

Abu-Laban, B., Derwing, T. M., Mulder, M. & Northcott, H. (2001). *Lessons Learned: An Evaluation of Northern Alberta's Experience with Kosovar Refugees (3 volumes)*. Edmonton, AB: The Prairie Centre of Excellence for Research on Immigration and Integration.

### 3 CANADA'S RESPONSE TO THE KOSOVAR SITUATION: AN ANALYSIS OF OPERATION PARASOL<sup>1</sup>

#### **Introduction**

##### *Key Stakeholders and the Nature of Their Involvement*

The lead department for Operation Parasol was CIC; they coordinated the whole project and were responsible for the processing of the documentation that allowed Kosovars to enter the country. NHQ undertook all the initial planning and determined which other government departments and agencies should be involved. CIC staff in the regions and at the local level were also heavily involved in coordination, both at the sustainment sites and in the settlement destination communities. DND, already in the Balkans at the time of the evacuation, was responsible for providing the sustainment sites, preparing the bases to receive the refugees, and ensuring that the physical operation of the sites went smoothly. Health Canada was responsible for initial screening in Macedonia to determine whether refugees were fit to fly; they organized more intensive medical examinations on arrival to Canada; and they provided additional medical assessments and met health care needs at the sustainment sites, along with the military. The Director General of the Canadian Red Cross offered the services of that organization to coordinate all the volunteers at the bases, while local and provincial agencies were called upon for their specific areas of expertise; for example, the Multicultural Association of Fredericton was responsible for education, including settlement issues and LINC classes.

##### Private Sponsors

CIC contacted the Canadian Council for Refugees (CCR) to discuss promotion strategies for the private sponsorship program, in order to get more private sponsors involved. A 1-800 number was set up to facilitate communications, and the Refugee Branch of CIC did a lot of the work in coordinating the volunteers. The Minister made an appeal to Canadian families to open their hearts and serve as sponsors; before long, there were more would-be sponsors than there were refugees. An official in the Resettlement Division indicated that the appeal itself "was not sufficiently clear ... we didn't say, and it's very hard to say, 'Don't offer them your homes'." Canadians were anxious to offer their own basements, guest rooms, and summer cottages to the refugees, and did not understand the need to foster independence by providing the Kosovars with their own housing. Some of the SAHs were also unhappy with the appeal because it was decided that refugees would be sent to "communities where services were available to support their settlement integration—language training, interpreter services, and so on." In the past, private sponsorship has not been limited to large communities; refugees went to wherever there were sponsors available.

There was some confusion regarding the use of the term *sponsor* versus *host*. An official from the Integration Branch at CIC stated that "there was confusion and the confusion was over a name. The sponsors of the Kosovar refugees who were not responsible in any way for monetary support could and probably in hindsight should have been called hosts. They were not doing what sponsors normally do .... This led to some misunderstanding of responsibilities and rather than rely on existing host networks and

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SPO coordinators, we unintentionally created a different type of sponsor. In the future, when we are talking about hosts, we should use the word *host*. Hosts spend time with newcomers, help them to integrate into the community.” In the case of the Kosovar refugees, CIC called for private sponsors, and in addition to coordinating calls from all over the country at NHQ, the regional and local CIC offices were charged with finding sponsors.

### *Family Reunification Program*

The Refugee Branch of CIC started a family reunification program to bring Kosovars to join relatives in Canada who were citizens, permanent residents or landed immigrants. A phone hot-line and a fax line were set up to facilitate contact between families. Procedures were established for a Relative Identification Form (RIF). If a family in Canada knew of the location of family members in the Balkans, the information was entered into a database. The information then went to security for a check, to CIC and UNHCR staff on the ground in Macedonia and Albania, and to the Red Cross. An extended definition of ‘family’ was employed: spouses, children, parents, grandparents, siblings, aunts, uncles, and fiancés were all included. Although most of the contacts were initiated by family in Canada, there were some instances of family members in Macedonia and Albania who were able to trace their Canadian relatives and submit a RIF to join them. This extended program of family reunification was available until July 9, 1999. After that date, only cases that were already in process were considered. The overriding consideration from the start was to try to keep families together. One measure of the effectiveness of this policy is the fact that very few of the family reunification cases repatriated.

Once KOF and KOS refugees entered Canada, they too could bring family members over; however, family reunification in their cases was limited to spouses and dependants. They had until September 9, 1999, to identify immediate relatives. The visa officers were instructed to continue to work on open files until January 9, 2000. There was considerable consternation amongst the Kosovars, who did not understand why the criteria for family had changed. It seemed unfair to them that some people had been able to bring in siblings, aunts, and uncles while others could not. The rationale was not explained clearly enough for them to see that the decision had been made in a principled manner.

## **Macedonia**

### *Red Cross*

The Red Cross was in charge of personal services, including recreation, religious needs, family tracing on the Internet, and attention to “some of the more vulnerable people in the camp.” They were also responsible for coordinating the other volunteers on the base. A Red Cross staff member described the delineation of tasks as follows, “We looked after the people. The military looked after the building. Immigration looked after the process of putting people through into homes. We looked after their other needs.” The Red Cross made a decision to treat the Kosovar refugees as guests: “As a matter of fact we consciously chose [to refer to the Kosovars as guests] as a management team of

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Red Cross people at the very beginning before people actually arrived. We said we are to refer to these people as the *visitors* or the *guests*. That is what we presented to our volunteers and we used that term, and other people who had responsibilities there used that term also.”

#### *Salvation Army*

Seventy tonnes of clothing had been donated to CFB Gagetown for Operation Parasol. Volunteers at the base sorted and packaged the clothing. The Salvation Army arranged for the clothing depot at the base and set it up in a way that made it accessible to the Kosovars. Initially they had a tent, but later on they were moved to a small building. Because there was limited space in the building, and because the cashless thrift store was very popular with the refugees, a system had to be set up to control access. Shoppers were given colour-coded stickers, and, based on the colour of their sticker, people could line up on designated days to enter the store. After 20 minutes, they would have to exit, but they were free to line up and re-enter for another 20 minutes on that day as often as they liked. Because there was not much to do on the base, many of the Kosovars viewed the clothing depot as a diversion; they also seemed to find comfort in accumulating things. A Salvation Army official stated: “When people have been through trauma, they often put things around them—stuff that provides security. They [Kosovars] were very much putting stuff around them ... it didn't even matter if it fit them or not.” Although the Salvation Army was meeting a clear need, they had some concerns about the effects of having so many free things available to the Kosovars. “I was thinking, ‘Man, these guys are going to be in for hard times once they have to go out on a set income, and you're not supposed to help them. They are not going to be able to get all this stuff’.”

There were some tensions among the refugees over who was allowed to come to the store: “Some people wanted to take authority over the others about who could come or not.” The Salvation Army did not always have access to interpreters on the base, so they relied on young Kosovars who spoke good English to help them in the store. That also caused some problems; on occasion, “some of the boys who were helping us were manipulating others and not allowing some [refugees] in.” It was difficult when people would line up when it was not their designated day. “We were trying to be fair to everybody and to give everybody equal opportunity. So when the young people were at the door, telling some of the older Kosovars that it was not their turn ... some did take exception because it was a younger person speaking to an elder.”

#### *Islamic Association of Fredericton*

Members of the Islamic Association served as volunteers on the base, under the auspices of the Red Cross; they knew that most of the Kosovars were Muslims, so they offered their expertise. “We helped in holding prayers regularly—the five-time prayers in the mosque. We helped in the kitchen ... we talked to them, serving food to older people, taking care of anything they needed.” The Association also provided the military with a list of foods that should not be served to Muslims, and they checked the weekly menus to ensure that inappropriate foods were not included.

#### *Family and Community Services*

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Family and Community Services social workers were brought to the sustainment site to provide assistance to any refugees who were in distress. They were known on the base as family support workers (FSW). One of the first things they did was to ensure that they had access to two excellent interpreters and that these individuals were assigned to the family support team on a regular basis. Other workers on the base (hospital personnel, the military, and Red Cross) were supposed to refer any people who they observed as having difficulties. However, as a representative from the department reports: "We received very few referrals from the Red Cross." In fact, according to the final report of the FSW, out of 1100 references in 10 weeks, 6 came from Red Cross and 2 of those were for children who had fallen out of bed. "There was tremendous frustration among those [volunteers] who were being brought in by the Red Cross because they didn't know what their jobs were, what their roles were and what they were supposed to do. A lot of them thought they were to be doing social work and some thought they were making friends .... I think there was some resentment towards the social work group who were there in a professional capacity." According to the FSWs' final report, they obtained referrals from CIC, the Multicultural Association, the medical staff, military, interpreters, and eventually, some refugees sought them out on their own. One of their main accomplishments was developing a team approach with two respected interpreters early on. This, combined with their visibility, walking around the camp, enabled them to be accepted by the refugees, and to be strong advocates for them. Their success rate with the problems brought to them by the refugees was very high. The approach taken was unstructured, non-directive, flexible, and this allowed the team to respond to crises as they arose.

### *Interpreters*

Finding Albanian-speaking interpreters was a challenge because Canada does not have a large Albanian community. People were recruited from across the country to serve at the sustainment sites; many of these individuals continued to interpret for Kosovars when they returned to their own cities. Although some of the people were superb interpreters, there were some serious problems with others. First, because some of the Kosovars understand Serbian, some Serbo-Croatians were hired to interpret. This caused difficulties on two fronts: many Kosovars only speak Albanian and therefore could not understand the interpreters, and second, people who had just been airlifted to Canada because of a conflict with Serbs were not trusting of a Serbian interpreter. Another related problem had to do with the linguistic proficiency of some of the interpreters. In some cases, their grasp of English was insufficient; in others, people were hired because they were of Albanian heritage, but actually had very little knowledge of Albanian. Moreover, many of the interpreters lacked training. The role of an interpreter is to repeat, as accurately and neutrally as possible, what has been said. There is no place for inserting one's own views, and yet there were reports of interpreters doing just that. For example, as a member of one of the agencies on the base indicated: "We had an interpreter scream at someone who was suicidal, 'Are you a man, or what?'"

The interpreters had perhaps the most stressful role to play at the sustainment sites. They worked very long hours, at what, under any circumstances, is a taxing job, but added to that was the level of trauma experienced by some of the Kosovars. The emotional burden on the interpreters was extreme.

### *Multicultural Association of Fredericton*

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The Multicultural Association is a settlement agency; their staff assumed that they would be responsible for settlement activities at the base, but they expressed a great deal of frustration because they felt that their roles were not clearly defined. Instead, Multicultural staff, who were there for the whole time the Kosovars were present, tried to work around the ambiguities and to provide assistance wherever they saw a need. As one person put it, "I found that there was nothing that was really ours. Everything had to be somebody else's, yet everything came back to us in the end."

They recruited interpreters from across the country and sponsors locally, they helped CIC with their duties (for example, working in conjunction with CIC during interviews and follow-up with families to complete the IMM8 forms (application for landing)). They made presentations to the Kosovars on Canadian culture, they taught ESL, and they worked with the local craft school to get activities in place for the Kosovars. The older refugee women enjoyed knitting, so the Multicultural Association arranged for donations of wool and other supplies.

### *Kosovar Village Council*

The other significant body that played a role in the day-to-day operation of the base was the Village Council. The CIC had heard from the health workers, the interpreters, and the DND that there were certain individuals who seemed to have authority. A CIC representative indicated that "we took it upon ourselves to gather up some of these leaders. We had an initial meeting amongst ourselves first, and suggested that it might not be a bad idea to get some of these people together and let them take an active role in participation, and making rules and regulations ... So it just evolved from that." A Multicultural Association representative described the council as follows: "There were 10 men representing the Kosovar community, one from each hub, and the military, Immigration, Red Cross and Multicultural. We talked about what was working and what needed improvement. They could tell us what their needs were and give us suggestions on how the camp could work better." "Ultimately Immigration was in charge of what was going on, but definitely the Village Council would give their input and let the rest of us know what the people needed." "They were listened to. They wanted to have an Albanian school .... They created an Albanian school for grades 1-8. They had teachers and the military helped them with the supplies that they needed and they created their own school and maintained that .... They suggested a community garden that would give people something to do and they could grow their own flowers or vegetables. The military helped them with that to get them the land and the tools they needed and they started a garden." The Council also served as an information dissemination vehicle; for example, there was a bear problem in the woods, so the Kosovars were advised through the Council that they shouldn't leave food outside.

A Red Cross spokesperson viewed the council this way: "Another thing we did ... is that we had a village council which was chaired by Red Cross. We had people elected from the group themselves. They elected their own representatives. It varied from eight to nine people who met with us twice a week, with the military and CIC, and it was chaired by the Red Cross. These people brought concerns from the guests to the table and asked questions and they were given answers. We kept minutes and we went over them every time. We looked at the issues and we resolved things and looked at what still needed to be resolved."

A Health Canada official commented on the role of the Village Council from a psycho-social standpoint: "When you form any kind of committee to help with

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scheduling, program policies and guidelines for a community, let them know ahead of time the level of authority you are giving them. Do not use them to transmit rules and regulations only, and do not co-opt them so they end up being enforcers. When that happens you take away their capacity for empowerment. The importance of these committees is that it is one more step in helping to restore and increase their own and their community's sense of safety, security, confidence, competence, control, power, mastery and trust. That is our hidden agenda."

### *Cooperation Among Groups*

Any endeavour that involves several different organizations and hundreds of staff and volunteers is bound to be incredibly complex. Both flexibility and organization are required if the venture is to be successful. We asked each major stakeholder at Gagetown about the roles of the other organizations and the level of cooperation that they encountered. Most people interviewed were impressed that things went as well as they did, despite certain errors in judgement or planning. The DND earned the admiration of nearly everyone who was involved: "The military were marvelous!" CIC staff were praised highly for their sense of fairness and their determination to keep families together. The Multicultural Association, Family and Community Services and the Salvation Army were highly respected as well. "The Multicultural Association were stars. They knew exactly what they were doing. They brought in people who were knowledgeable, skillful, had background, responded—they were just wonderful."

The Red Cross, on the other hand, appeared to have been less effective. To be sure, there were individuals working for the Red Cross who were singled out for praise; on the whole, however, almost every other organization was dismayed by the poor performance of the Red Cross volunteers. A DND representative said, "The Red Cross volunteers had not volunteered much. It was hard to keep them in the kitchen for what the Red Cross told them was their shift. When I needed them they weren't there." The Salvation Army wanted to get some of their volunteers cleared to come onto the base, but found that the regular rotation of Red Cross personnel caused problems for them: "There were real delays ... the faxes were being lost. We had people waiting for three or four weeks, trying to get clearance because of the delays that were created." The Multicultural Association was concerned about the controlling behaviour of some of the Red Cross workers. "Since the Red Cross had gone through the organizational challenges of the last few years, the success of this project was very, very important to them. The local leadership had very young people. It might have been a different dynamic in different sites, but this was very young leaders who tended to be very controlling .... I'm not writing off the Red Cross, but it was really challenging to have some 21-year-old telling all these people who have worked for 15 years with newcomers that if they want to deal with newcomers they had to take off their MCF T- shirt and put on the Red Cross thing." "No respect was given to what we do." An example of the controlling actions taken by the Red Cross had to do with the knitting and crocheting supplies. The Red Cross made the women turn in their wool and needles every night for fear they would hoard them. "The biggest concern seemed to be control of the resource" rather than the well being of the women. A couple of organizations commented on the fact that some of the volunteers appeared to be there because they wanted to socialize with the refugees: "People wanted to tutor for ulterior motives —like 'I've seen this guy and now I don't want to tutor him—I would like to tutor this other guy'. The Kosovars were very popular that summer—for good and for bad."

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A Health Canada official in Ottawa indicated that the Red Cross' motivation in getting involved with Operation Parasol was to get funding and to highlight their roles. This resulted in a struggle for turf. "There were problems in Borden and problems in Gagetown. The Red Cross person in charge at Gagetown wouldn't even discuss or hear about setting up programs for the children and adolescents. The request to introduce activities for children had to be brought to the camp advisory council. There were turf struggles between Red Cross staff and other agencies. Red Cross unduly influenced the decisions of the Village Councils and basically decided what was going to happen. The Red Cross does not have a sufficient volunteer base to take on a program like this; the other part is, their volunteers are not trained for this level of service. Their style of management is much too authoritarian—no flexibility. This was highlighted in Trenton and Argonaut, especially in Windsor Park, where there were no games organized for the kids for practically a month. I mean a formal program. They were approached I don't know how many times. And it was finally the FSW who had to ask Canadian Tire if they could donate a basketball hoop and so on. So many things could have been organized but their staff were overwhelmed."

Representatives from CIC New Brunswick said of the Red Cross: "Their whole modus operandi for being in this thing was to get as much good press as they could because of all the bad blood publicity they were getting prior to this. We had a lot of drag down battles with them because they were breaching security in relation to bringing media people onto the base and not going through the proper channels. We had a lot of problems with some of their volunteers fraternizing with the refugee population." "We would find that the Red Cross would do things like schedule some kind of outside activity without working with the Multicultural Association to see if the language class had arranged something. They didn't seem to be working together, so situations happened that really didn't need to, and from what I could see, and I think I was objective when I looked at it, the problems seemed to be with the Red Cross. They seemed to feel their power being thwarted or something."

The Post-Operation Report (POR) from the DND also indicated that getting good publicity appeared to be an overriding issue for the Red Cross. "There must be a clear understanding that not all agencies necessarily have the same aims and objectives. As the operation progressed, it became clear that the Canadian Red Cross had a number of objectives with respect to publicity and fund-raising that went well beyond the requirements of the operation itself. While not directly involving the military, this did lead to a number of potentially serious issues developing between Red Cross and CIC. These issues were generally resolved by (1) clear understanding that CIC was the lead agency, and (2) negotiation through the Camp Senior Planning Group" (p. 45; Phase 4 POR). "One concern expressed by a number of the staff, both military and civilian, was the apparent disparity in media recognition given to the various agencies at Camp Argonaut. In a number of media pieces published during the course of the operation the overall slant of the article was that the Red Cross was singularly running the camp" (p. 46; Phase 4 POR). The imbalance in coverage was not appreciated. "The disparity in media coverage for the three agencies (DND, CIC and Red Cross) may, in some respects, be attributed to a deliberate media campaign employed by the Red Cross. While the motives of the Red Cross cannot be accurately determined, the effect of disparate media coverage can. The soldiers employed at Camp Argonaut felt overlooked, their contribution to the success of the operation downplayed. While not a serious morale concern (i.e., it did not affect the conduct of the operation), this was deemed to be a "dissatisfier" for the troops" (p. 4; Phase 5 POR).

