

Workshop Summary

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Workshop Title:

Critical Reflections on Canada's Host Program and on an Alternative Program in Sweden as Components in the Integration of Immigrants and Refugees

Brief Description:

Canada is one of the few immigrant receiving countries that provides a unique linking service between newcomers and Canadian nationals in the form of a "host program." Matched with the newcomers, adult or youth, on a number of important background factors, the Canadian hosts are expected to develop an interest in the well being of newcomers and to orient them to the new country for a period of one year. This session is designed to provide critical reflections on the program from (a) the perspective of new research evidence on the program; (b) the perspective of the Canadian hosts; (c) the perspective of the newcomers; (d) the perspective of policy makers/analysts; and (e) the perspective of service providers. In addition, although there are no identical host programs in Europe or elsewhere, the workshop will, for comparative purposes, include a presentation on an alternative integration program(s) for newcomers offered in Sweden. The overall goal of the workshop is to identify strengths and weaknesses of the Canadian and Swedish programs and to make policy recommendations for strengthening them further.

Participants:

Moderator: Baha Abu-Laban, Ph.D., Co-Director, PCERII and Professor Emeritus,
Sociology, University of Alberta

Policy Perspective: Valerie Lussier, Host Program, Citizenship and Immigration Canada

International Perspective: Elena Dingu-Kyrklund, PhD, Centre for Research in International Migration and Ethnic Relations, CEIFO Stockholm University

International Perspective: Kent Andersson, Deputy Mayor, City of Malmö, Sweden

Hosts' Perspective: Kelly McKean, Coordinator, PCERII and Board Member, Action for Healthy Communities, Edmonton

Newcomers's Perspective: Sabah Tahir, Changing Together...A Centre for Immigrant Women, Edmonton

NGO Perspective: Merek Jagielski, Metropolitan Immigrant Services Association, Halifax

NGO Perspective: Paulette Johnson, Catholic Social Services, Edmonton

NGO Perspective: Rakesh Bhardwaj, CultureLink, Toronto

Research Perspective: Paul Anisef, Ph.D., Sociology, York University/CERIS and Morgan Poteet, Graduate Student, York University/CERIS

Discussant: Kenise Murphy Kilbride, Ph.D., Ryerson University/CERIS

Summary:

1) The presentation given by Valerie Lussier, (Citizenship and Immigration Canada) served as the lynchpin for all the presentations given in the workshop. It reported that the Host Program was created in 1985 to assist refugees. By 1991, the Host Initiative was established as a fully funded program and expanded to other immigrant categories. The goals of the Host Program are situated within the principles of Canada's settlement programs which include the following:

- the integration of immigrants as a two-way process that involves commitment on the part of newcomers to adapt to life in Canada as well as the commitment on the part of Canadians to adapt to new people and cultures;
- the ability of newcomers to communicate in one of Canada's official languages is key to their integration;
- newcomers' contribution to the economic and social fabric of Canada is valued;
- it is important to share with newcomers the principles, traditions and values inherent in Canadian society, such as freedom, equality and participatory democracy;
- settlement and integration services across the country should be flexible, responsive and reasonably comparable and include a sound accountability framework.

The Host Program is unique in that it is the only volunteer-based settlement program. Volunteers are recruited and trained by the service providing organizations to act as hosts. Once trained, they spend time with newcomers with whom they are matched, to help them adjust to their lives in their new community. In this way, the principles of

Canada's settlement programs (listed above) are addressed. The Canadian volunteers also benefit through participation in the program which often results in friendships with newcomers that last for years after the formal association ends. The community at large also benefits in that this community-based, volunteer supported program helps build a stronger country, connecting people with their communities.

Currently, approximately 3% of funding for basic settlement services is allocated to the Host Program. An evaluation of the Host Program was conducted in 2004 that involved interviews or surveys of Citizenship and Immigration Canada representatives, service provider representatives, stakeholders, Host clients and Host volunteers. The evaluation found that that Host is considered a highly relevant program that meets the needs and expectations of newcomers to a significant degree. It was also reported that Host has many positive impacts on volunteers. The program's flexibility was seen as a key strength. It allowed for different Host delivery models that could potentially address a range of client needs.

The evaluation's recommendations included increased information-sharing among service providers with respect to volunteer training, information resources, and best practices. Other recommendations focused on issues related to expansion of the program.

Ms. Lussier also addressed the National Host Conference held in February 2005. The conference theme was "20 years of Host: Celebrating our successes, building our future." The conference resulted in several recommendations which can be grouped under five broad themes: 1) tools for service providing organizations (e.g. the creation of a network of Host providers and Host workers to facilitate the exchange of best practices); 2) purpose of the Host Program (e.g. more clearly define the purpose of the program so we can create a model that is clear enough to ensure accountability, while remaining flexible enough for service providers to reach ideal outcomes in the matter that is most effective for the clients in their local community); 3) program promotion; 4) funding issues (e.g. increased funding for the initiative); and 5) the need for expansion and preservation of the Host volunteer base.

