A BMRC RESEARCH DIGEST
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The reception of refugees and asylum-seekers in Quebec:

documenting, contextualizing,and valuing the “Vivons nos quartiers” initiative in Montreal

Buttons created during an awareness-raising campaign aimed at encouraging the reception and mutual aid of refugees

What you need to know

The arrival of a large number of Syrian refugees (2015-2016) and the increase in the number of asylum-seekers crossing the Quebec-U.S. border (beginning in 2017) put to the test the Quebec system of receiving and settling newcomers, especially in the Montreal region. The organization of support services for more vulnerable immigrants demonstrates the experience and expertise of the community system of settlement and integration, its resilience and its capacity for concerted intervention, particularly at the local level.

What is this research about?

We analyze the deployment of the “Vivons nos quartiers” (VNQ) initiative, a project backed by the Concertation Table of agencies serving refugees and immigrants (TCRI), from the perspective of the governance of the integration of refugees and asylum-seekers in Montreal. Documenting the history of the reception of refugees in Quebec allows us to situate and contextualize the setting up of the project and to shed light on the tradition of concertation specific to the community settlement sector. The analysis of the concertation activities established within the framework of VNQ allows us to evaluate their reach in terms of inclusion and integration.

How was the research carried out?

We began with a literature search to trace the history - which is still not well documented - of the reception and settlement of refugees and asylum-seekers in Quebec, and more particularly in Montreal. This research was complemented by interviews of key informants from the community reception and settlement sector. In parallel, we observed the meetings of different committees associated with the implementation of the VNQ project (steering committee, Action-Reflection Group for the Diversity of Welcoming Neighbourhoods). We also observed and participated in the meetings and activities of two local concertation committees supported by VNQ.

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What have we learned from the research?

The arrival of refugees in the 1970s spurred community and religious organizations to structure the reception of refugees and asylum-seekers in Quebec.
During the 1980s, the community sector developed its network and the TCRI took shape. Quebec's repatriation of jurisdiction over integration in 1991 led to a complete restructuring of integration programs: the funding model for community organizations was changed and services to refugees were reduced. The tension between the community sector and the provincial administration strengthened the mobilization and the concertation links of organizations belonging to the TCRI.
The response of the community settlement sector to the arrival of refugees (2015-2019) testified to the expertise it had acquired over the past few decades. The capacity for concerted action of the sector was put to work, particularly through the VNQ project. The project supports several local committees promoting intercultural rapprochement through the sharing of information, resources and advice and through assistance with structuring their network. Among these networks, those of Ville-Émard/Côte-St-Paul and of Mercier-Hochelaga-Maisonneuve are deployed in districts receiving recent and often precarious immigrants. These committees are composed of actors from different sectors and work at the local level. Their main functions are to inform and empower their members to allow them to contribute to the promotion of openness to diversity, intercultural rapprochement and the full participation of refugees and immigrants in their districts. The committees also aim to create links between their members so that their collaboration improves their interventions. The main challenges for the committees are the recurring lack of funding, demands related to coordination and keeping members mobilized, especially when an immigrant settlement agency is established in the district.

How can you use this research?

These analyses will make for a better understanding of the foundations of the organization of the Quebec system of reception and settlement. They show that the dynamics of governance at the national and provincial level have real impacts on the living conditions and the social inclusion of newcomers, especially those with a more precarious status.
The analyses also show the contribution of concerted action at the local and community level, which often fills the gaps in more institutionalized programs. The analyses can inspire local actors from other districts and encourage workers in different sectors to address the challenge of immigrant integration at the district level.

Who is leading this research?

This research is the second phase of a longitudinal study conducted since 2017 by Gabrielle Désilets, PhD and Anna Goudet, a doctoral student at INRS.
The second phase of the study is the result of collaboration between Anna Goudet, Catherine Paquette, a master's student at INRS and Alexandra Charette, a postdoctoral research fellow at Concordia University who produced this document.

Learn more

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