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Generally the Red Cross found themselves able to work well with the other groups and to accept the challenges as they were presented. Some focus group members found the structure of the DND to be different than their own, "Working with the Military I found really challenging because our style is different. They have much more rigid views on treating people. Several of them had already worked overseas in humanitarian peace keeping where they were dealing with refugees. They were much more rigid and much firmer." However, the joint management of the CIC, DND, and Red Cross from the operation centre proved to be a good way to work together, "The thing that saved us was the operation centre that worked together, where the three main parties worked on a regular basis and they were there all day every day making decisions on things that had to be done." Another Red Cross participant describes her working relationship with others as follows: "We always got along with everyone, and we worked together. ... Personally I would not call it a stressful event at all"

## **Prairie Region**

The Prairie Regional office for CIC encouraged local CIC managers to find out what resources they would need to receive the Kosovars and assured them that the money would be found. The local managers had a lot of discretion in deciding what course of action would be taken; as a result, quite different approaches were implemented across the Prairies. The same directives were thus interpreted and acted upon in very different manners across the region. In Alberta, there was more contact with settlement agencies in the early stages than in either Saskatchewan or Manitoba, although the settlement agencies in Edmonton were in agreement that they should have been consulted sooner than they were.

The local managers communicated with the provinces, but there were also telephone conference calls from the region to disseminate information. The region was also responsible for finding CIC staff to work at the sustainment sites: they sent between 17 to 20 people at a time, which had repercussions for the ongoing programs. All of the staff across the Prairies worked extremely hard to meet the needs of the Kosovars, while maintaining normal operations under reduced capacity. One of the spokespersons for the region indicated that the sponsorship issue came to a head with the Kosovars. The majority of the sponsors were inexperienced, and the people best versed in settlement issues, the settlement agencies, were not engaged as partners from the beginning. According to the CIC representative, "Given the initiatives that we want to undertake to increase the capacity of communities and of private sponsors, we now need to take what has happened and get people interested in the program." When asked about the role of the SPOs, the same representative said that although "they weren't involved [in the Kosovar program] .... [t]hese were probably one of the best-qualified groups to help address the whole movement."

Three representatives of settlement agencies from the Prairies (Edmonton was not included at this meeting) were vocal about the failure of CIC to involve the SPOs from the beginning of the Kosovar crisis. As one of them put it, "There was a fire and [CIC] called the police department instead of the fire department .... We [the settlement agencies] are the fire department. We can do the job. We smelled the smoke and we went." Another individual said "[CIC] chose to go around the settlement agencies that existed and tried to create a parallel organization focused on the SAHs .... The



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government looks at this [settlement] as a subcontracting sector. They need to appreciate that we do the work we do, not because we are subcontractors, but because we have a commitment that is larger than the subcontractor duty .... CIC betrayed the partnership. We were ready.” It was the contention of this individual that CIC bureaucrats resent the entrepreneurial freedom and the commitment of the settlement agencies. He/She noted that SPOs and the government are often at loggerheads over refugee claimant cases, among other things, and that an attempt to organize the SAHs could be a strategy for counterbalancing the independence of the CCR. The third respondent indicated that “we [a settlement agency] were like an engine idling while CIC set up a parallel organization .... We were actually told by CIC to get as far away as we could from the sponsors.”

### **The Response of the Canadian Public**

Several respondents indicated that one of the most interesting aspects of the Kosovar project was the response of the Canadian public. They attributed Canada's overwhelmingly generous offers to a number of causes. First, there was a great deal of media attention (sometimes called the CNN factor), which raised Canadians' awareness of the plight of the Kosovars. Second, some individuals indicated that they believed that guilt played a role as well. Canada was bombing Yugoslavia, along with its NATO partners, and was thus contributing to the worsening conditions faced by the Kosovars. CIC Communications reported that, when the airlifts were announced, “[w]e had offers of help for shelter, food, even breast milk.” Canadians recognized that these were “bona fide refugees, pushed out of their country.” CIC staff across the country were swamped with offers such as this one from the Edmonton office: “I remember a call from a man up in northern Alberta. He had a little shed and he thought that it would be a nice place. It didn't have any electricity or water, but he thought it would be good. He was kind and nice—but this was an example of the types of calls that came in all the time.” Not only did people donate money and goods, but they also were eager to sponsor Kosovar refugees when the Minister issued her appeal. CIC was in the position of having more would-be sponsors than refugees; but many of the people who offered to help lived in small centres and were disappointed when CIC decided to restrict settlement to larger cities in order to ensure that the Kosovars would have access to ESL and other settlement services.

### *The Uniqueness of the Kosovars versus Sierra Leone*

The generous treatment of the Kosovars was questioned in some sectors, especially in light of the fact that refugees from Sierra Leone, who were in equally dire straits, were not given the same options. When asked why Kosovars received such extraordinary treatment, a CIC official from the Integration Branch pointed out that the main difference was the appeal from the UNHCR. “We received a request. This was a humanitarian evacuation. This is completely different from our regular dealings in terms of helping people out of refugee camps. This was a most unique request .... Once here and out of the camps, Kosovars were treated similarly to all government assisted refugees. We used our regular refugee programs to provide financial assistance to them. The one unusual effort CIC made was to try and ensure that these refugees had access to interpretation, language training and trauma assistance as quickly as possible. These are services normally

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delivered through settlement programs. We injected more money into our settlement agencies to try and make these services available for them more quickly.” Another CIC spokesperson from the Refugee Branch agreed. “There was no appeal from UNHCR for the refugees of Sierra Leone; for that reason, the Canadian government is using its standard refugee programs to assist them.”

## **Challenges and Successes**

All of the respondents felt that there were real strengths to the project, and representatives of each agency or department were pleased with the commitment of the staff or volunteers from their own organization. Operation Parasol, after all, achieved its mission. The goal was to airlift 5,000 people to safety; in fact, more than 7,000 Kosovars came to Canada in a very short period of time. The government departments and agencies responsible for the operation of the airheads and the sustainment sites had mechanisms in place when the Kosovars arrived, and the majority of the refugees felt that they had been treated very well. There was an outpouring of support from the Canadian public the likes of which hadn't been seen since the arrival of the Vietnamese Boat People. These facts alone suggest that the project was an unqualified success. However, arranging for such a massive influx of people in so short a time was not without problems. We asked the respondents to identify the challenges and successes they experienced, as well as any recommendations they would have for the future, if a similar situation were to arise, and for the existing refugee programs.

### *Challenges*

#### a) National Challenges

The individuals from CIC who were interviewed in Ottawa were largely responsible for planning. Some of their comments relate to the challenges they themselves experienced; in other cases they discuss problems that occurred when their plans were implemented at the sustainment sites or in the sponsoring communities. There were essentially four main areas of concern: the lack of a plan; communication difficulties; lack of preparedness on the part of Red Cross volunteers; and lack of training for interpreters and sponsors.

#### *Lack of a plan*

As one representative of CIC, Refugee Branch put it: “We never had an emergency response plan—corporate memory is really important.” Another individual from the CIC Refugee Branch indicated that some of the best resources hadn't been tapped, presumably because of the absence of an emergency response plan: “Another thing we could have done better is we could use our SPOs that we use under the RAP program a lot more effectively. We didn't have the infrastructure in place to handle all the calls from would-be sponsors.” This same person felt that “we could have worked faster in the regions—they could have hired a lot more people but they didn't”; the local managers of CIC centres, however, were scrambling, in part because there was no plan in place.

A representative of the Red Cross also noted that Operation Parasol was a challenge because it was so different from other situations the organization had dealt with: “Most of the disasters Red Cross responds to are ones such as Manitoba floods and

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the Edmonton tornado, where the Red Cross' role and response activities are defined ahead of time in municipal plans. A different type of assistance was needed for this operation, dealing with refugees coming to stay on Canadian bases, so different response activities were required.”

#### *Communication problems*

Tied to this overarching difficulty were problems with communication. A respondent from CIC, Integration Branch indicated that “the biggest challenge was communication—you can't do enough.” “We were dealing with the perception that we had treated this group differently from any other group and being criticized a lot for that when we thought it wasn't the case. The information given to Kosovars, agencies and provinces was accurate, but people believe what they want to believe—the Kosovars believed that Canada is the land of milk and honey, a rather high expectation that we could not always satisfy.” A representative of the Resettlement Branch of CIC also commented on communication: “There were problems with sponsors because the appeal was not clear enough and problems with the change in criteria for family reunification—the Kosovars didn't understand.” Persons from both the Refugee Branch at CIC and the Red Cross indicated that there was insufficient information about the Kosovars. The former noted that “a lot of religious assumptions were made,” while the latter pointed out that there was not enough cultural information about the Kosovars to give to the Red Cross volunteers. Communication with sponsors was an issue for CIC, Refugee Branch: “We could be a lot better in terms of the information we provided to sponsors.” Another individual from the same Branch had a similar concern: “Sponsors were disappointed with repatriates—it should have been more clearly communicated that they might leave, in order to manage people's expectations.”

#### *Unprepared volunteers*

A third challenge had to do with the lack of preparedness of many of the people who worked at the sustainment sites, especially members of the Red Cross. A spokesperson for Health Canada stated that “Red Cross staff were not trained, they had an insufficient volunteer base and a hierarchical management style which resulted in things not happening—such as programs for kids. Our staff ended up providing stress management to Red Cross, CIC, interpreters—we had a whole group of clients besides the refugees.” Untrained volunteers, although well-meaning, caused problems, such as this one noted by a staff person from CIC Resettlement: “Some volunteers on the bases were giving advice such as don't go to Saskatchewan or Quebec.” As a staff member at DND put it: “A lot of the DND people were really scornful about the Red Cross, forgetting that they were volunteers. The DND attitude is ‘We are used to doing it, therefore we can do it a lot better than you can, so stay out of our way.’ It's like five-year-olds helping unload the dishwasher. They love to do it but an adult could do it in one tenth the time.”

#### *Lack of training for interpreters and sponsors*

There were other areas where a lack of training caused problems; neither the interpreters nor the sponsors received adequate support. A CIC Integration Branch spokesperson stated that “the sponsors didn't get enough training, and some thought more was expected of them.” The individual who coordinated the interpreters and translators at CIC noted that “there was a problem with interpreters giving their opinions, particularly around medical services—they didn't receive any training.” A lack of training, problems with communications and the fact that there was no emergency plan in place before the

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appeal from UNHCR occurred may have contributed to another challenge cited by a Resettlement Branch staff person, who said with regard to life at the sustainment sites: "I think everyone wanted to do everything that could be done because they were in such need. It might have created a false atmosphere or a false reality."

#### b) Airhead and Sustainment Base Challenges

The rest of this section has to do with problems encountered at Gagetown.

The overwhelming concern on the part of several agencies and departments had to do with the lack of professionalism exhibited by Red Cross volunteers. The only friction noted consistently across organizations involved the Red Cross. Red Cross workers indicated that they had difficulties working with the military and the interpreters; they felt that the military were unbending in their approach to dealing with the refugees (however, one Red Cross staff said the military were very flexible). They also noted that the interpreters appeared to edit what they said, rather than giving an exact translation.

A representative from CIC, Fredericton indicated that there was a lot of friction amongst personnel, which was attributed to the following: "Red Cross volunteers didn't know their roles—there was inappropriate fraternization; they were unable to identify real settlement needs. Red Cross's attitude was that the refugees were guests. Where do they get off treating them as guests? It was a humanitarian evacuation. They came here as refugees." The respondents from the Salvation Army also noted problems with the Red Cross: "Red Cross could have communicated better with the groups it was working with—they had team meetings and did not tell us about them." Family and Community Services had similar experiences: "We didn't feel as though we were part of the team—we had problems with Red Cross. We had limited access to clients with problems—Red Cross refused to refer—we probably missed a lot of people with needs because Red Cross was taking over in roles they were not trained for." A spokesperson from Health Canada reported that the Red Cross volunteers "were trying to dissuade Kosovars from going to certain parts of the country." The focus group from the Multicultural Association of Fredericton cited a power struggle between some CIC and Red Cross representatives as being problematic; they found it very challenging to work in an environment where roles were not clearly defined. They also found that the three-week rotation of CIC and Red Cross staff caused difficulties for continuity of service, as did the family support workers. The DND representatives indicated that it was awkward not knowing which was the lead agency at the outset. Another principal concern was the lack of professionalism in Red Cross volunteers.

There were several challenges that had to do with the Kosovars. The Red Cross found their behaviour to be surprising at times: "Culturally it was a challenge; a very patriarchal society. I think that we had to try and make them realize that there are certain rules in our culture and if they are visiting Canada they must abide by [them]." They were also caught unprepared to meet the demand when refugees hoarded goods such as laundry soap and other personal items. The DND were concerned that the atmosphere found at the sustainment sites would have an effect on the Kosovars' expectations once they were out in the real world: "We tried to bring people's expectations down—we were providing a much higher level of service than what they would get in the provinces."

Sponsorship recruitment and matching were concerns for both CIC New Brunswick and the Multicultural Association. CIC felt that "Ottawa made a big mistake with the sponsorship recruitment program, contracting to World Vision—they didn't know the first thing about it." The focus group from Multicultural Association explained that because the destining was done further into the operation, the training and settlement

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staff from CIC that were on base earlier had been replaced by other CIC staff, and as a result, “destining was done by two officers with no settlement background.” They felt that there could have been much better matching of sponsors and refugees. The spokespersons indicated that Kosovars were sometimes told things that were inaccurate such as ‘No, you must go there or you will live in two separate towns’; ‘You will get a job, no problem’; and ‘No problem, you can bring your relative to Canada’ when the relative in question was ineligible.

The DND’s POR detailed a number of challenges. First, there was confusion over fiscal responsibilities. “From initial deployment it was the understanding of both military and CIC staffs within the Camp that CIC (as lead agency) were ultimately responsible for meeting the costs of the humanitarian evacuation. Consequently, all capital expenditures, regardless of organization, were processed through CIC for approval and authorization. This caused a number of delays as CIC was not adequately staffed for this role. The issue was further compounded in the Phase 5 close-out procedures. Following on from the understanding of fiscal responsibilities, it was agreed that CIC were responsible for disposal of all capital assets. This was questioned from the national level (NHQ), at which time it was briefed that there was “a clear understanding “ between CIC and DND that the agency/department that expended the funds was responsible for having authorized the purchase and for asset disposal” (p. 20, Phase 4 POR). The DND would have liked clarity on this issue at the outset of the operation, stating that central coordination of expense would have simplified accounting for expenditures when the operation was over. Another major challenge for the DND had to do with the division of law enforcement responsibility at the base, which was divided among DND, CIC and the RCMP. Although eventually this problem was resolved, at the beginning of the operation, responsibilities of each agency were not clear. The Camp security policy was “from the outside-in.” The concept was to control access by personnel outside the camp rather than to limit the movement of the refugees residing inside the camp .... The policy recognized that there was no legal basis to limit the movement of the refugee population on or off site once initial Immigration processing had been completed .... Until that occurred, military personnel monitored and reported movements but had no authority to detain. Enforcement of Immigration Law was carried out by CIC Security, reinforced as necessary by the RCMP” (p. 50, Phase 4 POR).

A challenge cited by several of the agencies at Gagetown was the limited access to interpreters and the range in interpreting skills. There were not enough trained interpreters who were fluent in both Albanian and English. The report of three psychiatrists working within Operation Parasol identified a related problem: some interpreters were refugees, “paid for their services, which set up a hierarchy within the camp. We believed the refugee-interpreters may have found it difficult to maintain confidentiality and neutrality.”

Finally, IOM’s greatest challenge had to do with the amount of luggage that the Kosovars accumulated during their stay. When the refugees were transported to their settlement cities, they wanted to take all the goods that they had accumulated at the sustainment sites. Although eventually they were allowed to bring several bags, many had to leave some of their belongings behind.

### c) Regional Challenges

Within the Prairie region, a challenge for CIC had to do with communication outside the organization, especially around the special needs status of the Kosovars; there was a concern that their status had not been explained well to the public.

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The representatives of three Prairie-based settlement agencies suggested that “CIC should have involved the SPOs from the beginning, and that many of the problems associated with the arrival of the Kosovars could have been avoided, had the settlement agencies been put in charge.” In the end, most of the agencies were involved, but because, in some instances, they were stepping in part way through, they had certain restrictions put on them by CIC. For example, “CIC paid interpreters \$19.00 an hour, then, when they passed the responsibilities off on the SPOs, CIC said that the SPOs had to pay \$19.00 an hour, at an agency where no one makes that much.”

### *Successes*

As is natural in any *lessons learned* document, there tends to be more focus on challenges and related recommendations than on successes; however, in the case of Operation Parasol, the number of things that went right far exceeds the number that went wrong, judging from the evaluations of the Kosovars themselves. Although there are fewer comments in this section than in the previous one, it is safe to say that representatives from every participating agency and government department are extremely proud of their own contributions. As the Associate Deputy Minister for CIC said: “There was an incredible commitment on the part of staff and volunteers.”

#### a) National Successes

A spokesperson for the CIC, Refugee Branch summed up several successes achieved by all the departments involved: “We did the whole operation with very few resources; we revitalized the refugee program and moved 5000 people in 22 days.” A representative of Health Canada gave kudos to CIC: “If you were going to give CIC a grade, it would be close to an ‘A’ — they kept not only family but friends together — they had a very positive attitude about dealing fairly with the Kosovars.” The notion of teamwork came up over and over; among others, the Human Resource Branch of CIC stressed the cooperation of the union; an individual from CIC Communications pointed out how well the government departments worked together and a representative of CIC interpreters and translators stated that “the whole team worked together. It had to come together so fast.”

In some instances, new resources were developed, for example, Information Management in CIC now has a comprehensive box of emergency provisions for technological set-up. CIC was pleased that “we gained a lot of people who had never thought of sponsoring before” and Red Cross reported that “we gained some new financial donors and corporate partners who donated goods to the operation and have remained partners.”

The CCR conducted a workshop in December of 1999 in which they evaluated the response to the Kosovar project. In the document summarizing the workshop, they identified many successes, in which they emphasized the flexibility at all levels, the fast mobilization of resources, and the political will to ensure a successful outcome.

