

Private Sponsorship VS. Government Assistance

A Summary of some findings of Employment and Immigration Canada's Evaluation
of the Indochinese Refugee Movement, 1979-80

In 1979-80 Canadians privately sponsored 35,899 Indochinese refugees to Canada. Another 25,978 came to Canada with government assistance. How have those refugees fared? How effective was private sponsorship compared to the traditional mode of government resettlement assistance? What is the future role of private sponsorship?

Employment and Immigration Canada recently released the first three (of four) studies* evaluating the 1979-80 Indochinese refugee movement. The release of the studies coincides with a dramatic decline in private sponsorships. Concerns about the inequities inherent in the dichotomy between private sponsorship and government assistance have been voiced. Further, the need to find the most efficient and effective modes of refugee resettlement in light of economic constraints has prompted calls for a new partnership between the government and private sectors for the sponsorship of refugees. The Inter-Church Committee for Refugees recently convened a study session in Kingston to work out some basic principles for a new sponsorship model which probably would combine government funds with private efforts. Employment and Immigration Canada's studies offer basic data from which to develop such new models.

*The four studies are:

- (i) a review, based on a survey by mail, of the experiences and opinions of Canadians who privately sponsored Indochinese refugees, prepared by the Program Evaluation Branch of Employment and Immigration Canada;
- (ii) an in-depth assessment of the Indochinese refugee group sponsorship program, based on intensive interviews with selected church leaders, representatives of voluntary agencies, and private sponsors of refugees, prepared by DPA Consulting Inc. in association with Mr. Maxwell Brem;
- (iii) a study of the impact of the Indochinese movement on Canada Immigration Centres (CIC) and Canada Employment Centres (CEC) based on interviews with staff,

prepared by the Program Evaluation Branch of Employment and Immigration Canada; and

(iv) a longitudinal study of the socio-economic adaptation of Indochinese refugees admitted to Canada during 1979 and 1980, being prepared by a group of sociologists.

Private sponsorship brings strong personal support, knowledge of the community and networks of Canadian friends and acquaintances to refugee resettlement. This human element obviously offers emotional advantages. It also has positive material consequences, evident in the critical area of employment.

Employment

Overall, 84.9% of the working age population of Indochinese refugees were participating in the Canadian labour market by the time they had been in Canada 18 months. A very high proportion of Indochinese refugee women were working: 82.4%, compared to only 50.9% of all Canadian women. This, the report suggests, reflects the need to have two incomes to make ends meet. (Seventy-seven per cent of the refugees had an annual income of less than \$10,000, while only 29.3% of Canadian families had an income of less than \$11,000 in 1980.) There is another important difference between Indochinese refugee and overall Canadian labour force participation. Indochinese refugees 45 years old and over had a very high unemployment rate of 18.8%, compared to an unemployment rate for that same age group in Canada as a whole of only 5.1%. In contrast, Indochinese refugees between 15 and 24 had an unemployment rate of only 9.5% compared to an overall Canadian rate for that group of 15.3%. The most commonly cited reason for unemployment was lack of English or French.

The unemployment rates of government-assisted and privately sponsored refugees were about the same, with the exception of some regional variations. (In Quebec, which resettled a higher proportion of government-assisted refugees to privately sponsored refugees than other provinces, government-assisted refugees had a higher unemployment rate than

those who were privately sponsored. The reverse was true in British Columbia and the Yukon.) But the unemployment rates were the same for the two groups in spite of the fact that overall, government-assisted refugees were found to be more likely to have some knowledge of English or French than privately sponsored refugees. Therefore, the report concludes, private sponsorship *per se* has been a positive force in helping refugees find jobs.

Forty-five per cent of privately sponsored refugees had found jobs they had at the time of the survey through their sponsors. Both privately sponsored and government-assisted refugees had been expected to use Canada Employment Centres (CEC's) to find jobs. But many sponsors thought these services "needed improvement". And government-assisted refugees have constituted as much as 90% of the clientele of voluntary refugee aid agencies that provide direct services such as finding jobs or accommodation.* Also, privately sponsored refugees were somewhat more likely to be working in occupations similar to their former ones, which may reflect the time sponsors were able to take to acquaint themselves with the refugees' backgrounds and, again, their ability to use personal contacts to help the refugees find suitable jobs. Only 13.7% of government-assisted refugees and 17.7% of privately sponsored refugees were working in the same occupations they had had in Indochina, after 18 months in Canada. Considering that all but 6.6% of the refugees previously held medium or high-skilled occupations, these statistics indicate that previous training is grossly underutilized.

