educated and did enter the labour market as easily as the PSRs except in the Okanagan. Michaela Hynie also found that while Syrian refugees in the Okanagan had the best overall outcomes, their sense of belonging was not necessarily better than in other Canadian cities.

The lack of uniformity of Syrian refugees' settlement experiences can also be explained by the fact that settlement agencies and faith-based organizations had to act quickly and create innovative programs to meet the needs of the newcomers. According to Chedly Belkhdja, from Concordia University, the settlement sector "needed to go beyond the classical agency settlement model." The arrival of Syrian refugees happened rapidly, with little information provided to the settlement agencies; there were limited opportunities to plan. In Moncton, the sector did not have any experience with welcoming large numbers of refugees. The City took a leadership role and developed an Incident Command Centre. While multi-sectoral collaboration contributed to the operation's success, there were also instances when settlement services providers were hesitant about sharing information with other organizations. In addition, in Toronto, Mario Calla explained that they had so many volunteers and tons of donations that it became hard to manage with the agency's limited human resources. An additional challenge pointed out by Pastor Nestor Abdon was that faith-based groups did not approach the non-profit/government sectors enough for settlement support.

## Impacts of LIPS for planning Immigrant Integration: The reality and the aspirations



**Marshia Akbar**

SSHRC Post-Doctoral Research Fellow, York University

As a post-doctoral research fellow at York University, Marshia Akbar provides research support for the SSHRC partnership titled 'Migration and Resilience in Urban Canada', which includes analyzing trends in migration and settlement in Ontario and Quebec metropolitan areas, engaging in knowledge mobilization activities, and publishing journal articles and research reports.

[Read More](#)

### What is next?

Despite challenges, LIPs are a valuable resource for facilitating access to information and resources and fostering partnership building and collaboration.

By evaluating feedbacks of field workers, LIPs identify their best practices which enable them to address the changing needs of newcomers.

However, more initiatives are needed to engage with diverse stakeholders, particularly employers. Training programs for field workers should also be a priority. They would reinforce culture sensitive practices and help connect immigrants to local settlement networks.

## COMMUNITIES PLAY A SIGNIFICANT ROLE IN SHAPING LIPS' PLANNING AND COORDINATION ACTIVITIES

Established in 2007, "LIPs provide a collaborative framework to raise awareness around newcomers' needs and engage a wide range of local actors in fostering welcoming communities. They support community-level research, strategic planning and improve the accessibility and coordination of services that facilitate immigrant settlement and integration" said Richard Lecours, manager of settlement and resettlement programs at IRCC, at the June 5, 2018 BMRC conference.

LIPs encourage co-operation among federal, provincial, and municipal governments. They also involve various stakeholders; employers, school boards, health centres and networks, boards of trade, professional associations, ethno-cultural organizations, faith-based organizations and social services providers, in collaborative strategic planning processes.

### A community-driven approach

Panelists agreed on the central role that communities play in shaping LIPs' planning and coordination activities. For Paulina Wyrzykowski, Director of the Toronto South Local Immigration Partnership, one of the biggest priorities is inter-LIP coordination that engages a wide range of stakeholders. Since LIPs are local entities, collectively, they represent a diversity of interests and perspectives. Luisa Veronis, from University of Ottawa, agreed that location, place, and local histories have an impact on LIPs so that newcomers sometimes have to navigate communities with pre-existing histories that may or may not facilitate their integration. Gabrielle Désilets, from Concordia University, explained how in the absence of LIPs, training and networking play crucial roles in connecting immigrants to local networks of settlement supports in Montreal.

### Concerning anti-immigrant sentiment

While LIPs are meant to be both community-driven and newcomer-friendly, their work becomes more challenging in the face of anti-immigrant sentiment. Sudip Minhas, Executive Director of The Windsor Women Working with Immigrant Women, highlighted the gaps between academic discourses and negative public narratives regarding refugees and migrants that threaten the community-driven approach of LIPs. She believes that LIPs can and should play a role in combating anti-immigrant sentiments by helping to close the gaps between academic discourses and negative public narratives.