#### b) Airhead and Sustainment Base Successes

The people who worked directly with the refugees at the airhead and at the sustainment site shared the sentiments of the respondents from Ottawa. Every agency and department found the experience to be a positive one, despite any problems that arose. The evacuation itself went very well and was a model of efficiency and success. As a foreign service officer for CIC said: “The evacuation went very well — we knew the people on the ground and understood the conditions. With our evacuation nobody believed that we

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could do a flight a day. It was unrealistic but we did it. We took the most people in the shortest amount of time. We were the only country that did daily flights." IOM was pleased that none of those 22 flights was cancelled. A spokesperson for the UNHCR recognized that "Canada now has the skills to expedite an evacuation if there is the political will." This same individual also commented on the strength of the media that contributed to the outpouring of support from the Canadian public.

Health Canada indicated that "everyone at the airhead worked well together—CIC and health professionals. Under poor physical plant conditions we managed to deal with every flight, with great success and exceptional flexibility."

The groups that worked with the refugees at Gagetown were in agreement that there were many positive aspects to Operation Parasol. Here is a sampling of their comments. The Salvation Army indicated that "the successes were our interactions with the Kosovars, the response from Canadians and the positive community response from stores and volunteers. This experience broadened our view." The focus group from CIC, New Brunswick made these comments: "We did a pretty good job of keeping families together. Overall, the operation was a success; the military at Gagetown were tremendous. CIC came together as a department. People sacrificed but no one ever complained or regretted it. It was such a positive experience for all of us." Family and Community Services New Brunswick cited the wonderful support from CIC, and commented on how people in their organization worked together; they were pleased that the refugees were all safe. A spokesperson for DND indicated that the time at Gagetown was rewarding: "It was a positive experience for military staff; the refugees had high quality treatment; there was good inter-agency cooperation and the response of the public was great." The DND POR cited the family support workers for their help to members of the military; not only did they diffuse potentially difficult situations in camp generally, but they were also "good de-stressors" for the military staff.

Participants from the Red Cross in Fredericton outlined a variety of successes. For some success meant building the reputation of the Red Cross, "For me the success was that Red Cross got to actually show others, the military and immigration, that we can do a really good job," and "I think that it was in this area where we got good publicity for the Red Cross which is an organization that has taken a beating. So it is the other side of the Red Cross. People knew that the Red Cross wasn't just blood. That part was a big success for Red Cross." Another success was good teamwork and a common goal, "Everybody was flexible enough to want it to work, and that was really good," and "We all had one common goal and that is what we put our sites on."

### c) Regional Successes

The responses at the regional level of CIC were similar to those expressed at the national level: "We had flexibility; we did an amazing job;" "There was tremendous good will;" "We had good communication with the province (Alberta)." Each respondent indicated that the commitment on the part of employees was superb.

## **Recommendations**

Many recommendations were made by the individuals we interviewed as well as in the documentation we reviewed. In this section we will provide a synopsis of the information we gathered. Although some of these recommendations are intended for consideration

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when and if another emergency evacuation occurs, many have relevance for the ongoing refugee programs currently offered by CIC and settlement agencies. The Kosovar project, as the Prime Minister pointed out in the CIC publication, *Visa* (October, 1999), was a tremendous accomplishment that entailed the enthusiasm and dedication of countless numbers of people. The experience of these individuals could serve as a valuable resource for future ventures. Although there is overlap in a few instances, we have classified the recommendations into the following categories: Communication, Information Management and Dissemination Recommendations; Involvement of Service Providers; Training-Related Recommendations; Refugee Policy Recommendations; Sustainment Site-Related Recommendations; and Sponsors-Related Recommendations.

### *1. Communication, Information Management & Dissemination Recommendations*

In virtually every interview and final report the point was made that communication is crucial, and that steps should be taken to improve connections within and between stakeholders at all stages of the process. A representative of the CIC Refugee Branch suggested that procedures be streamlined for temporary offices overseas, taking into account the difficult conditions under which they operate. In the same vein, Information Management at CIC suggested that there is a need to explore wireless communication for overseas. The DND at Gagetown indicated that "a report from the field in Macedonia would have been very helpful." According to the DND POR, there had been a report from Macedonia: "Personnel who had been in the Balkans provided information for a one day orientation package for DND/CFB personnel at the camp." However, there was also other information that would have been useful; such as an indication of how many women, toddlers and infants were coming, in order to stock up on appropriate supplies. DND had not anticipated infants, and the Red Cross did not have enough time to order feminine products.

Several organizations, including DND, Family and Community Services, the psychiatrists, and the Multicultural Association of Fredericton recommended that there be clear information from the beginning on the roles of the various organizations involved. A plan, timelines, job descriptions, lines of communication and authority should be spelled out. Several groups also commented on the need for planning for such an operation; in the prairie region it was stressed that CIC should have a contingency plan for a massive influx of refugees; the psychiatrists recommended that a set of psychological principles be adopted and adhered to in the implementation of care for refugees; and Health Canada indicated the need for clearer specification of the information needed in medical records. Health Canada also recommended improved communication between doctors at the airheads and on the bases. At sustainment sites, the family support workers suggested that in the future, each person who works there be debriefed; not only to benefit the individuals but also to provide information for future endeavours. The Multicultural Association stressed that people working on the base must be precise in what they tell the Kosovars about employment, and so forth. Although the workers were likely trying to alleviate fears the refugees may have had by reassuring them that they would find employment suitable to their skills, they ultimately caused distress when it became apparent to the Kosovars that they had been misled.

Better communication across other constituencies was also recommended by the Multicultural Association, who argued for clearer explanations for changes to family reunification requirements to help refugees understand the policies of the government. On a similar note, a CIC official in Ottawa indicated that a strategy should be developed



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to more clearly inform the public in a way that they understand the status of refugees such as the Kosovars. CIC New Brunswick suggested that there be more consultation with the regions and that provinces be given more power in some of the decision making.

The CCR report outlined many similar recommendations regarding communication. It also pointed to the benefits of using media to educate the general public about refugee issues and suggested a public Thank-you, especially for sponsors who did not receive Kosovars.

## *2. Involvement of Service Providers*

Tied to the issue of clear terminology was the issue of the involvement of service providers. There was general consensus that service providers, especially settlement agency personnel, be involved from the very beginning if a project similar to Operation Parasol arises. A representative of CIC Integration Branch stated it this way: "I would reach out to service providers earlier. They could have helped find hosts quickly and effectively. They could have also helped in seeking our sponsors in collaboration with the normal channels." Other staff at CIC also indicated that the service providers should have been included sooner, but no one was as vocal about the need for the involvement of the settlement agencies as the representatives from the agencies themselves. As one of them said, "There is very little corporate memory in CIC—the staff is always changing. CIC learned a lot, but the SPOs had to pick up the pieces. Use the best people to do the job." Health Canada also suggested assigning the best people to the project, rather than the first people who happen to volunteer. Not only should the settlement agencies have been utilized to a far greater degree at the sustainment sites, but they also should have been tasked with the sponsoring arrangements at the outset. The Multicultural Association recommended that settlement agencies should have been contacted to orient sponsors; they could have recruited and matched sponsors and refugees. A spokesperson from CIC, Refugee Branch, agreed: "The SPOs should take care of the training, get the new sponsors and provide information; our biggest mistake was not using them this time."

## *3. Training-Related Recommendations*

There were many recommendations related to training of both staff and volunteers. The family support workers suggested that first and foremost, experienced people be used. Even then, comprehensive training is essential. An official from the CIC, Refugee Branch stated that "we could set up training or procedures for managers on how to deal with emergency or unusual situations."

The spokespersons from Red Cross, Fredericton suggested that, in future, CIC "give more lead time to recruit and train volunteers and to be sure that they can get their shots and criminal records checks." People from several organizations commented on the need for training for the interpreters. A representative of CIC [interpreters and translators] indicated that potential interpreters should be screened for bilingual language proficiency, health and education levels and should then receive training. In both the final report of the psychiatrists (Heber et al.) and the Health Canada interviews, it was suggested that interpreters should be provided with debriefing and that ways be found to help alleviate their stress, such as scheduling their time so that they can leave their work periodically to be with their families.

## *4. Refugee Policy Recommendations*

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Given the unique nature of the Kosovar situation, several organizations took the opportunity to make general recommendations regarding refugee policy. The Multicultural Association, in reference to the practice of assessing refugee status overseas, suggested that there be more flexibility in determining status when people arrive in Canada. They indicated that CIC at a local level should be able to change the status from a CR1 to a CR5, for example, if the situation warrants. They recommended a general policy of starting with less and giving more as required; that is, one year of support for all, followed by an assessment to determine if further support is necessary. The settlement agency representatives indicated that they would like the federal government to provide the same level of support to all refugees as was supplied to the Kosovars.

The FSW had some recommendations regarding repatriation of the Kosovars. First, if a similar situation arises again, they suggested a reconsideration of providing the opportunity to repatriate, because they felt that, in the case of the Kosovars, their ability to focus on settling was compromised by the two-year window to return to Kosova. If a decision is made in future to offer repatriation, they recommended that refugees not be sent home until they have been to their settlement communities, so that they are better informed as to their choices.

The CCR recommended that several aspects of the Kosovar project be extended to other parts of the settlement program, such as expediting refugees' travel to Canada with Minister's permits, abolishing ROLF and keeping families together.

Finally, the psychiatric report (Heber et al.) suggested that an outcome study be conducted to examine the Kosovars' health and adaptation in Canada, in order to guide policy in the case of future operations.

##### *5. Sustainment Site-Related Recommendations*

There were a number of diverse recommendations that dealt with the running of sustainment sites; some referred specifically to refugees and some to the staff on site. The FSW were concerned that the physical set-up of the camp did not allow for sufficient privacy for the Kosovars; in future they recommend prefab or trailer housing. The Salvation Army also felt that fewer people should be accommodated at any one site; preferably under 1,000. Both the Islamic Association of Fredericton and the Salvation Army suggested that refugees be provided with opportunities to work on the base as soon as possible. The Islamic Association stated: "Give them skill improvement on the base, for example, carpentry, and assign more responsibilities to them—people were spoon-fed for too long." The Salvation Army echoed this recommendation: "Establish some sort of work roster to keep refugees occupied." The high expectations the Kosovars had on arrival in their settlement communities has been attributed to the unreal nature of the sustainment site. Tied to this notion of raising expectations were the gifts that people received. The Multicultural Association recommended that donations not be distributed on the basis of ethnicity; all refugees should be treated equally, but bikes were donated only to Kosovars. Finally, the Salvation Army recommended that people be allowed to keep all the goods they are given; and that there be arrangements for more luggage rather than forcing refugees to leave belongings behind.

The recommendations that related to the staff and volunteers at the sustainment sites were as follows:

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1. The DND indicated that military policy should be given dispensation to detain refugees who want to leave camp rather than leaving that to the RCMP or the Ontario Provincial Police.
2. The family support workers suggested ensuring more continuity of staff: "the three-week rotation of staff from CIC and Red Cross made it difficult for the rest of the agencies."
3. Both Health Canada and the family support workers indicated that there should be a mechanism for dealing with stress among staff: self-care should be built in to scheduling and people should be sent home if they show signs of burnout.
4. The FSW advised that cultural brokers would have been useful on site.
5. The Multicultural Association suggested importing interpreters from the source country and bringing English speakers from the ranks of the refugees early to use them as interpreters on the base.
6. Finally, it was noted that medical and dental care provided by volunteers on base was more than what was allowed in provinces; the Multicultural Association suggested that in future, refugees should be given only emergency care to avoid problems later.

#### 6. *Sponsor-Related Recommendations*

A CIC official from the Prairie region stated that one of the main outcomes of the Kosovar project has been a heightening of awareness of the role of sponsors. This individual suggested that CIC examine sponsorship in light of this experience; training and debriefing, in particular, should be employed. CIC Resettlement staff echoed this sentiment, urging that sponsors be trained and that they be made aware of all the resources in the community at the disposal of the refugees. They also suggested that there should be a system of sponsor accountability. The Multicultural Association recommended that there be better matching of sponsors and refugees from the beginning, (for instance, new sponsors should not be given difficult cases). Matching could be accomplished by providing family profiles to the local CIC. Closer attention to matching should be accompanied by training and support; a mentoring program with government assistance was suggested. Health Canada indicated that CIC could hire social workers to support sponsors and refugee families. Communication for sponsors was also stressed: the Multicultural Association suggested that email be used extensively; they recommended a chat room where inexperienced sponsors could raise issues with experienced volunteers and they indicated that RAP binders and other information must be distributed more widely.

The CCR report suggested that resources be found to establish and maintain a national network of SAHs; they also advocated the development of a "communication process to recognize and ensure the representation of all community players/provinces (SAHs, SPOs, CIC, other organizations, the public)" (p. 5).

## **Summary**

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1. Individual interviews were conducted with representatives of CIC, Red Cross, DND, CIDA, IOM, UNHCR and Health Canada and focus group discussions were carried out with the Red Cross of Fredericton, the Multicultural Association of Fredericton, CIC New Brunswick, the St. John Salvation Army, Family and Community Services of New Brunswick (the FSW), the Fredericton Islamic Association, CIC Prairie region staff and representatives of settlement agencies in the prairies (outside Edmonton).
2. Final reports of organizations involved with Operation Parasol were reviewed.
3. Canada's response to the UNHCR appeal was swift and unprecedented; over 5,000 Kosovars were airlifted to Canada, where they were sent to military bases, known as sustainment sites.
4. A family reunification program was implemented, with a relaxed definition of eligible family members.
5. CIC, DND and the Red Cross were the lead agencies in planning and implementing the Kosovars' stay at the sustainment sites.
6. The Minister of CIC made a public appeal for sponsors.
7. Sponsors were asked to provide many of the same services that are normally a part of the JAS Program, but there was no financial obligation.
8. Refugees were assessed medically at the airheads, and then sent on to the sustainment sites.
9. The Red Cross was responsible for coordinating personal services at the sites, which were offered by their own volunteers and several other agencies at the Gagetown site, including the Multicultural Association, the family support workers, the Salvation Army and the Islamic Association of Fredericton.
10. A Kosovar Village Council was established to involve Kosovars in decision-making and to disseminate information.
11. Generally, most groups on the sites worked well together, but the Red Cross was singled out by other agencies and government departments for having a publicity agenda. Red Cross volunteers were strongly criticized by other groups because of their lack of training and professionalism.
12. The Canadian public was generous in their support of the Kosovars.
13. Agencies indicated many challenges and successes of Operation Parasol at the planning level, in the implementation at the airheads and sustainment sites and at the level of sponsors in settlement communities.
14. Recommendations of the participating respondents and those found in the final reports were identified.

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#### Note

1. Participants from individual interviews and at least one key person from each focus group were contacted for their approval regarding substantive quotes. Several quotes by Red Cross participants have been withdrawn at the request of the Red Cross in Fredericton, NB.

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## **4 . PROFILE OF REFUGEE RESPONDENTS**

This chapter focuses on demographic and social profiles of the refugee respondents. For comparison purposes, the data have been classified by category of refugee, as well as by sex, age, and education where applicable. Profile topics include general demographics for the respondents and their families; the refugee-making experience; language; employment; education; and religion.

### **Demographic Characteristics of Refugees**

The average age for KOS, KOF and non-Kosovars, including respondents and their children born prior to 1984, is 28, 24 and 25 years respectively. Given that refugees who came to Canada under Operation Parasol were selected solely on the basis of need (for other refugees age is a factor in the selection process), one would expect the average age of Kosovars to be considerably higher than that of non-Kosovars. If we consider that the average age of repatriated Kosovars is 32 and that 28% of the repatriates are over the age of 45, compared with 11% of those that stayed in Canada (see Chapter 8), the difference in average age of Kosovars and non-Kosovars is understood.

Males and females were equally represented in the Kosovar respondent group and the CR3 portion of the non-Kosovar group. However, all of the non-Kosovar Joint Assistant Sponsorship (JAS) respondents (N=4) were female. Many JAS refugees enter Canada under the Women at Risk Program. It is uncommon for adult males without disabilities to be classified as JAS. The treatment of the Kosovar refugees was very unusual in that the entire group was accorded the most generous federal funding.

The KOS, KOF, and non-Kosovar respondents represented 52, 17 and 13 separate families respectively. In all refugee categories the majority (60%) were currently married and living with a spouse. For the Kosovars, over 99% fell into the categories of married and living with spouse or never married; however, 18% of non-Kosovar respondents reported being widowed, separated, divorced, or married with their spouse living in a different location.

The average household size for Kosovars was four persons and is higher than for non-Kosovars at three persons. The temporarily broadened definition of family for Kosovar refugees and the Albanian cultural practice of the extended family living together contributed to the larger household size for Kosovars. As well, non-Kosovars have to demonstrate sufficient funds prior to becoming eligible to sponsor family members.

### **The Refugee Making Experience**

When respondents were asked why they decided to leave their home country, virtually all of the Kosovars' reasons were directly related to war. While the large majority of non-Kosovars also presented reasons directly connected to war, 14% stated that they left because of the economic situation or poor living conditions. While these reasons can also

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be associated with war, the non-Kosovars cited conditions of chronic war rather than the shorter reign of violence and destruction experienced by the Kosovars. Comments from Kosovars outlining their reasons for leaving include: "Chased out of house by military who said they would kill us if we did not leave." "It was very dangerous so we must leave our houses." "Serbian police came and told us to leave our houses and they gave us only five minutes to leave." "Police did a massacre in our village. Our house was fired, our property was destroyed." The non-Kosovars also spoke of war (in places such as the Balkans and Afghanistan). Some elaborated with comments such as: "Husband and sister's husband killed in front of us." "I could not live a normal life; I could not go to my house ... somebody else is living there." "Living conditions were very bad: no jobs, no money, no freedom." "Hundred things made us leaving our country. No jobs, no future, nobody knows how will be tomorrow."

Seventy-four percent of respondents fled their hometowns with members of their family. Most of the KOSs (84%) stayed in a UNHCR refugee camp, as did half of the KOFs and about one in ten of the non-Kosovars. The great majority of the Kosovars reported that they had been assisted by the UNHCR, by international NGOs such as the Red Cross, and by Albanians in Macedonia; they indicated that each of these groups had been very helpful. The non-Kosovars, coming from countries such as Croatia or Afghanistan, were less likely to report that they had been helped by the UNHCR or by international NGOs.