The Department of Citizenship and Immigration also commissioned a research project on youth host models which CIC will use to develop National Guidelines for Host Youth Activities and provide ideas regarding delivery models that could be used to expand the Host Program to youth (see presentation by M. Poteet listed below).

Finally, Ms. Lussier discussed the Host Program in the context of the Government of Canada's action plan, "A Canada for All: Canada's Action Plan Against Racism," which involves a multi-year investment of \$56 million, included in the 2005 Federal Budget. The Host Program fits into this overall program in that it is recognized by both government and settlement sector groups to be, at its core, an anti-racism initiative.

2) Dr. Elena Dingu-Kyrklund's presentation dealt with the Swedish "Immigrant Integration from Scratch" program or "*Introduktionsprogrammet*" and other policies. This so-called "*Introduktionsprogrammet*," is the official Swedish Government program to assist government recognized asylum seekers to integrate into Swedish society. It is extremely difficult to be accepted as a Geneva Convention Definition refugee in Sweden. However, for those who receive this recognition, this program is designed to assist their smooth integration into Swedish society. Non-refugees are not offered the same kind of programs and services.

It is assumed that because non-refugees choose in advance to come to Sweden they will have access to more resources and be better prepared to “integrate” into the country. There is a program for non-refugees but it is structured differently from the program for Geneva Convention Definition refugees.

All newcomers are entitled to Swedish language courses (SFI – Swedish for Immigrants) free of charge. The next step for non-refugees is contact with the public employment offices, AF – *Arbetsförmedlingen*, where according to the rules, an employment officer, in cooperation with the person concerned, will set up a *handlingsplan*, or “plan of action”. This is a step-by-step program for the individual to follow that is intended to gradually lead to employment.

The plan is individual and should be based on the personal background, possibilities and intentions of the job-seeker. It may include anything from additional language instruction, various forms of introduction to the Swedish labour market, e.g. by special training or/and practice or trainee-like programs, or work activities in a company that could become a potential employer. Basic educational programs are offered for those whose level of education is very low and who are entitled to certain special measures to compensate what is considered a major handicap on the labour market. In practice this means possibilities to complete one’s education up to high school level, etc.

However, such an individual plan of action is not unique to immigrants, but a general demand that all job-seekers, including Swedes, have to subject themselves to, under the threat of otherwise losing their eventual unemployment benefits. One of the differences is that for immigrants it may take a longer time to qualify for any kind of benefits – while basic subsistence is always included in the introduction program for refugees.

The above describes how the above settlement programs should work in theory. However, there is a gap between what is expected in theory and what actually happens in practice.

3) The presentation by Mr. Kent Andersson, Deputy Mayor of the City of Malmö, Sweden, described a program run by the City of Malmö. Malmö is a city in which one quarter of the population was born outside of Sweden. Approximately 40% of all residents have at least one parent born outside of Sweden. Furthermore, 55% of children and youth under the age of 19 and residing in Malmö speak another language in addition to Swedish. It is within this context that the City of Malmö developed a program that matches immigrants and professors at the University of Malmö. The professors act as mentors on a volunteer basis to the immigrants who are from similar occupational backgrounds.

4) The presentations given by Ms. Kelly McKean and Ms. Sabah Tahir dealt with their first-person experiences as Canadian volunteer and refugee client respectively in the Host Program operated by Catholic Social Services in Edmonton. Both speakers gave positive feedback about the program based on their personal experiences. They gave evidence of the real positive outcomes resulting from the official goals of the program as elucidated in Valerie Lussier’s presentation.

5) Marek Jagielski’s presentation urged that the traditional Host Program model be expanded to encompass the concept of social capital. One of the goals of the Host

Program is provide support to facilitate integration and fuller participation of newcomers in all aspects of Canadian life. The concept of social capital refers to creating networks of social relations to provide access to needed support and resources that facilitate cooperation within and among groups. Jagielski argued there is an obvious relationship between the Host process and the development of social capital. This co-relationship makes it essential to examine potential new directions for the Host Program from within a social capital perspective since both are focused on enhancing the social and cultural capacities of individuals and groups that create quality social and cultural networks and promote civic participation.

Jagielski also made several recommendations for possible future research including: 1) should the Host Program focus exclusively on addressing immediate settlement needs to directly support delivery of the settlement services or should it be more evolving along the social capital continuum?; 2) what changes are needed to the existing Host program model to make it more effective in working on the development of the social capital?; and 3) how would the incorporation of the social capital stages make the Host Program more effective in fostering integration of newcomers?

