



# CCPA-MB

## Social and Economic Trends

CANADIAN CENTRE FOR POLICY ALTERNATIVES - MANITOBA

**April 6, 2017**

### Refugee Claimants Require Temporary and Permanent Supports in Manitoba

**W**e in Manitoba find ourselves in need of a serious discussion about how to coordinate services, including lodging, for the refugee claimants who are continuing to cross the Canada-US border at Emerson, Manitoba. This involves puzzling out the place of supports and services in the broader refugee system as well as locating refugee claimants within this system.

For this, some context is required. In 'What does it take to house a Syrian refugee,' (CCPA MB publication January 2017) we argue that the temporary housing supports that had been afforded to the 'first wave' of Syrian arrivals in Winnipeg (during December 2015-March-2016) should be both rendered permanent and extended to all Government Assisted Refugees (GARs). While there was an impressive mobilization of supports at the federal and provincial levels during the 'Syrian refugee crisis' -- including, crucially, Rent Supplements -- such supports were temporary and not extended to other GARs.

The reasoning for extending and regularizing these supports in the case of GARs is simple. Adequate and decent housing is the first step to ensuring successful the successful resettlement of refugees after violent displacement. The fates of such refugees -- which, it must be stressed, are people who cross international borders seeking refuge from violent conflict and displacement due to circumstances not of their doing, nor choosing -- should not be subject to the whims of elections cycles.

Referred to Canada by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, GARs are provided with income support for up to a year at the social assistance level that corresponds to that of local (i.e., provincial) rates. This includes a monthly shelter allowance, which corresponds to provincial shelter allowances, and a basic allowance, which is determined by family size and age, corresponds to provincial

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Employment and Income Assistance (EIA) rates, and includes a monthly amount for food and incidentals. Privately-Sponsored Refugees (PSRs), on the other hand, are to have their basic needs met by their sponsors for up to a year, or until they are self-sufficient, whichever comes first.

As we and others have argued elsewhere, the systems for GARs and PSRs are not perfect. But, at least there are systems in place meant to provide for their basic needs. Refugee Claimants are neither GARs, nor PSRs, however. In other words, they are neither government sponsored, nor privately sponsored. Generally, refugee claimants make their claim at ports of entry. However, Manitoba has seen an increase in refugee claimants risking dangerous conditions to cross the Canada-US border because they are unable to make a refugee claim at a port of entry – hence, they cross the border irregularly. This is largely due to the 2004 US-Canada Safe Third Country Agreement, which requires claimants to make their claims in the first ‘safe’ country they enter. For those with outstanding refugee claims in the US, an unfair hearing – which is increasingly conceivable -- can result in deportation from the US.

Therefore, contrary to the popular claims that refugee claimants are ‘queue jumping’, they are partaking in a process that has clear parameters as outlined in Canada’s refugee system. That they are doing so through irregular border crossings is the result of two factors: the aforementioned 2004 US-Canada Safe

Country Agreement and the climate of uncertainty facing refugees and refugee claimants in the United States during Donald Trump’s presidency.

And while there has been an increase in the amount of refugee claims being made in Manitoba compared to recent years (reports from the community have over 250 such claims being made in Manitoba in 2017 thus far), these numbers should be put into perspective. Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada reports that Canada received 44,640 refugee claimants in 2001. The lowest number received since then was 10,372 (in 2013). In 2016, there were 23,894 (see <http://www.cic.gc.ca/ftp/pdf/Asylum-asile-eng.pdf>).

In short, rather than unprecedented ‘floods’ of refugee claimants into Canada, we are starting to see numbers approach previous annual amounts after they had decreased due to more stringent guidelines being put into place by the federal government. Moreover, these numbers are occurring at a time in which there are more displaced people than at any point in history – 65.3 million by the end of 2015— including after World War 2 (<http://www.cnn.com/2016/06/20/world/unhcr-displaced-peoples-report/>).

So how is Winnipeg’s refugee serving community organizing to provide services for refugee claimants, and what more needs to be done? Before we can answer that question, some more context is important. Beginning

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with the Canada-Manitoba Immigration Agreement (2003), the Province of Manitoba provided funding for settlement services for all newcomers. The province was flexible in its funding and this included refugee claimants, who, while small in numbers, could access supports similar to other newcomers. For example, during the period, Welcome Place, the housing arm of Manitoba Interfaith Immigration Council, had a building with 6-7 units, which refugee claimants could access as temporary housing.

Around 2012, the Federal government repatriated all funding for settlement services to the federal level and employed more stringent criteria to determine who was eligible, and who was not, for settlement supports, including housing supports. Refugee Claimants, who are not previously selected by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, generally have been excluded from receiving federally-funded settlement services since this time, in spite of the fact that many go on to have their claims decided favourably, leading to permanent resident status. Despite this reality, refugee claimants remain in somewhat of a bureaucratic blackhole. In other words, while there are no durable existing mechanisms in place to ensure that refugee claimants receive housing in Manitoba, there is most certainly a need.

As Karen Pauls reports (<http://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/manitoba/asylum-seekers-benefits-1.4023251>),

Manitoba Interfaith Immigration Council, the Salvation Army and Red Cross have offered up temporary accommodation for refugee claimants. Many stay with family, friends, or community members. The Salvation Army has provided temporary accommodations for up to 85 (as of March 23rd, 2017) refugee claimants and are maxed out.

On February 23rd, the government of Manitoba committed additional funding to Welcome Place to pick up refugee claimants from Emerson, provide paralegal supports, and offer more temporary accommodations (<http://globalnews.ca/news/3267097/manitoba-premier-to-speak-refugee-supports-thursday/>). Most of the available beds have been occupied.

Successful claimants are able to apply for social assistance. However, the time between the interview in which their eligibility is determined and when they are able to access social assistance -- normally about 20 days -- is the most crucial period in terms of financial support. There is a need to bridge the gap between arrival and, at a minimum, the point at which successful refugee claimants receive protected person status and access social supports, and, at a maximum, they are capable of fully integrating into society. If we can reasonably expect continued refugee claims in Manitoba, we need to make both temporary and permanent housing options available. New Journey Housing, for example, is already assisting refugee claimants to find long term housing solutions.

And while it is important to note that like other categories of refugees, of the refugee claimants whose claims are accepted, the vast majority will go on to be self-sufficient, find jobs, and provide for their housing within Winnipeg's housing market. But many will require assistance. With this in mind, we also recommend that refugee claimants be regarded as homeless, as such a designation would expedite their applications to social housing. In short, while many refugee claims are denied, it is short sighted to treat refugee claimants as short term 'problems.' Indeed, many will become Manitobans and Canadians in due time. Given this, it is our collective responsibility to think of long term solutions across the entire spectrum of housing and settlement needs.

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