Respondents were asked how long they had been away from their homes before coming to Canada. This measure was used rather than that of time spent in a refugee camp because it is more accurate in measuring the time of displacement. For most of the KOS respondents, it took from three weeks to two months (on average 52 days) to come to Canada. The KOF respondents tended to take longer, from one to six months (on average 99 days), because the KOFs experienced delays while attempts were made to link them with family members already in Canada. In sharp contrast, most of the non-Kosovars took from one to ten years (on average 5 years) to come to Canada, and many of them came via a country of temporary asylum.

The majority of the KOS respondents (64%) said that they had a choice of going to a country other than Canada; however, fewer than one-quarter of the KOF and non-Kosovar respondents said that they had a choice (21% and 23%, respectively). When asked why they came to this country, most of the KOS group said that they liked Canada. They referred to Canada in positive terms, describing it as peaceful and democratic, and said that they would have a better future here. Typical comments included the following: "Because we believed that here is much better than everywhere else." "Peaceful country and good place to get education." "I wanted to be in a safe place and heard Canada was safe." "We knew that Canada is free country." "Hospitable country, freedom, democratic country, open with others." In contrast, most of the KOF and non-Kosovar groups mentioned family reunification as their reason for coming to Canada. Typical comments included the following: "Because my wife and children were here." "My brother [came] here twenty years ago. I wanted to live in same city with him." "Because my sister was here." "Because of my cousin who is living here for several years."

Despite the reasons given for coming here, 74% of respondents indicated that they knew little, if anything, about Canada before leaving their homes. Comments addressing what they would have liked to have known before coming included: "I would like to know what people they are, how will be their reception, what kind of climate has Canada." "I would have liked to know how big Canada is, and something about culture, customs, educational system, etc." "Opportunities for work, for education." "I would

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like to know more about history of Canada.” “About the weather.” “How Canadians live.”

A large majority of the refugees came to Canada with family members (88% of KOS, 84% of KOF, and 91% of non-Kosovars). Most came as nuclear families with a spouse and one or more children or, in the case of younger persons, with parents, brothers and sisters. Almost all left family members behind (90% of KOS, 96% of KOF, and 91% of non-Kosovars), most commonly sisters, brothers, sisters-in-law, brothers-in-law, parents and parents-in-law. Twenty-nine percent of Kosovar respondents reported having family members come to Canada after them, compared with only 9% of non-Kosovars. These differences reflect the differences in policy relating to family reunification. Until mid-summer of 1999 Kosovars who came to Canada under Operation Parasol were eligible to apply to bring relatives to Canada under an expedited family reunification program carried out at no cost to the Kosovars in Canada. In contrast, non-Kosovars who wish to bring relatives under family reunification experience a longer process, and they must be financially responsible for their settlement, travel and processing costs. Given that the non-Kosovars in our study arrived in Canada in 1999, it is unlikely that many could have afforded to sponsor family members. Those relatives who did come to Canada were mainly siblings and children.

### **Arrival in Canada and in Alberta**

All respondents came to Canada in 1999 and subsequently settled in Alberta. Most of the KOS refugees spent time on the military bases in eastern Canada before coming to Alberta. All but five of the 109 KOS respondents arrived in Canada in May of 1999, and came to Alberta in June and July of 1999; thus the average time between landing in Canada and arriving in Alberta was about two months. The 25 KOF respondents arrived in Canada from May to December of 1999 with the majority arriving in June and July. All but one of these KOF respondents came directly to Alberta. A total of 22 non-Kosovar respondents were interviewed, including 18 classified as CR3 and four as JAS. These non-Kosovar respondents arrived in Canada throughout 1999, with most coming in the first half of the year. Most came directly to Alberta.

### **Religion**

When respondents were asked about religious affiliation, virtually all of the Kosovars (98%) reported being Muslim; the remainder were Christian. When interviewers probed further, the majority could not determine to which denomination of Islam they belonged. The non-Kosovar group was comprised of both Christians (59%) and Muslims (41%), with all respondents except one being able to name the denomination to which they belonged. Within their northern Alberta community, 79% of Christians reported living near a church, compared with 57% of Muslims who lived near a mosque. Of those respondents who did attend a place of worship on a regular basis, the frequency of attendance was similar, with 51% of Muslims and 58% of Christians attending monthly or more frequently.



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An interesting comparison is between Kosovar and non-Kosovar Muslims. While 60% of the Kosovars reported living near a mosque, many of the non-Kosovars lived outside of larger centres; only two non-Kosovar respondents reported living near a mosque. However, more non-Kosovars (89%) indicated that their religion was very important to them personally, compared with 71% for Kosovars. Even though they lived further from a mosque, 78% of non-Kosovars reported attending the mosque on a regular basis compared with 33% of the Kosovar Muslims. To the Kosovar respondents, Islam is a very strong part of their identity that serves to build cohesion within their group in the same way that ethnicity and culture do. Being Muslim and Albanian contribute as much to their sense of identity as being Orthodox and Serbian do to their oppressors. The theme of Islam as identity also surfaced in the 1998 study *The Settlement Experiences of Refugees in Alberta* and is best captured in an encounter with a respondent. Upon discovering that an interviewer was Muslim, a young Bosnian girl asked what it meant to be Muslim because she knew that her own people were dying for their religion, but she did not understand why. From these two studies the data suggest that respondents from the Balkan area perceive Islam as an identity, more so than they feel required to adhere to the tenets of the faith. Sponsors and service providers also reported that Kosovars did not conform to their expectations of orthodox Muslims.

## Language

The first language of all Kosovars is Albanian. Sixty percent of the non-Kosovars reported Serbo-Croatian as their first language, and another third spoke Farsi or Persian. A large majority (87%) of respondents spoke more than one language, with the most common additional languages being English, Serbo-Croatian, and Bosnian for the Kosovars, and English and German for the non-Kosovars.

Respondents were asked to evaluate how well they understood, spoke, read and wrote English both at the time of the interview and before coming to Canada. Each area of evaluation was rated on a 4-point scale, where 1 represented *not at all* and 4 meant *very well*. Only a small minority of all respondents (6%) reported being able to understand spoken English *well* or *very well* prior to coming to Canada (Table 4.1). Approximately one year later, at the time of interview, the understanding of English had improved dramatically for all respondents, with 72% stating that they understood English *well* or *very well*. When we examine comprehension level by age and sex, differences are evident. At the time of the interview, 82% of males aged 16-44 reported understanding spoken English *well* or *very well* compared with 73% of females of the same age group. In the older age group (45 and over), significantly more males (61%) reported better understanding than did females (27%).

When we examined speaking, reading and writing English, a higher percentage of KOFs rate their ability as *well* or *very well* both prior to and after coming to Canada. The non-Kosovars consistently reported lower speaking, reading, and writing skills in English at the time of interview. Kosovar eligibility for four additional months of ESL training not offered to non-Kosovars may be a factor in these findings. While the English language abilities of all respondents improved greatly, a higher percentage of educated respondents (i.e., with high school or more) reported understanding, speaking, reading and/or writing English *well* or *very well* at the time of the interview.

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Respondents who could understand, speak, read and/or write English *well* or *very well* prior to coming to Canada were between the ages of 16 and 44. At the time of the interview, the pattern of younger respondents reporting higher English skills remains, but females aged 45+ are truly left behind. To learn why this group of respondents assessed their English skills to be low, we examined ESL class enrolment. In fact, only 36% of females aged 45+ attended ESL classes, and the number of individuals in this age group is small (Table 4.2). Seven respondents in this age category were not attending or had not attended ESL classes. Reasons for not studying ESL included the following: "I have five little children." "I was pregnant." "I'm working." "Because I was sick." "Because I'm old."

## **Education**

Respondents were asked about their highest level of education or training, their course of studies in Canada, and their plans for obtaining further education and occupational goals. Non-Kosovar respondents were the most educated group: 67% had completed high school or more, compared with 55% of KOSs and 45% of KOFs (Table 4.3). This finding is not surprising, given that the non-Kosovar respondents had to meet the requirements of selection criteria to be eligible to come to Canada. Differences in educational attainment are also apparent when we consider age and sex. While men aged 45+ were the most educated (36% with postsecondary education), women in the same age category were by far the least educated; only one respondent (9%) had postsecondary education.

Excluding high school students, only three respondents were attending or had attended school for purposes other than ESL training in Canada. These students are/were studying nursing assistance, day care providing and air cadet training. Furthermore, while fewer non-Kosovars plan further education in Canada (64% of non-Kosovars, 82% of KOS and 79% of KOF), the most striking differences appear when we look at age and sex. A minority of females aged 45+ (46%) plan to further their education in Canada. However, considering that 90% of this group is presently educated at a less than high school level, a large minority planning further education suggests a shift in thinking, or perhaps a perception of opportunities that did not exist in the home country. The most common occupational goals mentioned by all respondents included computer programmer, nurse, and teacher. Other frequently mentioned occupational goals across all refugee categories included construction worker, medical doctor, bus/taxi/truck driver, accountant, mechanic, business owner, baker/cook, engineer, seamstress/dressmaker, salesperson, hairdresser, and economist.

## **Employment**

Analysis of employment excludes respondents younger than 21 years of age. More than half of the KOSs and a third of the KOFs held a paying job in Kosova before coming to Canada (Table 4.4). Because of the difficult conditions of life during the previous decade, many Kosovars were unable to enter the labour force. Those who held paying jobs had worked as teachers, salespersons, accountants, and nurses, for example. Many

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more non-Kosovars held jobs in their home country (76%) than had KOSs (56%) or KOFs (35%). While the selection criteria for non-Kosovars may again be a factor in the differences between Kosovars and non-Kosovars, a substantial difference between KOSs and KOFs is also apparent. While this difference cannot be explained within the scope of this study, a contributing factor may be the strong familial ties that exist in the Albanian culture allowing for financial assistance to flow to respondents from family living abroad.

A majority of respondents with high school or more (72%) held jobs in their country of origin compared with 24% of those with less than high school. Those employed had typically worked in their occupation for several years; on average respondents had worked in their primary occupation for more than ten years. Only two females aged 45+ had been employed in their country of origin.

While the majority of respondents had not found employment in Canada at the time of the interview, significantly more non-Kosovars (42%) and KOFs (41%) than KOSs (25%) held jobs. A shorter timeframe for financial support may be a *push* factor for non-Kosovars to seek employment and for their sponsors to assist them in doing so. As well, strong family networking ties for the KOFs and those non-Kosovars who have family in close proximity may also have positively affected the attainment of employment. Kosovars were working in jobs such as: housekeeper, dishwasher, cook, construction and assembly worker, research interviewer (for this study), courtesy clerk, restaurant worker, and loading dock worker. Most of the Kosovars who were employed had been working at their current job for less than six months (90%); most considered their jobs to be temporary (80%); and most were working part-time (75%). About one-third of the part-time employees said that they were working part-time because they could not find a full-time job. Very few were self-employed.

In contrast, the large majority of employed non-Kosovars had been working for more than six months (90%) and they were more likely to be working full-time (68%) in permanent positions (90%). With the exception of one respondent, who was employed as an electrician, they were working in dead-end labouring positions, regardless of their education or experience. While the results indicate that the non-Kosovars were more self-sufficient and independent than the Kosovars, they may have fewer possibilities to progress further. Their stronger focus on employment and self-sufficiency may prove to be a barrier to further education, improvement of English skills, recognition and acceptance of educational degrees and certification, and employment that offers opportunities for advancement and development. Age appears to be a negative factor both in finding employment and in the short-term nature of employment. Only three respondents (9%) aged 45+ are employed, none in full-time jobs, and all in temporary positions.

Among those respondents who were not employed at the time of the interview, about half of the Kosovars and three-quarters of the non-Kosovars were not looking for a job. More males (68%) and females (50%) aged 45+ were seeking employment than their younger counterparts. The most common reasons for not seeking a job included going to school and being a homemaker.

## **Conclusion**

While the age and sex variables do influence the level of success that newcomers achieve in Canada, these variables are static. Language skills, education, and employment are

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influenced by the resources available to, and the efforts made by the newcomer, however factors outside of the refugees' control include the policies of the receiving country, the attitudes and reception of the receiving community, and services available to the newcomer. The differing levels of support and services for Kosovars and non-Kosovars influenced options available to the newcomers interviewed for this study.

With the exclusion of JAS respondents, the financial support for non-Kosovars came solely from their sponsors, with an understanding that the refugees would be self-supporting within one year. Because these respondents felt greater pressure to find employment and become self-supporting quickly, they had fewer options to attend ESL classes full-time or to obtain further education or job training.

All respondents self-assessed at low levels of English comprehension upon their arrival in Canada. Results of the same assessment during the month before the interview reveal that the Kosovars had better comprehension of spoken English even though they were less educated than the non-Kosovars. Because of their longer term funding, a higher percentage of Kosovars worked less, and more attended full-time ESL classes. In addition, they were eligible for four months more ESL training than other refugees were.

In order to be privately sponsored, non-Kosovars had to meet selection criteria based on their ability to settle in Canada, while Kosovars were selected on the basis of their situation of need. It is thus not surprising that non-Kosovar respondents were more highly educated and had higher rates of employment both in their home country and in Canada. As well, a higher percentage of non-Kosovars held full-time permanent jobs. A cursory examination of the data may lead one to surmise that non-Kosovars are in fact more quickly independent and more successful than their Kosovar counterparts.

When we examine the type of employment that the employed respondents hold, however, differences in refugee categories are not evident. The large majority are working at dead-end, low paying jobs, with few possibilities for advancement, attainment of transferable skills, or English language development, regardless of their education, training, or skills from the home country. The very fact that a higher percentage of Kosovars are working at part-time and temporary jobs may give them the advantage of being able to attend ESL classes, work at having credentials recognized, and/or continue their education or attend job skills training.

This is the first time in Canada that two groups of refugees are settling under such very different circumstances. It is beyond the scope of this study to determine if the additional supports for Kosovars and the very warm welcome and continued support from the Canadian public will translate into an easier integration and ultimately, greater success. What may seem to be success at the end of one's first year in Canada (self-sufficiency) may not translate into success in later years (continued improvement of quality of life).

## **Summary**

1. This chapter examines the demographic and social profiles of 109 KOS, 25 KOF and 22 non-Kosovar refugees. Themes for discussion include general demographics for respondents; the refugee-making experience; religion; language; employment and education.

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2. The average age of the different groups of respondents ranges from 25 to 28 years. When the ages of repatriated Kosovars are considered, the average age of Kosovars is increases.
3. Males and females are equally represented in all refugee categories except the non-Kosovar JAS, where all four respondents are female.
4. More Kosovars than non-Kosovars lived in UNHCR refugee camps and received assistance from international aid organizations. All respondents described situations of a short and intense war as reasons they left their home country but non-Kosovars also described situations in which they endured war for a long time.
5. For Kosovars, the time between leaving home and arriving in Canada averaged 52 days compared with 5 years for non-Kosovars.
6. Kosovars have a higher percentage of intact families than non-Kosovars. Financial support for family reunification for a period of time in 1999 made it easier to bring Kosovar families together. CIC made a point of sending extended family groups of Kosovars to the same city.
7. The majority of KOSs had a choice regarding which country to go to for asylum, but KOF respondents came to be reunited with family already living in Canada. For non-Kosovars Canada was the first country that accepted them as permanent residents.
8. Virtually all Kosovars report being Muslim but they were unable to define which branch of Islam they are affiliated with. Being Muslim appears to be more a matter of cultural identity than religious identification for Kosovars, and attendance at a place of worship is of less importance than it is to non-Kosovar Muslims.
9. All respondents self-assessed low levels of comprehension of spoken English during their first month in Canada. Although the non-Kosovars came with higher levels of education, their assessment of their English comprehension in the month prior to their interview was lower than that of Kosovars.
10. Kosovars were eligible for an additional four months of ESL training not available to other refugees.
11. In all refugee categories, males aged 45+ have the highest levels of education, while their female counterparts have the lowest levels of education. Non-Kosovars are more educated than Kosovars.
12. Non-Kosovars had higher levels of employment both in their home country and in Canada. They also had more permanent and full-time work.
13. A large majority of respondents were employed at low-paid labouring positions that did not reflect their education, credentials, skills or experience.

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## 5 THE SETTLEMENT EXPERIENCE OF REFUGEES

### **Introduction**

This chapter describes the settlement experience of Kosovar refugees with comparisons to non-Kosovar refugees where appropriate. Questions were posed in face-to-face interviews to respondents who were at least 16 years of age by the end of the year 2000. All respondents answered questions about their settlement experience in northern Alberta; their adjustment; their assessment of life in northern Alberta; community supports available to them; and their plans for the future. All of the Kosovars were asked about decisions to stay in Canada or to return to Kosova. In addition, the KOS refugees were asked questions relating to their experiences on the military bases where they first stayed upon their arrival.

### **Time at the Military Base in Canada**

After arriving at one of the two airheads in Canada, 95% of the KOS refugees spent time at one of several CFB sustainment sites located in Ontario and the Maritime provinces. A large majority (76%) of the Kosovar refugees who eventually settled in northern Alberta were placed at Gagetown, New Brunswick, while 13% stayed at Kingston, Ontario and 9% at Aldershot, Nova Scotia; the remainder were placed at either Trenton, Ontario or Greenwood, Nova Scotia. This section includes data from 104 respondents who stayed at sustainment sites in Canada.

### *Needs and Services Provided at Military Base*

Respondents were asked to list their family's most urgent needs upon arrival in Canada. To contextualize this question, we must remember that although these respondents had been refugees for only a couple of months many had been displaced within their home country for a considerably longer period of time. As well, the urgency of their flight meant they did not have time to prepare for the journey. Extreme crowding and very limited resources in the refugee camp in Macedonia contributed to the condition of the refugees on their arrival in Canada and, hence, their most pressing needs. Urgent needs upon arrival in Canada tended to be the most basic, including clothing/shoes (66%), food (59%), medical attention (51%), sleep/rest (45%), safety (34%), finding family members (29%) and bathing (13%).

A variety of services were offered to refugees during their stay at CFB sustainment sites. Respondents were asked which services they received and how helpful those services were. The services most accessed were interpretation, physical health care, and completion of forms, with 100%, 95% and 90% of respondents respectively using these services, followed by orientation about Canada (88%), finding family members (81%) and psychological support and ESL training (73%). In each area of service more than 90% of respondents rated that service as being *helpful* or *very helpful*. It became apparent to service providers very early on that within the Albanian culture there is a reluctance to acknowledge the need for psychological support services or to access them. Therefore at the military bases these services were often called family

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support; the interviewers for this study were briefed on all the names used for psychological support. From this we can assume that the access of the services reported is most likely accurate.