Sudip Minhas, Executive Director of The Windsor Women Working with Immigrant Women

### Different local circumstances

LIP activities in Hamilton, Ottawa and Waterloo demonstrate diverse strategies for planning and coordinating settlement supports. LIPs respond to public perceptions of immigrants and the settlement experiences of immigrants themselves that may vary from city to city. Diverse local circumstances may pose difficult challenges for successful inter-LIP co-ordination.

## Sanctuary cities: what are they good for?



**Virginie Mesana**

SSHRC Post-Doctoral Research Fellow, University of Ottawa

As postdoctoral fellow at the Department of Geography and Geomatics (University of Ottawa), Virginie Mesana is a co-researcher on several BMRC-IRMU projects. She is currently conducting a transversal analysis of policy discourses relating to migration and resilience at the federal, provincial (Ontario and Quebec) and municipal (in selected cities) levels. She is also coordinating projects on the governance structures in immigrant settlement, on resilience and international students' mobility, as well as on labour market experiences and immigrant resilience in Ottawa. Dr Mesana's own research focuses primarily on the study of diasporas and ethnic relations in North America, with a particular interest for media and cultural analysis, and feminist critical theory

[Read More](#)

### What is next?

There is a need for more "political will and commitment", with better dialogue between different levels of government and municipalities.

Encouraging more "appropriate", "safe" and "confidential" practices for "sanctuary cities" is key. Policy makers also need to be part of a conversation about developing a system where no ID is required for undocumented migrants.

Finally, the city of Toronto might learn from Montreal's provisions in its upcoming "sanctuary city" strategic plan, especially regarding better city staff training.

## ENCOURAGING MORE "APPROPRIATE", "SAFE" AND "CONFIDENTIAL" PRACTICES FOR "SANCTUARY CITIES" IS KEY

"Sanctuary cities" promote and implement resilience strategies to help vulnerable populations. They are vital to a number of initiatives in order to protect human rights all over the world. They can also be community led like in Toronto or politically led like in Montreal. However, both these examples show that there are still not enough pathways and funding to make them successful.

### Three main obstacles

There is a contradiction between the increase in restrictive immigration and asylum policies and efforts to create "inclusive" and "welcoming" sanctuary cities. Documented migrants are still being treated as "criminals" and there is no real "sanctuary city policy" in place to provide better access to city services to all.

### Implementation issues

Jenna Henneby (Wilfrid Laurier University) noted that there has been a move from a language of "rights" to a language of "access to services" in various local contexts around the world. A truly inclusive sanctuary city should make services more visible to undocumented migrants. Idil Atak (Ryerson University) underlined current implementation problems in Toronto, starting with the lack of a proper policy on paper and a dedicated budget.

Migrants, most city staff and agencies are not well-informed of the Access TO initiative. Francisco Rico-Martinez (FCJ Refugee Center, Toronto) highlighted that all inhabitants should also be "empowered to use the complaint mechanism". In Montreal, there has been a "symbolic" use of the "sanctuary city" language to create a "welcoming and inclusive city for everybody".

### Challenges of people with temporary status

Stephan Reichhold (TCRI, Montreal) indicated that a consultation with community partners had been conducted in order to define what Montreal would be as a sanctuary city. The Bureau d'intégration des nouveaux arrivants à Montréal (BINAM) staff is now working on an actual plan with extra funding for organizations, research and staff training in immigration-related topics.



Stephan Reichhold (TCRI, Montreal)

Challenges noted by the panelists include the three following aspects. (1) Undocumented Torontonians seeking emergency services from the Toronto police may be at risk of being reported to the Canada Border Service Agency (CBSA). For this reason, (2) there is a lack of demographic data on undocumented people which would give us better insight into horizontal mobility. And, (3) sanctuary cities' initiatives can be problematic in practice.

The language used can be seen as paternalistic and can heighten anti-immigrant sentiment. Increasingly, many who come to Canada arrive with temporary residence and their transition to permanency is precarious. How will "sanctuary cities" provide services to "people who fall through the cracks"?

## Stories of resilience-What did we learn from the newcomers?



**Adriana De Los Monteros Romo**  
BMRC-IRMU KM Intern, Ryerson University

Adriana De Los Monteros Romo is an international student from Mexico who is graduating from the Ryerson Graduate Program in Immigration and Settlement Studies.

