

Starting out in smaller communities may be better for refugees in short term

August 23 2019, by Katie Willis



Attendees meet at an open house to recruit volunteer support for refugees in Lethbridge. New U of A research shows Syrian refugees settling in the southern Alberta city were more satisfied with support services and the community than new arrivals in the larger city of Edmonton. Credit: Intellectual Reserve

Syrian refugees are more satisfied with settlement services and their community when they spend their first year of settlement in a smaller city, according to a new University of Alberta study.

Researchers compared experiences of refugees from Syria who were settled in Edmonton, a mid-sized city with a population of about one million, to those in Lethbridge, a [city](#) in southern Alberta with a population of about 100,000.

Results suggest smaller communities were more creative, nimble and efficient in settling newcomers in their first year with Syrian refugees in Lethbridge reporting higher satisfaction with both the community at large and the specific aid services offered.

"It seems that smaller urban centers such as Lethbridge can better serve refugees in the short term," explained Sandeep Agrawal, lead author of the study and director of the U of A's School of Urban and Regional Planning. "Their [small size](#) helps agencies, officials and individuals to come together much more quickly, and they can also be creative in their [service](#) delivery."

The effect, however, may not extend past the first few years of settlement. The study also suggests larger cities such as Edmonton may have more success in settling newcomers in the long term, with better access to complementary non-government supports, more diverse job prospects and a larger volunteer base.

While further research is required to determine the long-term success of refugees in different cities, Agrawal also calls for a more robust approach to assessing the number of refugees settled in different municipalities across Canada.

"Our [government agencies](#) would be well served to conduct critical analyses before determining the number of refugees destined for various urban centers across the country," he said.

Agrawal noted the ratio of newcomer numbers to the capacity of service

infrastructure in a community matters, "because it largely determines the efficacy of settlement services—regardless of the size of the urban center."

The study, "Does Community Size Matter in the Settlement Process? The Experience of Syrian Refugees in Lethbridge in Alberta, Canada," is under review for publication in the *Journal of International Migration and Integration*.

Provided by University of Alberta

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