### *Activities at the Military Base*

While 91% of the respondents who stayed at a sustainment site indicated that Kosovars were involved in organizing and planning what to do on the bases, only one-third indicated their personal involvement. However, the personal involvement reported was of an assisting nature rather than an organizational and planning role. The most prevalent tasks listed were cleaning (23%), working in the kitchen (17%) and helping the Red Cross (13%). Other roles included helping with activities, sports, school, library, kindergarten, the teen centre, hairdressing and working with people in general.

Almost all respondents (95%) reported that they were able to choose how they spent their free time on the base. The most common activities were engaging in sports, walking to the village, watching TV and socializing. For example, respondents said the following: "I played soccer a lot and walked with friends." "We played basketball, watched TV, walked." "I walked with my friends and talked together about our problems." "We played soccer, walked in the city." "I spent time standing and talking to my friends. We were very happy when they brought us wool, knitting needles, crochet hooks, so we knitted together." "Made a lot of Canadian friends."

Those KOS refugees who had younger children (born after 1984) were asked how their children spent their leisure time on the military base. Parents responded that their children played, socialized and engaged in sports and games. "They played there all the time and I was very satisfied. My children were happy there. They had everything that they needed." "They had a good time there; played, walked." "They were very happy there because they were all together and all the time they played outside." "Playing, watching TV, in the room with games, walking." "Red Cross celebrated children's birthday—it was the most exciting moments for them." "Going in picnic with the soldiers and the persons from Red Cross." "There were about a thousand Kosovars, so [we] found friends, played soccer, sang, had concerts." Almost all of the parents reported that they were *very satisfied* (61%) or *somewhat satisfied* (34%) with their children's leisure activities, while only 5% were *dissatisfied*.

Seventy-nine percent of parents with school-aged children reported that their children attended school at the sustainment site. For those children who did attend school, 70% had Albanian-speaking teachers drawn from the refugee population. Most of the parents reported that they were *very satisfied* (33%) or *somewhat satisfied* (60%), while only 7% were *dissatisfied* with their children's schooling.

During their time at the sustainment sites, respondents engaged in a number of required activities. While some of these activities would normally take place prior to arrival in Canada, others usually took place at reception houses with the assistance of settlement staff. Upon arrival at the sustainment sites, the refugees' most urgent needs were addressed. Those needing immediate medical attention were attended to and basic needs were provided. The processing of minister's permits, applications for social insurance numbers, and child tax credits were completed at the bases. Almost all respondents found that the assistance they received in carrying out the required activities was *helpful* or *very helpful* (98%). The variety and abundance of food was also found to be *helpful* or *very helpful* (98%), followed by leisure activities (92%) and clothing received (90%). Housing in barracks provided warmth and safety but little privacy with

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multiple beds per sleeping room. While most respondents found the services to be *helpful* or *very helpful*, housing ranked the lowest in terms of satisfaction at 82%. Overall, virtually all reported that they were satisfied with their experience at the military base (73% *very satisfied*, 26% *somewhat satisfied*).

#### *Duration of Stay at the Military Base*

Almost half (49%) of the respondents stated that the time spent at the military base was *just right*. The remainder was almost equally divided in assessing the time as *too short* (23%) or *too long* (28%). Those who said that the time spent on the base was *just right* discussed the many friendships established there and the time they had to recover from their experience: "There was good organization." "We were in a safe place." "We had a good time there." "I found some friends there." "The time was necessary for making decision where to go, for finding the sponsoring groups and apartments." Persons who felt that the time on the base was too short found it difficult to leave their newly established community and made the following comments: "We were all together and we had friends, so it was very hard for us to separate from them." "We had really good time in base. We made a lot of friends. I cannot forget that time." "I wish I could stay more because we've had nice time there." "I was happy there. The soldiers were very friendly and helpful." Those who reported the time at the base as being too long referred to the crowded sleeping conditions, the short-term nature of life at the base, and their eagerness to resume their lives: "Living in a camp is not a normal life." "It was hard to stay there. I missed having my own place to live." "We were curious for the new place we will go." One respondent reported experiencing mixed feelings that the time on the base was too long and too short: "We met many friends that we may not see again" but "the barracks were so crowded."

#### **Settling in Northern Alberta**

Although the large majority of KOS refugees spent their first weeks in Canada at a sustainment site on a military base, the KOF and non-Kosovar refugees came directly to the cities in which they settled. The experience of several weeks at a sustainment site provided the KOSs with a setting to form opinions and expectations of Canada prior to settling in the new community. The extensive media coverage of the war, in conjunction with Canada's overwhelming acceptance of refugees from Kosova, created a very different setting for the arrival of Kosovars compared with the arrival of the non-Kosovars, who came virtually unannounced.

#### *Assistance from Sponsors and/or Canadian Relatives*

During their first month in Canada, 21% of the KOF respondents indicated that they were helped mainly by relatives in Canada compared with 55% for non-Kosovars (Table 5.1). The higher degree of assistance from relatives for non-Kosovars may be attributed in part to the greater percentage of non-Kosovars living with relatives in Canada, where help was readily available (55% of non-Kosovars, 33% of KOF). Almost half (46%) of the KOF respondents reported being helped mainly by both Canadian relatives and sponsors, compared with only 9% for non-Kosovars. Sponsors of some KOF families



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indicated that the Canadian relatives required as much support as the refugees, and these sponsors found themselves assisting the larger group.

Respondents were asked who assisted them in the month prior to the interview. KOF refugees indicated that in the past month they continued to be helped mainly by relatives in Canada (33%), by their sponsoring groups (29%), or by both (38%). Compared with the first month in northern Alberta, assistance from the sponsoring group had decreased and support from Canadian relatives had increased. Factors that may have contributed to this shift in source of assistance include the strengthening of relationships between newcomers and Canadian relatives, the increasing ability of the Canadian relatives to assist newcomers, and sponsor fatigue. The evolution of assistance to non-Kosovar refugees follows a different pattern. Respondents, who during their first month in Canada, received assistance mainly from their sponsoring group or from a combination of their sponsoring group and their Canadian relatives, were still being assisted by the same people. After one year, all KOFs continued to be at least partially dependent on Canadian relatives and/or sponsors for assistance while 18% of non-Kosovars reported being self-sufficient.

Fewer than 5% of all respondents lived with their sponsoring group during their first month in Canada. Due to a commitment from the local CIC to minimize change and disruption to the KOS refugees, all were offered a permanent residence upon arrival and none of these refugees lived with their sponsoring group. Thirty-three percent of the KOF group and 55% of the non-Kosovars lived with Canadian relatives during their first month in Canada. At the time of the survey, only KOFs were living with Canadian relatives and the percentage had declined to 8%.

Refugees who had not initially lived with their Canadian relatives or sponsoring group were asked about the frequency of their contact with this group during their first month in northern Alberta and during the month prior to their interview. Most respondents indicated meeting with the sponsoring group or Canadian relatives very frequently during their first month in Alberta.<sup>1</sup> At least one in three respondents reported that they met daily with their sponsors or Canadian relatives during their first month in northern Alberta (38% of KOS, 40% of KOF and 33% of non-Kosovars). By the month prior to the survey, these contacts had diminished with only 9% of non-Kosovars, 6% of KOS, and none of the KOF respondents meeting with their sponsors or Canadian relatives on a daily basis. While many of the respondents maintained at least weekly contact in the month prior to the survey (41% of KOS, 50% of KOF and non-Kosovars), some respondents reported that they no longer met with their sponsors and/or Canadian relatives (18% of KOS, 9% of KOF and 5% of non-Kosovars).

Sponsors and/or Canadian relatives met with respondents for a variety of reasons to assist them in settling in their new environs. Respondents were asked about the reasons for their contact with their sponsors and/or Canadian relatives and how helpful that contact was both during their first month in their new community and for the month prior to the study. During their first month, the large majority of respondents reported needing assistance in all areas of settlement, with the exception of looking for a job, where only 63% of the Kosovars and 59% of non-Kosovars reported needing help (Table 5.2). Given that many of these newcomers were unable to speak English or French at that time, it is to be expected that very few would identify the need to look for a job. More interesting is the finding that only 6% of the Kosovars and 27% of the non-Kosovars contacted their sponsors or Canadian relatives regarding this matter.

Between the first month and the month prior to the interview, the need for assistance diminished in most categories. Respondents moved to independence in a

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number of areas but also noted that the nature of the help they needed had changed from having their sponsors and/or Canadian relatives doing things for them to having them become advisors and mentors. Although many respondents still required assistance in the month prior to the interview, it must be noted that the need for assistance may have moved from a consistent need to an occasional one. Variations in the nature of required assistance between Kosovars and non-Kosovars are evident. In the month prior to the study, non-Kosovars no longer required assistance with appointments with CIC, likely because they no longer had reason to meet, while 80% of Kosovars still required assistance in meeting with CIC. More Kosovars required assistance with appointments with doctors and dentists (87% and 82%) than non-Kosovars (68% and 64%, respectively). While these findings may indicate that fewer non-Kosovars needed assistance in procuring medical and dental care, it may also mean that fewer were accessing medical and dental care or that they were more independent than non-Kosovars in seeking medical or dental attention.

During the first month there are few differences between KOS and KOF respondents other than KOF respondents not requiring assistance in finding an interpreter. In the month prior to the study, KOF respondents made less contact with their sponsors and/or Canadian relatives in most categories of assistance. The percentage of respondents requiring assistance in the month prior to the study diminished in most areas but stayed the same for Kosovars for social activities and emotional support. In the month prior to their interview, more Kosovars required assistance in looking for a job than during their first month (76% and 63%, respectively).

During the course of their first year in Canada respondents increased in self-sufficiency. As their English language skills improved, they were able to access the community directly and their contacts in the community helped them to build friendships and contacts exclusive of their sponsors and/or Canadian relatives. This adjustment and growth is consistently evident in the significantly decreased percentages of respondents who made contact with sponsors and/or Canadian relatives for assistance in the last month. The only exception is Kosovar respondents who sought assistance in finding a job; the percentage tripled from 6% to 18%.

Satisfaction with the help received from sponsors and/or Canadian relatives is consistently high, with a large majority of respondents rating the assistance as *very helpful* in all categories of assistance. The percentage of respondents giving this high rating ranges from 50% for finding an interpreter to 100% in numerous areas for non-Kosovars and from 67% for finding a job, to 94% in helping with school for children for the Kosovars. It is noteworthy that many of the non-Kosovar respondents live outside of a major city and hence it may have been more difficult to find interpreters in these areas of residence.

### *What Respondents Found Most Helpful*

Most of the refugees responded when asked what they found to be most helpful (87% of KOS, 96% of KOF and 100% of non-Kosovars), but relatively few responded when asked what they found to be least helpful (22% of KOS, 28% of KOF and 23% of non-Kosovars). The Kosovar respondents' comments about what they found to be most helpful included: "Filling in forms, registration in school, appointments with doctor, knowing the city." "Housing, health services, finding interpreters." "They have brought us many appliances, radio, TV, computer. They paid for internet for us for a whole year." "We were helped in everything." "Visiting, clothing, and all that we needed." "When I

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had a surgery, my sponsor helped me at home and with children one week non-stop.” “Orientation in the community, introducing with the people.” “Furniture for apartment.” “To have someone to talk to when we were sad. They helped us in spirit to feel better.”

The non-Kosovar respondents were more likely to mention financial support as most helpful: “They have supported us. We are dependent on them.” “Moral support, financial support, they were there for us.” “They did everything for us.” “Getting us here. They gave us everything.” “They subsidized us, found us an apartment, found us jobs.” “They covered all expenses during the first year (apartment, school, food, clothes, dentist, and for all living expenses).” “They were always available to me, visiting and providing financial help.” “They helped us for everything. They paid us all the bills, dental work, they brought us clothes. For Christmas they brought us a lot of stuff so they made my kids feel very happy.”

### *What Respondents Found Least Helpful*

Comments about what was least helpful were less frequent. Responses from Kosovars included: “Appointment with dentists.” “They didn’t find a job for us.” “They could not do more because they were busy with job, etc.” “Least helpful was about house supplies.” “They didn’t help us to bring my brother here.” “I think they didn’t have any reason to talk to me about my religion.” “They didn’t help us as other sponsors helped other Albanians. They didn’t find us family doctor, they didn’t take me to dentist.” “They didn’t visit us that much.” “We no longer see them. They don’t come to visit.”

Non-Kosovar refugees indicated: “At the beginning I did not know English, so that all the help from my sponsors in orientation was not helpful because I did not understand.” “Even though they were living far away from us they helped us as much as they could. Maybe they should have visited us more often but I understand that they couldn’t.” “Although the sponsors tried, they were not able to help me bring my family to Canada.”

### *Stress and Feelings*

The stress of change in almost every aspect of life is part of being a newcomer. While immigrants have chosen and anticipated their course, refugees are not afforded the luxury of choice, making the time of adjustment to the new environment a time of stress and mixed emotions. Respondents were asked how stressful their lives were during their first month in their new community and during the month prior to their interview. The differences between Kosovars and non-Kosovars are striking. Seventy-six percent of KOFs and 72% of KOSs reported that their life was *somewhat* or *very stressful* during their first month, compared with only 27% of non-Kosovars (Figure 5.1). By the month prior to the interview, these differences had levelled out, with the level of stress decreasing for Kosovars and increasing for non-Kosovars: nearly half of all respondents reported *somewhat* or *very stressful* lives (44% of KOS, 52% of KOF and 45% of non-Kosovars).

Respondents were asked about their feelings of happiness and sadness during their first and last months. More non-Kosovars (59%) reported feeling *somewhat* or *very happy* during their first month in their new community compared with the Kosovars (15% of KOS and 20% of KOF) (Figure 5.2). In the month prior to their interview, more Kosovar respondents reported feeling *somewhat* or *very happy* (44% of KOS and 60% of

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KOF) than did non-Kosovars (38%). Given that the Kosovars received a higher level of support throughout their time in Canada, one might assume that their lives would be the least stressful and happiest of all respondents. However, considering that they were plucked directly out of the war without time to process and come to terms with what had happened before coming to Canada, these findings are not surprising. It is also interesting to note that the KOFs who had relatives to help them with their settlement reported feeling the happiest but also the most stressed.

### *Uniqueness of the Kosovars*

A minority of the respondents were aware of differences in the benefits and services provided to Kosovar refugees entering under Operation Parasol compared with refugees entering under other programs (36% of KOS, 24% of KOF and 21% of non-Kosovars). When asked to describe the differences, Kosovar respondents typically responded with: "Free health services for two years, no fee when we applied for landed status, two years' financial support from the Federal Government." "I heard that other refugees had one year but we have two years' government support." One Kosovar mentioned that "expenses [for other refugees] were not guaranteed from Canada for their return [to their home country if they decided not to stay in Canada]." Another said: "We came quickly. Other refugees must wait in refugee camps." Non-Kosovar respondents noted that "Kosovars got everything for free: furniture, doctor's services, travelling. For us, it is not free, we have to pay for our airplane tickets." "They get two years of sponsorship. That's all I know."

### *Recommendations for Improvement of Sponsorship Program*

Respondents were asked how the sponsorship program could be more helpful to newcomers. Approximately half (47%) of the KOS refugees, 40% of the KOF refugees and 73% of the non-Kosovars offered suggestions. Sixty-one Kosovars provided a total of 70 suggestions focussing mainly on more contact with sponsors (23%), more information about life in Canada, how Canadians live and social customs (19%), more assistance in finding employment (14%) and more financial support to newcomers in terms of dollar amount and/or duration of coverage (10%). Suggestions from Kosovars included: "If they visited us very often, because I needed to talk to somebody and to have conversation. If they did that, I would be very happy and I would learn English faster." "Sponsoring groups should be bigger. They [sponsors] should have determined duties." "We don't feel their engagement to help us about the job. The main thing is they should try to find us a job, otherwise we are concerned about our future after two years." "Besides material and moral help, to be accepted by Canada in our former professions. I propose giving the opportunity to the refugees to try to work in their profession will be the best choice, work in one year can show at what level newcomers are at." Sixteen non-Kosovars responded with a total of 21 suggestions focussing on more assistance for sponsoring relatives (25%), more financial support to newcomers in terms of dollar amount and/or duration of coverage (25%), and more assistance in finding employment (14%). Responses included: "I am thinking about sponsoring someone else in the future. I think the Government should be more liberal in allowing that." "Finding a job maybe, but that would be too much to ask."

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Newcomers experience many differences between their life in Canada and in their home country, with respect to culture, religion, parenting, gender roles and much more. Respondents were asked if their sponsoring group and/or Canadian relatives had shown any knowledge of or had given them any advice about these differences. The majority of respondents (59% of KOS, 61% of KOF and 68% of non-Kosovars) indicated that their sponsors or relatives were aware of differences and/or gave advice about these differences. The knowledge and/or advice that respondents received follows several themes. They are listed here in rank order: learning about life in general; personal rights; being respectful; banking and education; religion; parenting styles; and learning English. Regarding the knowledge that sponsors had and the advice that they gave, refugees commented as follows: "They knew a little bit about us. They've advised us as much as they could." "They gave us advice how to behave in Canada." "[They told us] to respect each other and obey laws." "Women have more freedom here than in my country." "The same rights for women and men." "Men in Canada are supposed to do dishes and clean houses." "Kids have more freedom. They behave at school differently. Discipline at school is not so tight as in my home country." "They told us you're not supposed to beat your children here." "We talked about our traditions and their traditions." "They didn't know exactly about our culture and tradition. Some information that they had was wrong: relation between husband and wife, parents and children, about clothing, about religion, etc." "They didn't know too much about us but they showed respect for us. I appreciate that." "They were interested to know about our food, how we cook."

### **Adjustment to Life in Northern Alberta**

Respondents who had children under sixteen years of age (N=72) were asked about their children's adjustment to their new life in Canada. When asked to assess their progress on a 4-point scale where 1 meant *not at all adjusted* and 4 meant *very well adjusted*, parents felt overall that their children were adjusting *well* or *very well* (89% of KOS, 82% of KOF, and 100% of non-Kosovars). About half of the parents reported that they were concerned about their children's future in Canada (54% of KOS, 46% of KOF, and 53% of non-Kosovars). Specific concerns centred on education (N=19), future marriage (N=6), retention of language, customs and traditions (N=4) and the behaviour/freedoms of Canadian youth (N=4).