She played a key role in the organization of the BMRC-IRMU Knowledge Exchange event by successfully supporting the Knowledge Mobilization Officer in the organization of the event.

She completed a research project on Canadian snowbirds in Mexico.

[Read more](#)

### What is next?

One of the main recommendations to newcomers from the guest speakers was the idea of emulating the successful paths of other immigrants: “you do not have to reinvent the wheel, you just have to do it different” said Rosalind. They suggested that being proactive, persistent, highly self-motivated, developing social networks and strategies, getting a degree from the host country and participating in volunteer experiences were all key to success in a new country.

They also invited agencies, community sector and practitioners to help immigrants beyond job search and work related issues and “foster integration attitudes and motivation to become part of the country and its context”.

## NETWORKING AND VOLUNTEERING HELP NEWCOMERS GET THEIR CAREER STARTED IN CANADA.

The BMRC conference ended with a conversation between Professor Jelena Zikic and three past recipients of the RBC Top 25 Canadian Immigrant Awards who participated in her individual resilience project.

Dr. Zikic shared the highlights of her research on Migrant Resilience. She defined migrant resilience as the migrants’ ability to cope with barriers they face when immigrating and settling in Canada.

### Common issues

One of the most common issues immigrants face is the inability to enter the labour market and occupy positions that allow them to use the expertise acquired in their countries of origin. They must also overcome structural barriers related to language skills, lack of Canadian work experience and failure to recognize their foreign credentials.

In her research, Zikic noticed that resilient immigrants develop three instances of resilience in identity struggles: First, they demonstrate an “individual subjective motivation to integrate”. Secondly, they react proactively to the lack of credentials recognition. Third, they develop strategies for integration and to meet people. These instances were grouped into two coping mindsets. First, there is the survival mindset: “they need to survive to move on” said Zikic. The second mindset is holistic, “migrants want to “fit in” and give back to society” continued Zikic.

### Hard-work, well-being and volunteering

Guest speakers Maziar Hidari and twin sisters Lorelei & Rosalind Silverman, who were invited to share their experiences of immigrating to Canada, talked about the common challenges they had to overcome to succeed in Canada. Lorelei and Rosalind remembered how “every single day was a small challenge”. However, against all odds, they remained constantly active and maintained their well-being and social connections through volunteering, taking English courses and looking for employment.

Similarly, Maziar Hidari, a popular artist in his home country, felt that he “had to start below zero”, as he did not have a professional reputation and did not know anyone when he arrived in Canada. “Once I had a job, my dignity came back to me, I felt that I belonged to the community”, said Maziar. Like the sisters, Maziar revealed that networking and volunteering helped him get his career started in Canada.

While the stories told by the speakers showcased their individual resilience, some attendees questioned whether self-motivation was enough and asked whether other factors and a supporting environment facilitated their success. The three guest speakers focused their interventions on reiterating that hard-work, well-being and volunteering were the keys to success. They also demonstrated a high-level of optimism and confidence in their abilities to thrive: “We always had a plan B or C. We knew that even (if) they cut us tomorrow, we would do something else like the Medusa (referring to the myth), once every arm was cut, two more will grow” said the sisters.

## Transversal scan of “Resilience” in policy documents and Mapping Settlement Structures in Ontario.



**Gabrielle Désilets**  
SSHRC Post-Doctoral Research Fellow,  
Concordia University

Gabrielle Désilets is a post-doctorate fellow and Project Manager for the Montreal city network of the Building Migrant Resilience in Cities partnership. As an urban anthropologist, her research examines identity, intercultural cohabitation, place-making and belonging in urban areas. Her current research focuses on a neighbourhood approach to fostering welcoming communities.

[Read More](#)

## BMRC RESEARCHERS PRESENTED TWO DIMENSIONS OF THE TRANSVERSAL PROJECT

In this session, Luisa Veronis, Virginie Mesana, John Shields and Jessica Praznik presented the preliminary findings of the transversal project.

