Syrian refugees face disparate experiences in private sponsorship programs

New research from the School of Urban and Regional Planning compares outcomes for Syrian refugees from private, government, and blended programs.

By Katie Willis on January 9, 2019

Experiences of Syrian refugees in privately sponsored programs range from integration to abandonment, according to a new study by University of Alberta scientists. Across programs, refugees face very similar challenges. With nearly half of refugees in private programs, this in-depth assessment of their resettlement experiences provides critical insight.

“The significance of this research is to correct the prevailing view in favour of privately sponsored programs,” explained Sandeep Agrawal, lead author and professor in the Department of Earth and Atmospheric Sciences. “The resettlement experience of refugees in this program varies considerably.”

The study organizes the resettlement experience of privately sponsored refugees during their first year in Canada into three categories of satisfaction: community support; minimum requirements; and abandonment.

“Those sponsored by well-resourced groups—such as church groups—received extensive support in every aspect of their settlement to the point that the care often far exceeded what the government-sponsored refugees received,” said Agrawal, director of UAlberta’s School of Urban and Regional Planning. And while others received the support that met the minimum legal requirements laid out by the government, some privately sponsored refugees were abandoned by their sponsors altogether. “These sponsors did not have the means and/or the time to adequately support their matched refugees,” added Agrawal.

The research also provides recommendations to ensure more positive and consistent experiences for refugees across programs. First, the researchers suggest that private sponsorship should also require settlement services, such as support finding employment and access to language classes, rather than leaving resources entirely up to private sponsors. “This will even out the disparity of settlement experiences among privately sponsored refugees,” said Agrawal. “This recommendation is important because almost half of Syrian refugees have come through private sponsorship and the numbers through private programs will most likely increase.”

The researchers also suggest that religious institutions be engaged to offer certain more culturally and religiously appropriate services.

“We should also consider the blended program as possibly a better way forward—with both government and private sponsors helping refugees, each for a given period of time,” said Agrawal. “This composite approach could offset the deficits inherent in each single approach.”


Source: Faculty of Science