Using the same 4-point scale, respondents were asked about their own adjustment to life in Canada. Again the majority said that they were adjusting *well* or *very well* (84% of KOS, 83% of KOF and 78% of non-Kosovars). Fewer than half of the Kosovars (44% of KOS, 42% of KOF) and two-thirds of the non-Kosovars (68%) expressed concerns regarding their future. Concerns most common to all refugee categories included employment (N=37) and education (N=21). The non-Kosovars were unique in being concerned about family reunification (N=4).

### *Friends and Social Contacts*

Virtually all respondents reported making new friends in Canada (97% of KOS, 100% of KOF and 91% of non-Kosovars). Although respondents from each refugee category reported making friends, a consistently larger percentage of Kosovars established friendships (Table 5.3). The most striking differences are evident in friendships with

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newcomers from one's own culture (98% of Kosovars, 60% of non-Kosovars) followed by friendships with neighbours (80% of Kosovars, 45% of non-Kosovars). When we explored contact with various groups of people, excluding the workplace or school, we found that Kosovars have more frequent contact with others. Between one and two thirds of non-Kosovars never have contact with any of the groups other than their immediate family or other relatives, while fewer than one third of Kosovars have no outside contacts. As well, Kosovars consistently have more social contacts on a daily basis than non-Kosovars, with the exception of the work category. It appears that the non-Kosovars experience a higher degree of social isolation than the Kosovars, but it is not clear whether this situation is voluntary.

#### *Assessment of Life in Northern Alberta*

Respondents were asked to give their opinions on a number of statements about their community of residence, on a scale of 1 to 4 where 1 meant *strongly disagree* and 4 meant *strongly agree*. Statements addressed their location as being a good place to live, having good job opportunities, being a good place to raise a family and being a friendly and welcoming place. Kosovars consistently responded slightly more positively than non-Kosovars. Respondents *agreed* or *strongly agreed* with the statements with a range for Kosovars from 88% to 94% and for non-Kosovars from 82% to 87% with the exception of 'There are good job opportunities here for me.' Seventy-one percent of Kosovars and 54% of non-Kosovars *agreed* or *strongly agreed* with this statement.

Parents of children born after 1984 were similarly asked for their opinions on statements about whether schools in their community have good ESL programs, if they encourage children to keep their cultural identity, and if the schools in their community will help their children get to university or technical school. A large majority of all respondents felt that the school in their community would help their children proceed to postsecondary education (82% of Kosovars, 79% of non-Kosovars). However, a much higher percentage of Kosovars compared to non-Kosovars *agreed* or *strongly agreed* with the statements that the schools have good ESL (92% of Kosovars, 50% of non-Kosovars), and that the schools encourage children to keep their identity (73% of Kosovars, 50% of non-Kosovars).

#### *Best Thing about Living in Northern Alberta*

When asked "What is the best thing about living here?", 132 Kosovars offered 210 responses and 21 non-Kosovars offered 35 responses. The most frequently listed *best thing* was freedom/safety/peace with 29% of both Kosovar and non-Kosovar responses; followed by education (26%), employment (15%) and friendly people, and parks and recreation (both at 7%) for the Kosovars; and parks and recreation (14%), education (11%) and employment, not crowded and a good country (all at 9%) for the non-Kosovars. Remaining responses included multiculturalism, standard of living, ESL and stores/shopping. Respondent comments included the following: "Life is organized. I am not afraid for tomorrow." "To know your rights and obligations." "Safety without problems, the others help without hesitation." "Many cultures and histories of people live here." "There are many opportunities for schooling and a better job if one knows how to plan his or her life." "The schools here have good program for my children." "High life standard, many opportunities to get education, job." "Parks, green, swimming

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pools, playgrounds, walking paths.” “You can be friends with all cultures.” “I like stores — West Edmonton Mall.”

#### *Worst Thing about Living in Northern Alberta*

Regarding the question “What is the worst thing about living here?”, considerably fewer respondents commented. Ninety Kosovars and 13 non-Kosovars listed 99 and 13 *worst things*. For all respondents, the most prevalent answers related to the climate/mosquitoes (25%) and living too far away from their home country (17%). Eighteen percent of Kosovars listed lack of employment as being the worst thing. Other responses referred to cost of education, learning English, adjusting to life, not owning a home, living on government support, and drugs and alcohol being available to youth. Respondents’ comments included the following: “Summer time mosquitoes and long winters.” “It is far away and cold ... We are scattered everywhere in Canada.” “I am too far from my children living in Kosova. I feel very worried about that.” “Finding a good job. I am afraid about my future financial situation.” “If my children want to continue education that is very expensive.” “The biggest problem for me is learning English. The reason is that I am old and it goes slowly.” “Salaries are not enough. Canada does not accept diploma.” “Isolated city from Edmonton, too far from medical centre. For intervention we need to go to Edmonton.” “Place without perspective.”

#### **Contacts with Community Agencies**

The majority of the respondents (76%) were aware of local agencies which provide settlement assistance to newcomers to Canada, and 93% of this group have accessed at least one of these services. With the exception of psychological support (81%) and finding employment (79%), satisfaction with services received was very high, with more than 90% of users stating that the services were *helpful* or *very helpful*. A higher percentage of KOS respondents accessed services in all areas except physical health, where a higher percentage of KOFs sought assistance (64% of KOF, 42% of KOS and 0% of non-Kosovars) (Table 5.4). While lower percentages of non-Kosovars made contact with SPOs in most areas of service, a slightly higher percentage of non-Kosovars than KOFs sought service in the areas of ESL enrolment (73% of non-Kosovar, 71% of KOF) and finding employment (11% of non-Kosovar, 7% of KOF). Differences in access of services should, however, be explored by location of residence. First, just over one third (35%) of respondents living outside of Edmonton were aware of local immigrant serving agencies as opposed to 85% living in Edmonton. Of those who were aware of local SPOs and living outside of Edmonton, fewer than half made contact with the SPOs for assistance, with the exception of Language Benchmarks testing (50%) and ESL enrolment (75%). Respondents living outside of Edmonton are in a variety of cities offering a range of settlement services. While cities such as Calgary, Toronto and Montreal offer many services to newcomers, Camrose and Fort McMurray offer very limited services. However, differences in access may also be influenced by secondary migration, where newcomers arriving in a second city have not had the support of sponsors to link them to SPOs.

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### **Staying in Canada or Returning to Kosova**

Questions related to remaining in Canada or returning to Kosova were presented to Kosovar respondents only. At the time of the survey, 28% of the KOSs and 40% of the KOFs had received landed immigrant status in Canada. Almost all of the remainder (90% of KOS and 80% of KOF) had applied for landed status. Since coming to Canada, very few of the Kosovar respondents had visited Kosova to learn more about the situation there (8% of KOS and 4% of KOF). Most who had not been back to Kosova for a visit were planning to go (85% of KOS and 79% of KOF).

The majority of the Kosovars (79% of KOS and 76% of KOF) knew someone, usually a friend, who had moved back to Kosova. That is, 57% had at least one friend who had moved back to Kosova, while 24% had at least one relative who had moved back. Of the respondents who knew people who had moved back to Kosova, 10% said that they did not know why they had returned while the remainder presented 124 reasons why acquaintances had gone back. The large majority of responses were related to *pull* factors. The most commonly cited reason to return was to be with family or to take care of relatives (24%); to return to jobs or business (20%); homesickness (15%); to return to home and/or property (10%); or because they were too old and wanted to die at home (10%). The remaining 21% of responses also related mainly to *pull* factors (Kosova needed them, new freedom, to rebuild old life, economy was good in Kosova) and one *push* factor (couldn't find work in Canada). Respondents' comments included: "Because they left suddenly. They didn't plan for it. When NATO left, people felt they were free so they wanted to go back." "Because we didn't know anything about our parents even if they were alive or not. Then my sister decided to go back to find them." "They had a job there." "[Their houses were not destroyed] and they were asked to continue their jobs." "Some of them are teachers and went back to schools. Students went back to continue studies." "One of them was old and his son went with him because he had nobody else to take care of him." My father-in-law went back because he was 78 years old and he wanted to go back in his country. Like every old person he wanted to die in his country." "All their life they dreamed about freedom so they wanted to go back and to feel that." "They were concerned about the job and their future in Canada. Also, they were so nostalgic about their country and they moved back hopefully for better future in our homeland."

The respondents who knew people who had repatriated were asked if any of these acquaintances now want to come back to Canada. While 40% did not know, of those respondents who felt informed about this question, 83% stated that some of the repatriates wanted to return to Canada. Responses as to why repatriates wanted to come back focused mainly on the difficult situation that they found upon their return to Kosova with 78% of the responses related to the situation in Kosova being bad in general, bad economically, politically unstable, or unsafe. The remaining 22% of the responses related to *pull* factors: "Canada is free, safe, and a good country." Only nine responses addressed why repatriates do not want to return to Canada, with more than half of these related to having employment in Kosova.

Respondents use a variety of resources to find out what is happening in their home country. An overwhelming majority of Kosovars use the telephone (95%), 78% the media and 50% Albanian friends and contacts in Canada. Another 30% use email to find out about the situation in Kosova. The non-Kosovar refugees rely primarily on the telephone (68%), media (46%), and letter mail (18%) to find out about what is happening in their country of origin. Fifty percent of the Kosovars and 81% of the non-Kosovars



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said that they knew enough about what is happening in their country of origin to decide whether to stay in Canada or to leave Canada. Older Kosovars, both male and female, were somewhat less likely to feel that they had enough information. Kosovar refugees who indicated that they did not know enough about what was happening in Kosova were asked what else they would like to know. Sixty-four persons offered 83 responses, the most frequent focussing on a need to know more about everything in general (38%), the political situation (30%), the economic situation (10%) and the future in Kosova (10%).

### *Plans for the future*

The respondents were asked what they planned to do in their second year in Canada. Table 5.5 shows that most of the Kosovars planned to prepare to apply for Canadian citizenship, return to Kosova for a visit, go to school or college or university, find a job or a better job, sponsor family members to come to Canada, and apply for a student loan. Persons who already had professional or technical credentials indicated that they would seek to have their credentials recognized. Very few said that they planned to move to another city in Canada (7%) or to move back to Kosova (3%). The plans of the non-Kosovars were similar except that they were less likely to plan a visit to their country of origin and were more likely to plan to move to another city in Canada.

Almost all of the refugees said that they were planning to stay in Canada (88% of Kosovars and 96% of non-Kosovars) with most of the remainder being undecided. Only 5% of the Kosovars and none of the non-Kosovars have made plans to leave Canada. Reasons given by the six Kosovars who planned to leave included: "My husband wants to go back after some years." "I worry so much for my family there, if they were here I would like to stay." "I have a job in Kosova." "I am homesick." Those who planned to stay gave the following reasons: "Canada is a good country." "I like this country. It is a good place to live." "Canada is a free country." "Here it is safe. Have good school programs." "Good opportunities to get education and job." "To get education, job - to start new life." "I have begun a new life; children are taking schools; employment opportunity is high." "It is quiet place." "Here is good life." "The people are very friendly." "It is a peaceful country, we can raise our children here in freedom." "Living there is very difficult. We don't have house, property was gone." "We don't have anything there because we lost our property which we had." "Here is better life than in Kosova."

### **Final Comments from the Refugees**

Respondents were invited to talk about any aspects of their experience as refugees that may have been missed in their interview. Over half of the Kosovars (56%) and two-thirds of the non-Kosovars (68%) offered comments.

Seventy-five Kosovars offered 118 comments, with the majority (62%) being expressions of appreciation and gratitude to Canada, the Canadian government, the Canadian people, sponsors, teachers, NGOs, and the military bases. Thirty-two percent of the Kosovar responses pertained to general concerns about their future life in Canada, and more specifically about employment, their children's retention of the Albanian culture and language, and family reunification. A small minority (7%) referred to bad memories and not wanting to remember the past. Comments included: "I like to live here. We have

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good opportunities for everything. We have adjusted very well here, so I don't have anything else to say, just I want to thank Canadian government and all people who helped us." "I want to thank all people who helped us, especially our children's teachers." "We are very satisfied with life here. Government, sponsoring group and our relatives helped us a lot. I would like to thank them all." "UNHCR helped us a lot." "I'd like to thank Canadian Government, Red Cross, sponsoring groups and all Canadians who helped us a lot." "I can't forget friends that I made in Military base. I can't forget wonderful time that we have had there. I appreciate the hospitality of Canadians, especially in Military base." "As we know, we came here suddenly because of war, but I'm surprised with the hospitality of Canadians. They are so nice and they helped us a lot about school and everything, that means to build a new life here." "I would like our children once or twice in a week to have study in their own language." "I am very happy here. We have a good life now but I worry for future because we are old and we cannot work." "I think it is very difficult to find a new way of life." "CIC needs to keep their promise to help us bring our other family members to Canada." "Grande Prairie is a nice place to live but it's so far from the centre of information, from the schools and from health services." "I don't like to remember the days in the camps in Macedonia. Those days there were a bad experience."

The majority (88%) of the 32 comments from 15 non-Kosovar respondents focused on concerns over a variety of topics. Concerns similar to those of the Kosovar respondents included comments about the future, employment, and family reunification. In contrast to the Kosovars, non-Kosovars suggested that the government speed up and extend the process for coming to Canada, provide more funding for refugees and sponsors, and reduce the cost of the entry visa. In their own words, non-Kosovar refugees said: "We waited three years for the answer after we applied for coming to Canada. It is too long. Also, it is difficult to find money to pay \$970 for each adult for entry visa." "It was long time since we applied for coming to Canada ... workers at Canadian Embassy had very bad behaviour. After four years, finally they said, yes. Canada is very beautiful country and we are very satisfied with life here. Now we are working and trying to make better future for us." "All of my family is scattered [over several countries]. It is so expensive to call them and see how they are. They expect me to send them money. I have no money. I cry everyday because I miss my family. Why can't the Canadian government bring my family to Canada?" "When refugees come to Canada they come with education and experience, but once they get here they are considered uneducated and [considered to] have no work experience or knowledge to work in Canada." Some wished for better English language skills. "We want to learn English—we tried to go to ESL when we came but were told there was no room in the classes."

## Summary

1. Three-quarters of the KOS respondents lived at the Gagetown sustainment site. KOFs and non-Kosovars went directly to their settlement location.
2. KOSs accessed a variety of services at the sustainment sites: interpretation, physical health care, assistance with completion of forms, orientation, finding family members, psychological support and ESL training. They consistently rated these services positively.

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3. At the sustainment sites, KOS respondents participated in required activities as well as helping around the camp. They also relaxed and took time to rest and recover. Half of these respondents felt that their time at the sustainment site was just right, while the remaining 50% were evenly split in thinking the time was *too long* or *too short*.
4. Upon their arrival in northern Alberta, KOSs went directly to their new residences while one-third of the KOFs and half of the non-Kosovars lived with their Canadian relatives or sponsors. At the time of the interview almost all respondents were living in their own residences.
5. Initially respondents depended heavily on their sponsors and one-third met with their sponsors on a daily basis. During the month prior to their interviews fewer than 10% were meeting with their sponsors on a daily basis. Not only did the frequency of sponsor/refugee contact diminish, the nature of and reasons for contact changed.
6. During their first month in Canada, three-quarters of the Kosovar respondents said their lives were stressful or very stressful compared with only one quarter of the non-Kosovars. In the month prior to the interviews these figures had changed to approximately 50% for all refugee categories. While Kosovars had become less stressed, non-Kosovars became more stressed. Although fewer respondents reported feeling *somewhat* or *very sad*, feelings of sadness followed similar patterns.
7. One in three KOSs and fewer than one in four KOFs and non-Kosovars were aware of differences in benefits and services provided to Kosovar refugees who came under Operation Parasol. Those who were aware of differences indicated that Kosovars experienced increased support and services, and an expedited process in coming to Canada.
8. Three-quarters of non-Kosovars and a large minority of Kosovars offered recommendations for improvement to the sponsorship program. Kosovar respondents' suggestions focused on more frequent contact with sponsors, more information about life in Canada, better assistance in finding employment, and lastly, greater financial assistance. Non-Kosovars' responses concentrated on greater financial support and assistance in finding employment.
9. More than three-quarters of all respondents said that they themselves are adjusting *well* or *very well* to life in Canada, but a higher proportion of parents felt that their children are adjusting *well* or *very well*. Fewer than half of the Kosovars expressed concerns about their future employment and education, while a majority of non-Kosovars worried about those concerns and about family reunification. Parents were apprehensive about their children's education, future marriage, the retention of language and customs, and how the freedoms of Canadian youth will effect their children.
10. More than three out of four respondents were aware of local agencies that provide settlement assistance to newcomers. The large majority of them accessed at least one or more of these services. Satisfaction with the help they received was high but least so in the areas of psychological support and finding employment.

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11. More than three-quarters of the Kosovar respondents knew someone who had repatriated. They attributed repatriations largely to *pull* factors: homesickness, family reunification, jobs, homes, property, and a desire to grow old and die in one's home country. Most respondents think that the repatriates want to return to Canada.
12. Kosovar's plans for their second year in Canada centre mainly on attaining self-sufficiency and independence. While many would like to return to Kosova for a visit, very few plan to repatriate or to move to another city in Canada. Non-Kosovars respondents were similar, but they were less likely to plan a visit to their home country and more likely to plan a move to another city.
13. A majority of the Kosovars' final comments focused on their expressions of gratitude to Canada, it's government, Canadians, many of whom assisted them, and one third expressed concerns about their future in Canada. Non-Kosovars mainly focused on concerns about their future, employment and family reunification.

**Note**

1. For those families moving to Alberta after settling in another city in Canada, frequency of meeting with sponsors pertains to their first month in Alberta.

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## 6. REFUGEE SPONSORS

### **Introduction**

One of the most critical roles in many successful settlement experiences is that of the sponsoring group. All newcomers undergo considerable stress when they move to a new country, but refugees, who have not chosen to leave their homelands but were forced out, and who may have lost family and friends in addition to a way of life, are especially in need of support on arrival. Different educational and health systems, government agencies, laws, and daily customs, to say nothing of language barriers, all contribute to a confusing and difficult maze that is best negotiated with a guide.

### **Types of Sponsorships**

Sponsoring arrangements for refugees fall under the categories of government, private, and JAS.

#### *Government-assisted Refugees*

Government-assisted refugees (GARs) are provided with a living allowance and schooling opportunities from the federal government for up to a year. Settlement agencies provide assistance and advice to GARs, helping them locate appropriate language training if necessary and assisting with the integration process in general. The federal government funds a host program, usually operated through settlement agencies, in which volunteer hosts, who have been through a screening procedure, are matched with GARs to assist them with social integration.

