

Study suggests tweaks to private sponsorship program for Syrian refugees

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Private sponsorship programs for Syrian refugees should require settlement services, such as support finding employment and access to language classes, rather than leaving resources entirely up to private

sponsors, according to a University of Alberta study.

"This will even out the disparity of settlement experiences among privately sponsored refugees," said U of A urban planner Sandeep Agrawal, who said his research revealed the experiences of refugees resettling in Alberta in privately sponsored programs varied widely.

"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."

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.

"They did not have the means or the time to adequately support their matched refugees," added Agrawal, who is also director of the U of A's School of Urban and Regional Planning.

Agrawal interviewed refugees, private sponsors, volunteers and agency representatives about the refugees' experiences during their first year of resettlement in the province.

While the three Canadian sponsorship programs—government, private and blended—were successful in bringing in Syrian refugees, he found that, contrary to some previous studies, refugees resettling into the country through the private sponsorship program faced similar challenges in finding jobs and learning a new language as those in the other two programs.

He said adding the requirement of [settlement](#) services is important because almost half of Syrian refugees have come through private

sponsorship and the numbers through private programs will most likely increase.

Agrawal also suggested that religious institutions be engaged to offer more culturally and religiously appropriate services, to ensure more consistent [experiences](#) for refugees across programs.

"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."

The study, "Canadian Refugee Sponsorship Programs: Experience of Syrian Refugees in Alberta, Canada," was published in the *Journal of International Migration and Integration*.

More information: Sandeep Kumar Agrawal. Canadian Refugee Sponsorship Programs: Experience of Syrian Refugees in Alberta, Canada, *Journal of International Migration and Integration* (2018). [DOI: 10.1007/s12134-018-0640-7](https://doi.org/10.1007/s12134-018-0640-7)

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