Finally, privately sponsored refugees also found their first jobs in Canada four weeks earlier than government-sponsored

*It is worth noting that CEC staff felt that private agencies often found inappropriate jobs for the refugees, such as seasonal jobs. Also, most agencies felt that privately sponsored refugees who had been here longer than one year (the length of the formal sponsorship commitment) were increasingly using their services.

refugees did. However, the price of this early start to employment was an early stop to language training. The mean duration of the language training of privately sponsored refugees was 2.7 weeks less than for government-assisted refugees.

Language Training

Government-assisted refugees received living allowances while attending language classes, but privately sponsored refugees did not; they were generally supported by their sponsors. The trade-off between early employment and immediate language training was one of the most contentious issues within sponsorship groups and also among government settlement officers. The study found that, overall, government officials tended to give priority to language training, whereas sponsors tended to give priority to employment. Many sponsors interviewed mentioned that the refugees themselves gave priority to employment and economic independence.

Furthermore, although language training itself was paid for by the government for both government-assisted and privately sponsored refugees, the study encountered allegations that government-assisted refugees were given priority for seats in language classes, on top of the fact that there was as much as a three to four month wait for seats.

Other Differences

Privately sponsored refugees had the assistance of their sponsors in finding jobs. Government-assisted refugees had government support while they studied English or French. These conclusions point to a larger problem of inequitable treatment of refugees. Levels of material support given to privately sponsored refugees varied according to sponsors; those given to government-assisted refugees varied according to local CEC's interpretations of guidelines. Moreover, some CEC officers noted that privately sponsored refugees sometimes expressed resentment at receiving less than

government-assisted refugees; for instance, they were often given hand-me-down clothes instead of money for new items. Some refugees were troubled by feeling indebted to a private benefactor, some CEC officers noted, and preferred receiving monies on the basis of government entitlement.

Refugees' material dependence on sponsors may pose problems for the emotional relationship between refugees and sponsors, one of the studies (based on in-depth interviews with sponsors) suggested. On the sponsors' part, it may reinforce a paternalistic and possessive attitude. On the refugees' part, it may induce dependency, suspicion, or even dishonesty. If all refugees were entitled to certain basic funds from the government, the study suggests, these emotional dangers might be less significant; and the problem of inequity would be ameliorated.

Cost

The average cost of settling a privately sponsored refugee was \$753 less than for a government-assisted refugee, the study found. Private sponsors spent an average of \$1,347 per refugee. The government spent an average of \$2,100 on basic living allowances and language training allowances for each government-assisted refugee.

The study suggests that the apparent savings of \$753 is somewhat misleading since the questionnaire on which the statistic is based asked sponsors not to include material contributions such as donations of clothing and furniture in their summaries of their expenditures. However, it is even more misleading for the report to discount these savings in this way. Donations of used items do not represent expenditures in the same way cash disbursements do, and the distinction is extremely important to finding ways to make refugee settlement cheaper.

Willingness to Sponsor Again

The majority of sponsors of Indochinese refugees would sponsor again if they felt there were a need and if they felt sure that

there would be sufficient money and help to see the sponsorship through, the study found.

Fifty-nine per cent of sponsors surveyed indicated that they would be prepared to sponsor again; 28% indicated they might be; and 13% indicated they would not. Some of these sponsors cited specific conditions that would have to be met for them to be willing to sponsor again. Their most important concern involved need, with sponsors saying such things as,

"I would sponsor again if a real 'need' can be demonstrated. I am not totally convinced that all the Indochinese were 'refugees' in the true sense"; and "I would sponsor again if I were satisfied that, given world conditions, it is those refugees who are most in need of our help who are being admitted to Canada."

Their second most important concerns involved means: sponsors wanted to be sure that there would be more government and agency support services available; that there would be an equitable sharing of workload; and that there would be adequate funds for the sponsorship.

In this connection it is interesting to note that a willingness to sponsor again was more likely to be expressed by sponsors associated with a church as a parent organization. Some churches and other national organizations had signed umbrella agreements with the federal government to facilitate sponsorship by their constituent groups. These umbrella agreements simplified the bureaucratic procedures of sponsorship and assured sponsors of back-up assistance in case of an emergency. These assurances had often made the difference between choosing whether or not to sponsor the first time around.

Finally, government leadership was thought to be critical in motivating sponsors. Church leaders felt this was so, and sponsors and agencies attributed the present decline in sponsorship, not to a decline in public interest or willingness to sponsor, but to a lack of continuing government interest and leadership.

Miscounting Refugees

a Case Study of Lebanon

by Howard Adelman

"Refugee" is an equivocal term. It is used in many different senses. It describes people whose homes are destroyed by earthquakes; people who are driven from their homes during wars; people who

flee persecution in their countries and become "Convention refugees". By failing to distinguish the various different senses of "refugee", gross differences in numbers of refugees can be reported.

Given the complexity of the situation in Lebanon in particular and in the Middle East in general, it is not surprising that such differences characterized the re-

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