#### *Private Sponsorship*

In private sponsorship arrangements, non-profit organizations, such as churches or ethnic groups, sign an agreement with the federal government indicating that they will be financially responsible for a refugee or refugees for a specified period of time. In the 1970s when Canada received a large number of Vietnamese refugees, the government allowed groups of at least five individuals to sponsor refugees, as long as they could prove that they could provide financial support. Since that time, the federal government has changed sponsorship procedures, and sponsorship must now go through a SAH. Privately sponsored convention refugees classified as CR3s are judged to need a settlement period of up to one year. Most of the privately sponsored refugees in Canada come under this category: a SAH takes full financial responsibility for these individuals.

#### *Joint Assistance Sponsorship*

JAS is another sponsoring arrangement in which the federal government has financial responsibility for the first part of the program and a SAH covers the rest. The amount of government support is negotiated with the SAH, depending on the perceived needs of the refugee group in question. Currently, for example, refugees from Sierra Leone are funded by the federal government for the first four months in Canada and their sponsors are

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responsible for the subsequent eight months. The experiences of the sponsors of non-Kosovar refugees discussed in this study represent the typical CR3 and JAS situations in Alberta.

### *Sponsorship of the Kosovars*

In many respects the sponsorship of the Kosovars differed from previous sponsoring arrangements in Canada. When the Kosovars arrived, an appeal for sponsors went out to the Canadian public. This was the largest single group of refugees to enter the country since the time of the Vietnamese *Boat People*. Once again, sponsorship groups were formed, but they had to be associated with a SAH. The Kosovars were classified as CR5s: special needs cases selected under Joint Assistance Sponsorship. Although regulations concerning JAS refugees stipulate that they can receive up to two years of settlement funding, depending on perceived need, it is usually the case that they are funded for no more than a year (as is the case with the non-Kosovar JAS refugees who participated in this study). Unlike previous agreements, the federal government chose to take full financial responsibility for all the Kosovars for two full years, rather than assessing needs on a case by case basis. Rather than asking settlement agencies to deal directly with Kosovar refugees, the government decided to assign sponsors to each refugee family, even those who had family members already living in Canada. Thus the Kosovars are officially JAS refugees, but the federal government agreed to fully fund their living expenses for two years, and covered some of the costs for medical and dental needs, normally a provincial responsibility in the case of GARs, and the client's or sponsor's responsibility in the case of the privately sponsored refugees. Another difference in the treatment of the Kosovars had to do with subsidized housing. In the past, there have been problems with housing costs for refugees in Alberta, because the federal government does not usually exceed the limits of the provincial government's Supports for Financial Independence (social assistance). In the Kosovar case, however, subsidies were granted in order to keep extended families in the same residential area.

In this chapter, we will consider the experiences of the sponsors of refugees in northern Alberta between 1999-2000. We will make comparisons between those located in the smaller centres of Grande Prairie, Ponoka and Camrose versus Edmonton; experienced versus inexperienced individuals; and sponsors of Kosovars versus sponsors of non-Kosovar refugees who are in the regular JAS program or who are privately sponsored. The quantitative information is drawn from questionnaires that were completed by members of sponsoring groups. (In some instances one person completed the form on behalf of all members in the group; in other instances more than one person from a single group completed the survey. For this reason, there are 110 responses to the questionnaire although there were 119 participants representing 49 sponsoring groups.) The qualitative information is taken from the focus group interviews; the sponsors welcomed the opportunity to express their feelings about the sponsorship experience.

### **The Northern Alberta Experience**

The staff in the CIC office in Edmonton were responsible for locating sponsors for the Kosovars who were destined for either Grande Prairie or the Edmonton region within a very short time period. Although experienced SAHs were sought, many of the

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participants in the sponsoring organizations had not themselves been involved with sponsorship arrangements in the past. In some instances the SAHs were national organizations, such as World Vision. Given that they were already agreement holders, CIC felt that they could depend on the national groups to provide orientation to the local sponsors. In most instances, however, SAHs did not provide training to their members. The non-Kosovars followed the same pattern as other CR3 and JAS refugees who have been destined to Alberta in the past.

### *KOFs and KOSs*

Kosovars who had relatives already living in Canada (KOFs) were sent to join their family members directly. It is for this reason that several Kosovars were settled in Grande Prairie, a small city in northern Alberta, even though the services in place were minimal. It was decided that even KOFs would need the assistance of a sponsoring group, given that all the Kosovars were classified as high need. Some Kosovars with no family in Canada were also destined to Grande Prairie, but the majority were placed in the Edmonton region.

CIC's involvement in the settlement of Kosovar refugees differed somewhat from their involvement with other refugees. Generally speaking, settlement agencies, such as Catholic Social Services (CSS), arrange to meet government-sponsored refugees, take them to a Reception House, help them to find accommodation, and orient them to the community. In the case of the Kosovars, however, CIC staff met many of the refugees at the airport, arranged for accommodation, and solicited contributions of goods from organizations such as the Salvation Army. (Eventually, CIC relinquished some of these tasks to others.) In effect, they took on a component of the traditional role of settlement agencies and private sponsors. The sponsors' primary responsibility was to facilitate social integration through assistance in arranging for ESL and other types of education, medical and dental appointments, banking, shopping and so on.

### *Sponsors*

When asked how they became involved, 58% of respondents said that their church was the impetus. Ten percent mentioned the media, and another 12% approached CIC, presumably because of the media attention. Nine percent stated that non-governmental agencies had contacted them directly, while 7% were requested to participate by relatives. Two percent of the respondents indicated that the refugees they sponsored were their own relatives.

Sixty percent of the people interviewed reported that this was their first sponsoring experience. Of those who had sponsored refugees in the past, the majority (60%) had been involved since 1989 or earlier. Many mentioned having sponsored Vietnamese in the late 1970s and early 1980s. When we examined the sponsoring groups further, we determined that all of the individuals matched with KOFs were sponsoring for the first time. While 62% of those who sponsored KOSs had no previous experience, the reverse was true for non-Kosovar sponsors, only 31% of whom were sponsoring for the first time.

### *Sponsor Training*

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CIC Edmonton arranged a number of orientation sessions in which their staff, settlement workers from CSS and the Mennonite Centre for Newcomers (MCN), representatives of the Red Cross, and others provided information to the sponsors in Edmonton. One CIC staff member also went to Grande Prairie to conduct an orientation session for the sponsors there. Somewhat later, orientation sessions were organized in Edmonton featuring speakers from the Centre for Survivors of Torture and Trauma.

The majority of respondents indicated that they had received orientation; over half of the sponsoring groups had sent at least one representative to the orientation panel sessions jointly conducted by CIC, CSS, and other service providers at the First Presbyterian Church. Another 11% reported that they had received orientation from CIC; in all but one instance, it was not clear whether the respondents meant the orientation sessions at the First Presbyterian or separate sessions conducted solely by CIC, as was the case in Grande Prairie. Nineteen percent of the respondents said that they had received no training; these individuals were almost all sponsors of non-Kosovar refugees. Two settlement agencies, the MCN and Focus Canada, provided additional sessions for Mennonite and Ismaili sponsors, respectively. Three groups mentioned having attended a Survivors of Torture and Trauma workshop on post-traumatic stress syndrome (PTSS). One JAS sponsor recounted that her group relied on a Resettlement Assistance Program Delivery Handbook (RAP) from CIC Refugee Branch for all information. "This information wasn't enough for me. We didn't know enough about the refugees like from where they came, do they speak English, and other things." In only two cases did sponsors report having received information from an umbrella SAH: "Our church office from Ontario also sent information regarding the sponsoring process, but the information was not specific to Kosovars." "We relied heavily on Canadian Lutheran World Relief ... in Vancouver." The findings of the focus group interviews suggest that sponsoring groups varied considerably in attendance at the orientation sessions; in some cases, all members of the group attended, and in others only one or two went. "The post-traumatic stress workshop was on a Wednesday and not all the people could get there because they had to work. I was sick about not being there." There were also discrepancies in terms of how well those who did attend related the information to other members of the sponsoring group: "We had as much information as one could possibly assimilate at any one time, but the sponsors did not have time to pull themselves together." "The training was very thorough, CSS did a great job, but the majority of the sponsors were not at the training sessions."

In future, it may be preferable to hold ongoing training sessions rather than one-time orientations. Sponsoring groups should be asked to produce a dissemination plan for information at training sessions and other resources so that all members receive updates.

When asked how adequate or helpful the orientation was, the sponsors' opinions ranged from high praise to disappointment and frustration. On the whole, however, sponsors realized that CIC and the settlement agencies were under severe constraints themselves. Even though more than half of those who responded to the question indicated that they had not received enough information ("The orientation session left me with more questions than answers"), many recognized that no one in Alberta had access to the specifics that the sponsors wanted. Several people mentioned that they had received inaccurate information in the sessions, and were thus taken aback when the refugee families arrived. Others said that, although they needed more information, they could not have handled more in a single session: "I think that with any more training the details would have gone in one ear and out the other." How happy people were with the



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training sessions depended on a number of variables, including the degree of trauma their refugee families evidenced: "We were told at the beginning that the experience would be intense, but I don't think we knew what *intense* meant. I thought it would be intense for the first few months and then we would come and go and develop an ongoing relationship. I expected them to be functioning at that point." The flexibility of individuals within the sponsoring group also affected their perceptions of the orientation: "I thought it was as well thought-out and planned as it could have been because there will always be situations that happen that no one can plan for or train you for." Experienced sponsors were more likely than first-time groups to express positive views on the training they received. An in-depth training program, delivered by settlement agencies and involving experienced sponsors in a mentoring role, would be useful in the future. These sessions should have accurate information specific to the refugee group in question and should provide guidelines for the work of the sponsors.

### *First Month Experiences*

We asked a number of questions regarding the sponsors' involvement with the refugees in their first month in the community to which they were sent. The numbers of people from a single group who were directly involved with the families in the first month varied greatly (0 to 30), but the most frequent response was seven group members. The contact was relatively intense in the first month, given that 35% of sponsoring groups met with the refugees daily, and 36% met with them between four and six times a week. Another 25% saw the families between one and three times a week. The remaining 4% of respondents indicated that they met with their families less than once a week. In the case of one CR3 sponsorship, no one in the sponsoring group met with the refugees. When asked about the activities of the first month (Table 6.1), the majority of sponsoring groups followed similar patterns. On average, 91% of the respondents said they were *satisfied* or *very satisfied* with many of the activities; the only activity that was somewhat less satisfying than the others was appointments with dentists: 16% expressed dissatisfaction with this (satisfaction figures not reported in table). Some possible reasons for this will be discussed later in the chapter. When the responses of sponsors of the non-Kosovars and Kosovars were compared, a noticeable discrepancy was apparent in the amount of involvement in help with job-seeking in the first month: 18% of those who sponsored CR3 or JAS refugees versus 4% of the KOS sponsors, and 0% of the KOF sponsors.

Table 6.2 indicates sponsors' involvement in assisting refugees by location, Edmonton versus other centres. Because many of them sponsored non-Kosovars, it is not surprising that the degree of involvement is lower among sponsors outside of Edmonton.

In the focus group discussions, the sponsors were asked what decisions they had made on behalf of the refugees. Almost all the sponsors of KOSs and KOFs indicated that they had made initial decisions with regard to physicians, dentists and banks. Many also reported that they had decided on accommodation, ESL programs for adults and schools for the children. However, in most instances, the sponsors indicated that they tried to lay out options to the families and let them make choices. In the case of KOFs, the family members who were already here proffered their own advice on such matters. The majority of sponsors indicated that the Kosovars were independent when it came to making decisions and often changed from the original dentist, for example, because they had learned through their community of someone else who was deemed to be preferable.

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Several sponsors mentioned that on the advice of CIC they had arranged for a block on long distance calls for the first three months.

In the focus group interviews two instances were referred to in which sponsors appeared to have overstepped their bounds, imposing their will on matters of a deeply personal nature. These were clearly rare occurrences.

Although some of the sponsors of the non-Kosovar refugees took the same role as the KOS and KOF sponsors, others indicated that the refugees themselves made all their own decisions. In one instance, a non-Kosovar sponsor indicated that CSS "did everything."

### *Group Member Involvement*

When asked about the number of people in each group who stayed involved over the period between the refugees' arrival and the time of the interview (roughly a year) there was a range of responses. Within the KOF and non-Kosovar sponsorship groups, 75% and 67% of the respondents reported that at least half of the group was still involved, respectively, whereas the majority of the KOS sponsors (55%) said that fewer than half of their group members were still seeing the refugee families. Several sponsors shared the sentiments of this individual: "There were a large number of helpers available at first, but eventually it became a smaller core who specialized in particular areas of assistance, e.g., medical, education and recreation." Others indicated that as the Kosovars became more independent, their roles changed: "[There was] very heavy participation in the early months; we're still involved one year later – more social activities now." There were also responses such as the following: "Many people indicated an interest to begin with, but were not interested in developing a relationship or being involved on a long-term basis. Very quickly only two of us were involved, then only myself." "All members of the group welcomed the refugees at the airport. Only two continued with day to day assistance."

The KOS sponsor groups may have undergone more attrition, but as indicated in Table 6.3, they started out with a greater percentage of large groups. The most notable difference across sponsoring groups lies between those in Edmonton versus those in the smaller centres, where one year after sponsorship began 57% of the groups had more than five active members.

Despite the smaller numbers, in almost all instances (99%) the groups were still in touch with their refugee families after a year and were still providing assistance of some sort (Tables 6.1 and 6.2). As one might expect, the emphasis had shifted from immediate tangible needs to emotional and social support. When we compared the different sponsoring arrangements, it became clear that the activities of the sponsors of the non-Kosovar refugees are somewhat different than those of the Kosovar sponsors. Most notably, the areas of education (ESL and registration of the children in school), shopping, filling out forms, and appointments with the doctor are considerably lower than in the Kosovar case. This suggests that the non-Kosovar refugees are expected to be somewhat more independent than the Kosovars at the same time in their initial settlement period in Canada. Also, the sponsors of the non-Kosovar newcomers provided substantially more help in terms of job-seeking than did the sponsors of the other groups. Several factors may have contributed to this difference. The private and JAS sponsors of the non-Kosovars were supporting the families financially until they could become independent; for this reason there may have been more pressure on the refugees to find work in order to be self-sufficient. Debt may have been another motivator for the non-Kosovar

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refugees to find employment: unlike the Kosovars, they are obliged to reimburse the federal government for their airfare to Canada, and those who came before February 2000 were required to pay the right of landing fee (ROLF) of \$975. Furthermore, the non-Kosovar refugees have typically spent long periods in refugee camps. By the time they arrive in Canada, many of them have dealt with some of the trauma resulting from the circumstances that forced them out of their homelands. For these individuals, getting on with their lives is a top priority. The federal provision of an additional year of living support for the Kosovars may also have influenced the lower figures for job-seeking in the KOS/KOF sponsorship groups. Several sponsors indicated that they encouraged the Kosovars to get as much ESL as possible before entering the labour market.

When we compared sponsors in Edmonton with sponsors in smaller centres in terms of activities undertaken most recently, we found that although a higher percentage of sponsors in smaller cities spent time talking with refugees, they had withdrawn completely from services that are normally completed in the first year in private or JAS sponsorship arrangements. Over a fifth of the sponsors in Edmonton were still conducting orientation, making appointments with CIC and so on, after the refugees had been in Canada for over a year.

### *Expectations*

We asked the sponsors a series of questions about their own expectations of the refugees and CIC, as well as their perceptions of the refugees' expectations of them and of Canada in general. The responses, which are detailed in the sections that follow, are indicative of unwarranted assumptions made by both sponsors and refugees. Although it would be impossible for CIC to anticipate every misconception, both sponsors and refugees would have benefited from more information about their respective roles. For example, some sponsors were disturbed by the fact that their families assumed they were on call at any time of day or night. What they likely did not know was that this assumption on the part of some of the Kosovars may have developed at the military bases, where there were people on call to meet their needs 24 hours a day. Community settlement agency staff routinely explain to their refugee clients that unless there is an absolute emergency, they should call during office hours only. However, unless a sponsoring group undertook to explain time boundaries to their families, the KOS refugees would have only their experience at the military base to judge by.

Sponsors too, made faulty assumptions that caused problems for the refugee families. In one case, for instance, a well-meaning sponsor encouraged a Kosovar father to attend the birth of his and his wife's child, despite their protests. In Kosova it is not customary for the father to be in the delivery room. With cultural issues, it is difficult to know what is universal and what is specific. In another instance, a sponsor imposed her views on matters of birth control and portrayed them as the *Canadian way* even though the *Canadian way* is, in fact, a matter of personal choice. The natural inclination is to assume a shared value base; when values differ or one group has inadequate knowledge regarding another, misunderstandings result. The focus group transcripts indicate that over time the sponsors and the refugees made adjustments to each other, but much of the confusion might have been alleviated had both groups had an understanding of the boundaries of their roles and some basic awareness of each other's cultural norms.

Moreover, it would have been useful for some of the inexperienced groups to be given examples of the procedures followed by experienced, successful sponsors. Had the responsibilities and various approaches to meeting those responsibilities been clarified

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early on, perhaps some of the group dynamics and distribution of tasks would have been better. For instance, one sponsor complained that her refugee family appeared to be unable to plan in advance. There will always be circumstances requiring the assistance of a sponsor that arise without warning, but a sponsorship group should be encouraged to build in safeguards for such an eventuality in their own initial planning.

#### Sponsors' Initial Expectations of Refugees

The sponsors were asked to comment on their initial expectations of the refugees and whether those expectations were borne out. Their responses can be categorized according to six themes:

1. Geographical location
2. Religion
3. Psychological well-being
4. Gender roles
5. Child rearing practices
6. Decisions to repatriate

In some instances, sponsors clearly assumed that Kosovars would behave in a similar manner to themselves (e.g., child rearing practices and gender roles), whereas in other cases, such as psychological well-being and religion, they expected differences. The majority of sponsors found one or more of their expectations to be contrary to reality.

Sponsors of Kosovar refugees cited a number of expectations and consequent surprises upon meeting the families. Several groups said that they thought the Kosovars would be rural people, *old-fashioned* individuals with no English language skills. These individuals were surprised that their families were modern, urban people and, in several cases, at least one of the family members could speak English. "We expected the language barrier to be very difficult but the time on the base getting very basic English made all the difference in the world." Interestingly, several people expected that all the Kosovars would speak some English, and those groups who received families in which no one had English were frustrated by the communication difficulties and the lack of interpreters.