6) The presentation by Paulette Johnson provided highlights and challenges encountered by Edmonton Catholic Social Services in delivering the Host Program. Between 1988 and 2005, the organization has recruited and trained over 2,000 volunteers and matched between 5,000 to 6,000 newcomers to Canada. Some of the organization's challenges have been addressing risk management requirements which include time required for volunteer screening, orientation, and monitoring which reduces the "pay off" for short term placements. Insurance coverage trends for social service agencies has also had a significant impact on the ability of Catholic Social Services to operate the Host Program. Rates are higher and there are fewer companies offering this type of coverage. Insurance companies require an increased level of documentation of services provided, including volunteer programs.

There are also program challenges in terms of volunteers. Current trends in volunteering indicate that the overall rate of volunteering is decreasing and volunteers want shorter term commitments. This has resulted in a high level of competition for volunteers among community and volunteer-based organizations. In addition, the profiles of newcomers to Canada are changing. At one end, some newcomers require a high level of support which can overwhelm volunteers. At the opposite end, other newcomers are highly skilled and focused on obtaining employment. Meeting the needs of two disparate groups presents challenges to volunteer recruitment, orientation, and training. Lastly, newcomer expectations of volunteers can be unrealistic.

Some possible future research directions are: is it possible to identify attributes of success for both the volunteer and newcomer? Are there prerequisites to participation in the Host Program such as "newcomer readiness?" What the long term outcomes for individuals and for Canadian society?

7) The presentation by Rakesh Bhardwaj described the Host Program Model as delivered by Culturelink. Cultureline initiated services in the Metro Toronto area in 1988 with the Host Program. Later the organization's mandate expanded to serve newcomer communities with more programs. The Host initiative is CultureLink's flagship program.

It is a one-on-one befriending program, which facilitates friendships between individuals, newcomers and volunteers from the host community. People are matched for 4 - 6 months on the basis of gender, age, and residential location. The new friends are expected to maintain weekly contact of at least 2 hours for conversation and social interaction. The program's eligibility criteria include the following: volunteers must have resided a minimum of 3 years in Toronto; must be fluent in English; and must be 19 years or older. In order to be eligible for the program newcomers must possess valid immigration papers or a permanent resident and must have resided less than three years in Toronto.

8) The presentation given by Mr. Morgan Poteet reported on a research project led by Dr. Paul Anisef (York University) which was commissioned for the Host Program at Citizenship and Immigration Canada (CIC). The Host Program is designed to assist newcomers with integration into Canadian life. Its primary method is to match newcomers with host volunteers who can help familiarize newcomers and ease their transition to life in Canada. Under federal-provincial agreements, British Columbia, Manitoba and Quebec assume responsibility for designing, administering and delivering settlement services offered to newcomers in these provinces (e.g. host-like services), while the Host Program operates in the remaining provinces. This study drew upon both Host and Host-like programs and had as its primary objective, the development of three models of service delivery for youth within Host and Host-like programs. A literature review and a survey of executive directors in service provider organizations by graduate students were employed to generate the models. The models generated were based on the centrality of schooling in young people's lives; a preventative model geared to newcomer youth identified as potentially at-risk; and models that employ innovative strategies in order to provide a 'second chance' to newcomer youth who have experienced multiple at-risk factors.

The research team concluded with the recommendation that a separate, national youth Host Program is required. Moreover, this type of program has the potential to address the needs of a group that had been hitherto overlooked in terms of federal government settlement programming.

Policy Implications:

Several presentations indicate that host program has tapped into Canadian volunteers' good will to help newcomers to integrate better into Canadian society. The Swedish programs discussed in the workshop are very interesting and could be emulated in Canada, mainly because they, too, seek to help immigrants and asylum seekers to integrate in Swedish society. But they are basically different from Canada's host program. The following are possible policy implications of the presentations for Canada's host program.

1. Creating a network of service providers to exchange experiences and identify best practices in the implementation of the host program.

2. Creating smaller, city-based networks of immigrants and refugees involved in the host program to exchange experiences and discuss options for a more successful integration.
3. Developing appropriate measures/instruments to identify immigrants and refugees who are most in need of the services and benefits of the host program.
4. Developing appropriate measures/instruments to identify immigrant and refugee youth who may be at risk (e.g., dropping out of school, engaging in anti-social behaviour, etc.) and recruiting volunteers who may serve as role models for these youth while helping them adapt better to the new environment.
5. Developing appropriate programs for training volunteers and establishing networks of volunteers to exchange experiences and make recommendations to service providers about how to improve on the existing practices of the host program.
6. Developing strategies and non-monetary incentives to expand the pool of volunteers on which to draw for the host program.
7. Expanding the goals of the traditional host program to enhance the social capital of immigrants and refugees.