

Title: From 'One Nation, One People' to 'Operation Swaagatem': Bhutanese Refugees in Coquitlam, BC

Authors: Kathy Sherrell, ISSo/BC, Chris Friesen, ISSo/BC, Jennifer Hyndman, York University, Centre for Refugee Studies and Subrath Shrestha, ISSo/BC

Contact: kathy.sherrell@issbc.org chris.friesen@issbc.org jhyndman@yorku.ca, subrath.shrestha@issbc.org

WP Number: 11-11

Research Question:

What elements are needed to prepare a city for a new refugee population from protracted situations? What can we learn from arrivals in year one that can be incorporated into subsequent year groups, in particular the piloting of a refugee youth pre-departure orientation program? How well are refugees from protracted situations like those in Nepal integrating into Canadian society?

Importance:

Since IRPA, CIC has implemented several new directions in the selection of resettled refugees from abroad (Presse and Thompson 2007). The increased use of group processing, the resettlement of refugees from protracted refugee camp situations, an increase in special need cases and the selection of refugees with no pre-existing presence in Canada (e.g. Achenese, Rohigayas) are all current trends (Yu et al. 2007). As such, the research and toolkit documenting the planning process and initial settlement experiences will be helpful by other RAP service providers across Canada and by Canadian policymakers. Researching initial settlement experiences will greatly help in future program/policy design for subsequent year arrivals in Canada. Lastly, the impact on local refugee destining practices has significant implications for local neighbourhoods, schools, and health care providers. In addition, the project will help define factors and elements essential to building a welcoming and inclusive host community.

Research Findings:

Early consideration of the settlement outcomes of Bhutanese GARs in Coquitlam offer both positive indicators and cause for concern. Although dependence on government transfers (e.g., RAP, social assistance) remains widespread, and families are experiencing housing stress, the relatively small household sizes mean crowding is less severe than other refugee groups in Metro Vancouver. Although unemployment is high, early attachments to the labour market through paid or volunteer work are promising. While there is a long way to go before success can be claimed, the lower affordability challenges and higher employment being experienced are in stark contrast to earlier groups. Another positive development is the extent to which Bhutanese newcomers are utilizing formal services and programs. The planning process and partnerships established in the months preceding the GARs' arrival have facilitated increased flexibility in responding to the new problems and challenges that arise for the Bhutanese.

Implications:

We outline twenty specific policy recommendations to facilitate better pre-arrival planning and settlement outcomes. Key among these is the need for sufficient notice to enable RAP contracted agencies to engage in a pre-arrival planning process; enhanced early intervention support services; and a specialized pre-departure Canadian Orientation Abroad program for refugee youth and young adults.