Veronis and Mesana’s research will help the BMRC-IRMU partnership better understand how the term “resilience” is used by the three levels of government (federal, provincial, municipal) and record its occurrence from 2007 to 2018. They have also developed a common methodology for the analysis of policy documents from different institutions. They created a codebook to help them analyze resilience in policy documents that do not directly mention the term “resilience” but that refer to similar ideas.

Another dimension of the transversal project was presented by John Shields and Jessica Praznik. They examined government websites and public documents to identify the government structures and institutions that deal with immigration and settlement in the province of Ontario, and the municipality of Toronto. They then produced a paper that describes an [“Anatomy” of the Immigration and Settlement sector in Canada](#).

### What did we learn?

Mesana and Veronis noticed an increase in the use of the term resilience in government documents over time. However, the term tends to be mentioned without any clear definition. Additionally, location and context matter: the use of “resilience” varies across government levels and sectors (e.g., public safety, climate change, and indigenous people): “The notion of resilience does not seem to have permeated into immigration documents, except when it comes to skilled workers, and in building the case for “francisation” in Quebec,” said Mesana.

### What is next?

Two days after the BMRC conference, elections were held in Ontario and the province is now governed by a Conservative government which quickly brought major changes to the Ontario Ministry of Citizenship and Immigration.

How will this political shift affect the settlement sector in Ontario?  
How will the federal government react to the provincial government’s changing priorities?

How will upcoming provincial elections similarly impact the settlement sector in Quebec?

Similarly, Shields and Praznik underscored that government-funded support is a unique trait of the Canadian settlement sector. However, location matters as there are differences across provinces. They noticed an increase in the involvement of provincial and municipal governments in immigration issues.

*“The federal government has authority on immigration matters but since the 1990s, provinces became more active players. Nowadays provinces spend much more money on immigration than previously, and municipalities, even without formal constitutional status, have become bigger contributors,”* said Shields.

### Why does it matter?

With their project, Mesana and Veronis are mapping the policy discourses of resilience that may help other researchers in the partnership. They are also contributing to our understanding of the notion and uses of resilience (e.g., community resilience, social resilience, systems resilience). Making this analysis useful to the community, the government and academics remains a challenge even though resilience could be used to develop immigration policies. “The power of words to define the experience of migrants and members of the settlement sector must not be underestimated,” said one participant.

By analyzing involvement in settlement supports over the past decades, Shields and Praznik investigated how different governments interact. “It is important for the community and the academic sectors to situate federal and provincial governments’ shared responsibilities on immigration, especially since these relations are constantly changing in nature,” said Shields.

## LEARN MORE ABOUT THE BMRC-IRMU PARTNERSHIP

---

"Established in 2016, Building Migrant Resilience in Cities (BMRC) is a research partnership and a multi-sector collaboration. It draws on over 20 years of experience in bringing together a range of key actors working on issues of immigration and settlement through CERIS, a leading Ontario network of migration and settlement researchers, practitioners, and policymakers. Our unique initiative explores the concept of social resilience to examine how institutions can facilitate migrant settlement in urban areas across Quebec and Ontario. We are generating new knowledge for academic debate and discussion that will be made readily available to decision-makers and practitioners who strive to enhance migrant settlement".

### Valerie Preston

Principal Investigator, Building Migrant Resilience in Cities (BMRC)  
Professor, York University

### Relevant links

[Visit the BMRC-IRMU Website](#)

[Read the BMRC-IRMU Project Description](#)

[Follow the BMRC-IRMU Twitter account](#)

[Visit the BMRC-IRMU YouTube channel](#)

[Learn the latest news with the BMRC-IRMU Newsletter](#)

[Read the BMRC-IRMU Research Digests](#)

[Consult the material from the latest BMRC-IRMU conferences](#)

[Consult the BMRC-IRMU Research Reports](#)

[Consult the BMRC-IRMU City Profiles](#)

### Contact information

To learn more about this project, for partnerships and media relations:

Naolo Charles  
Knowledge Mobilization Officer  
Building Migration Resilience in Cities Partnership

**Telephone:** 416-736-2100 Ext 20544

**Email:** [naolo@yorku.ca](mailto:naolo@yorku.ca)

*This report was coordinated, edited and designed by Naolo Charles, Knowledge Broker at York University.*