Sponsors were expecting devout Muslims. They were under the mistaken impression that all the Kosovars would be teetotalers. As one individual noted "There were misunderstandings about the consumption of alcohol. They say they're going for 'language lessons' meaning they are going for a beer." "They're not actively religious." "Things were different from what we were told—shaking hands was no problem." (Sponsors reported that in some of the orientation sessions, they were given descriptions of Islamic practices that in fact did not apply in the Kosovar case, e.g., they were told that it is inappropriate for Muslim women to shake hands with strangers.)

Many of the sponsors expected the Kosovars to be psychologically traumatized. In some instances, their expectations were accurate: "They didn't leave their apartment for a month." More often, however, the sponsors expressed surprise at how well adjusted their refugee families seemed: "We expected a lot of psychological stress. At the airport we expected people getting off the plane in a weak and fragile state. Instead we found five healthy adults." "[We expected] them to be upset, but no." "We expected them to be less alert ... The time on the military base was good for them."

Kosovar society is very patriarchal, and some sponsors were thus expecting clearly defined and distinct gender roles; in other cases, they were surprised by family

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relations: "We had confusion on the gender issue. We tried to do things to show how Canada is different." A male sponsor said the following: "I took them food and told them that I had made it. [The father] now tells me that he vacuums but I think he's teasing me." "The daughter-in-law had to stay home to take care of in-law elders and as a result, she did not go to ESL. She would have liked to go."

Several sponsors commented on the behaviour of Kosovar children, and the apparent reluctance on the part of their parents to discipline them. "Kids run the house." "Parents do not take responsibility for their kids." "They believed that Canada was so safe they didn't have to supervise their children." "I was surprised at how physically violent some kids are." The sponsors' reaction to the children's behaviour reflects a lack of information regarding typical responses to conditions of war. Matters of discipline vary from one culture to another: if sponsors have no access to information about differing child-rearing practices, they tend to judge from the viewpoint of their own backgrounds.

The sponsors were surprised at how quickly the Kosovars made decisions about whether to stay in Canada or to return to Kosova. "We were surprised that they decided within one week to stay in Canada." "The family we sponsored did not want to come to Canada. They never did try to settle." "I expected they would stay. I wish they had given Canada a try." "The decision to go home was made almost immediately." Virtually all of the sponsors of families who returned to Kosova expressed disappointment. Some individuals commented on the high emotional investment they had made; these individuals were quite hurt by the sudden return of the Kosovars.

There were no noticeable differences in expectations or surprises across experienced and inexperienced sponsors of Kosovars; however, the sponsors of non-Kosovars had fewer expectations overall, and less emotional involvement. This difference may be partially attributed to the media attention given to the Kosovars and to the orientation sessions many of the KOF and KOS sponsors received, at which some inaccurate information was presented, especially with regard to religious practices and cultural differences. It may also reflect the greater experience of non-Kosovar sponsors.

### Refugees' Expectations of Sponsors

#### *Demands for Immediate Assistance*

The majority of Kosovar sponsors felt that the Kosovars had unrealistic expectations; both experienced and inexperienced sponsors had similar answer patterns. The sponsors of non-Kosovar refugees, on the other hand, were much more likely to say that their families had either no expectations or realistic expectations of what the sponsoring group would do for them.

One of the expectations most often cited had to do with the sponsors being "on call" at all times. "I was in bed at 11:40 p.m. when I got a phone call saying, 'Could you please come over, my friend caught some fish.' I got up, got dressed and picked him up to take him over to his friend's house. His friend was cutting up the fish at midnight and I had to wait for 30 minutes while they cleaned the fish. Then they asked, 'We do not have room in our fridge, so can you take it to yours?' So, at about 1:00 a.m. after putting the fish in my fridge and driving him home, I went to bed. There was no comprehension that I get up at 5 or 6 a.m. This is what you go through!" "They were pretty aggressive about their social requirements. They were almost aggressive or pushy to have us take part." "They expected us to be there every day." "They expect services like driving them to appointments even when it's not an emergency." "The refugees

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expect us to be there immediately. If one of us cannot come, they will keep calling the sponsoring group until someone is available. We are trying to get them to be more independent and so we don't always show up." "It was too much. I was stressed out ... and later I became ill." "Sometimes my presence was expected, but I live at one end of the city and they live at the other. I have no car and take the bus. Bussing takes one hour. Since talking on the phone is difficult because no one speaks English well enough, it is difficult to plan in advance. They don't seem to plan in advance at all."

#### *Money and Material Goods*

Other unrealistic expectations had to do with the provision of material goods or money. "They expect us to take care of everything. They were told at the military base that sponsors are responsible for everything." "They wanted everything new, including a new house." "One of our young women wants to continue her education and expected that her education would be free of charge. They even expect their school supplies will be free." "Their expectations were totally unrealistic. No one could have lived up to their expectations. I think this attitude was fostered at the military base. Somehow they were under the impression that they would receive \$20,000 in cash when they arrived in Edmonton. They were given all kinds of stuff at the military base. They constantly kept asking where the money was. They expected an upper middle class existence." "There were restrictions put on long distance calling. The refugees expected me to go to TELUS and remove the restriction. They expected me to pay the \$100 deposit. I am a single mother on a restricted income and cannot possibly do this."

Although some of the Kosovars' expectations may well have developed at the military bases, where they were provided with a lot of goods and services at no charge, some of their expectations may have been the result of living in a communist country, where education was completely free. A better understanding on the part of the sponsors of the communist system could have helped them to feel less exasperated by the Kosovars' attitudes.

Because the Kosovars generally were in close contact with each other, they tended to compare sponsors. Since some groups were in a position to provide their families with many extra things, some of the other refugee families felt that they should have the same amenities: "When one family got a bike, they all needed a bike." "There developed an idea of favouritism amongst the refugees and this ended up being a big issue." To avoid this problem in the future, some guidelines could be drawn up regarding provision of goods, prior to the arrival of the refugees. Some ongoing contact across sponsor groups and with CIC would also be helpful.

#### *Expectation of Expertise*

Sponsors were also concerned that the Kosovars expected them to know everything. "We were seen as the experts. They assumed we knew everything about what was going on. As it turned out, sometimes the refugees would know more because they shared information throughout the community." "They expected solutions immediately. We were supposed to find solutions overnight." Had the refugees been given a clearer notion of the role of the sponsoring groups, and the bureaucratic nature of organizations in Canada, they may have been more understanding of the sponsors' inability to answer all their questions immediately.

#### *Gender Roles*

Not surprisingly, some Kosovars expected that gender roles in Canada would be similar to their own. Some of the refugees were taken aback by the role of women, and in

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particular, women sponsors. "They expected men to take care of everything and the reality was that more women sponsors were involved in the day-to-day activities. It became more acceptable after some time and the refugees got used to it." "At first the refugees didn't understand why all these women were coming to help and not their husbands."

#### *The Other Side*

There were, of course, sponsors who felt that the refugees were very grateful and who reported that they were not in the least demanding. "We were very respected; they looked upon us as the owners and they were the welcomed guests." "They were trying to adjust to us as much as we were trying to adjust to them." "Initially, I don't think they had expectations when they first arrived ... I think they were surprised at the amount of support they got here." "Our [refugee] group has been incredibly thankful for every single thing that we have done." "They were grateful and overwhelmed by what strangers were willing to do for them." "I know exactly what their expectations are, but I always feel that they are not demanding or anything like that."

#### Refugees' Expectations of Life in Canada

##### *Land of Plenty*

The sponsors' perceptions of the refugees' expectations of life in Canada were very similar to their views on the expectations placed on sponsors. The majority indicated that the refugees had misunderstandings of what life would be like in this country. "Because the refugees were offered so much by the government they expected more. They expected that all the education would be provided, including postsecondary education. They were upset about having to pay fees at school and didn't realize that we [Canadians] pay these fees as well." "They still expect that everything will be paid for, for instance, education." "They think they'll get government assistance in the third year." "They believed that all the medical problems they had would be fixed in Canada in two weeks." "There was an attitude that this is the land of opportunity. They thought that there would be a job, but didn't realize the impact of the language barrier." Several of the KOS and KOF sponsors indicated that they feel the government is partially responsible for the perceived unrealistic expectations. When asked, 74% indicated that they were aware of the differences between the Kosovar benefits and services, and those provided to other refugees. Most were able to elaborate with examples, such as two years of funding, dental and medical benefits, fast-track entry into Canada, free transportation and subsidized housing.

A number of individuals indicated that the refugees had been given misinformation on the military bases that led them to believe that they were entitled to more benefits than they actually received. The fact that several medical and dental procedures were started at the military bases (e.g., root canals) surely led some Kosovars to think that they would be completed as soon as they arrived in Alberta.

Some people felt that the Kosovars made poor judgements in spending: "Kosovars do not have realistic expectations. They believed that they would have jobs, big houses and cars. Then the first thing they spent money on was a computer." Computers may seem frivolous to some sponsors, but for many of the Kosovars, email is an essential link to family and friends who are still living in extremely difficult conditions in Kosova. Clearly, guidelines for both sponsors and refugees would be very helpful in the future.

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Most of the non-Kosovar sponsors felt that the refugees had no expectations of Canada before they arrived; however, in one instance a sponsor expressed a sentiment similar to that of the KOS and KOF sponsors. "He came from being poor and often hungry, to what seems to him like a land of plenty, and it wasn't immediately obvious that the *plenty* isn't just out there to take, that you have to work and earn it. We actually had interesting situations with people giving them [children] so many things that they stopped valuing them and inadvertently destroyed them. They would say, 'Oh, it doesn't matter if these shoes are wrecked. People will give me more.' So we had to stop giving them things."

#### *Freedom*

Two other themes emerged in the discussion of refugee expectations of Canada. One had to do with personal freedom. "[The head of our family] made the statement that in Canada you have the freedom to make something of yourself or the freedom to fail. On Christmas Eve I was driving our family back home and he turned to me and said, 'I'm not sure that I can say this properly, but for the very first time in my life I understand what freedom really means.' I asked him what he meant. He explained that there were no police on the street, the people were moving freely, and he could come and go as he wanted ... He said, 'If I am sick I can go to the hospital right now. It is such a relief not to live in a police state.' He was telling me how blessed we are." Another sponsor quoted the head of a Kosovar family, who said, "Now that I am in Canada I can sleep at night. I know that I am safe."

#### *Multiculturalism*

The other factor that came out of the discussions of refugee expectations was tied to Canada's multicultural nature. The refugees evinced both positive and negative reactions in the perceptions of the sponsors. "The sponsors took the refugees to Heritage Days. They were surprised that so many cultures were living together and not fighting." Some sponsors commented that the Kosovars were quite astonished at the diverse nature of their ESL classes, and that people who were so different could get along.

A few sponsors indicated that they were surprised by the negative comments the refugees made about others, based on difference. "I must say, I was constantly amazed—even though they had been through all kinds of tensions of that kind—to see them judging people by their names. You don't know people, but you don't want to talk to them because of their names." "Good God, I had to listen to tirades about Chinese people, making fun of someone else's accent. I don't know why that surprised me that much, but I would expect anyone to know that there are lots of different kinds of people in this country." The expectation on the part of some of the sponsors that Kosovars, particularly the KOSs, would know about the degree of diversity in Canada is somewhat naïve. The Kosovars had no intention of leaving their own country until just a few months before they arrived in Alberta. Not only had they not planned to leave, but they had few choices in deciding where they would go during the airlifts. Canada's multicultural nature and approach to integration are quite distinct from those of many European countries, and must be surprising to many newcomers.

#### Sponsor's Expectations of Citizenship and Immigration Canada

The participants were asked how adequate federal government support to the sponsors was. Their answers can be classified into six main categories, presented here in rank order:



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1. There was a need for more clarity/information/follow-up.
2. All support was helpful.
3. There were not enough interpreters; interpreters were not adequate.
4. The government should have paid for all dental /medical expenses.
5. There was no support; red tape and delays.
6. Sponsors do not need help; it is enough to provide financial support to the refugees.

#### *Need for More Clarity/Information*

Both experienced and inexperienced sponsors reported that they were frustrated at not having sufficient information, or at having been supplied with incorrect information. This ongoing problem involved nearly every aspect of the initial settlement experience. "CIC could never tell us when the refugees were coming. Why not? They were in charge. Is this a random universe?" "At the workshops it appeared that the government was not that prepared. They had handouts but not that many details." "CIC should be more helpful ... CIC stopped answering the telephones directly and a person had to navigate the voice mail system. There was no human being to talk to." "The initial explanation by CIC regarding medical and dental assistance did not stay the same." "I heard about the TB rumour. It would have been nice if CIC had sent out a circular about what to do." CIC could have done some more in the follow-up." "We missed doing their income tax. We didn't realize that it needed to be done until the government threatened to withhold the child tax benefit." "The medical information was in sealed envelopes. They didn't share this information with us. There needs to be some follow-up on the medical requirements." "We need to know not only medical situations but also psychological difficulties. We were told not to ask questions, yet this information is critical." "CIC was like a revolving door. As a result there was no ongoing person with whom you could talk."

Some of the frustration felt by the sponsors could have been avoided had there been clear direction from the beginning on the interim federal health agreement and other matters decided by CIC National Headquarters (NHQ). Some of the information that sponsors needed was contained within the RAP binder, but the dissemination of the contents of the binder varied greatly from one group to the next.

#### *Support was Helpful*

Although several people expressed frustrations at the lack of information when they needed it, many people felt that CIC did an excellent job. Experienced sponsors, especially, were pleased with the support of the CIC office. "CIC was very gracious." "The CIC contact was very responsible and available. They were very responsive to our requests and were very patient." "The CIC staff were very polite, patient and respectful to the refugees." "We didn't expect the amount of support we got compared to our experiences before." "CIC was available any time, any place. They gave us a list of names and phone numbers that we could contact." "X went beyond the CIC mandate. She made some instant decisions." "I was constantly amazed at how much the government supported us. I expected them to be like they were before, when we had to figure everything out on our own, but no. Every time I called they were really helpful with all the information we needed." "I was amazed with the government. They were real public servants, not some mini-dictators like they can be."

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#### *Problems with Interpreters*

A range of problems was cited with reference to interpreters. In addition to there not being enough English/Albanian bilinguals available, some sponsors had concerns regarding the quality of the interpretation. Furthermore, the Kosovars were sometimes unwilling to talk to Serbian interpreters. "We would have liked to have more access to interpreters. We needed them so badly and they were run off their feet." "When we finally had some interpreters and knew their schedule, the government got rid of them and hired two new people who didn't know what was going on." "We were not sure if X was interpreting or telling us his own ideas." "The interpreter told us that X had a lot of counselling in the Maritimes. From the manner in which this information was presented it seemed that the problems had been resolved. Instead he still has memory loss ... The family did not expect him to work, but we had to learn this gradually. Had we known some of this information we would not have been so judgmental." "The interpreters were an issue. Serbian interpreters were used. Our family would not talk with X because they thought she was Serbian."

There was a natural constraint in terms of the availability of appropriate interpreters; however those individuals who volunteered to interpret should have been given guidelines from the outset. In addition, it would have been helpful to the local CIC personnel to have had information from the bases as to which families had members with good English skills. Interpreters could then have been dispatched on the basis of greatest need.

#### *Dental and Medical Expenses*

A recurring theme throughout the focus group interviews had to do with dissatisfaction with the handling of dental and medical expenses. There was a great deal of confusion over the coverage; the federal government indicated that the Kosovars' dental and medical needs would be paid for, but it is the responsibility of the provincial government to administer health care. The communication regarding federal involvement was not clear at the outset, which caused problems for health care providers, the provincial government, sponsoring groups, and the refugees themselves. "We were told that refugees would be offered the same Alberta Health Care as Albertans. One of the refugees went to physiotherapy and met the criteria for receiving ongoing treatment. The government never did pay the bill." "The hospital finance department did not know about the interim health agreement." "There was a gap in communication about the medical information. There were some things that should have been addressed immediately and we didn't find out about it until they returned. A root canal was started at the military base but was not finished. The government did not pay for root canals once they were off the base. There was no follow-through." "The father had all his teeth pulled out when he was at the military base. After he was living in Edmonton the dentist applied to the government to get dentures. The government turned down this request. Finally the dentist got approval for temporary dentures. What are temporary dentures? He had been in Canada for a year and just received the dentures about three weeks ago." "It wasn't clear how much [dental support] was covered. And who could have guessed that almost every single one of them would come with dental problems."

One of the most contentious problems for the sponsors was the handling of the medical and dental health of the Kosovars. Had policies concerning the provision of care been decided upon and disseminated to all relevant parties early on, a great many misunderstandings could have been avoided. The medical records given to the refugees in a sealed envelope should have been flagged if they were urgent; and sponsors who

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received refugees who had serious medical problems should have been advised of their status, without divulging the exact nature of the condition (to maintain some privacy).

#### *No Support Provided*

A few individuals, primarily but not exclusively sponsors of non-Kosovars, indicated that they did not receive any support from the government: "We were on our own." "I did not receive any support." "We received no support from the government but we relied on our SAH." One group indicated that they had no expectations of help as sponsors, but that they want the government to do more in terms of bringing refugees to Canada. "If there is a group that gets more media attention, they also seem to get government support, whereas, in Africa, in Rwanda in particular, we see a forgotten nation. Terrible atrocities took place there. There are still Rwandan children dying in refugee camps in Kenya but there is no official government program in place for them."

#### *No Need to Help Sponsors*

Some respondents thought that the role of CIC was simply to provide financial support to the refugees; they felt that there was no need to assist the sponsoring groups: "The government was very generous in the money provided." "The government doesn't need to help sponsors. The government is already helping bring refugees here."

When we explored whether there were differences in perceptions of government support to sponsors depending on previous experience, we found the majority of those who spoke of red tape and a lack of support were sponsors of non-Kosovars, who indeed, did get less support from CIC than the sponsors of Kosovars. Although both experienced and inexperienced sponsors called for more clarity in the information provided by CIC, it was primarily the experienced sponsors who felt that CIC was helpful.

#### *What Sponsors Would Have Liked to Have Known*

As noted earlier, many sponsors indicated that they would have liked more clarity on the federal and provincial governments' regulations regarding medical and dental support and other government requirements (e.g., income tax). Most of the other topics suggested here, though, had to do with the refugees themselves and information on what a sponsorship commitment would entail.

#### Information about Refugees

Several people expressed a desire for more information about the families who were sent to Alberta: "We would have liked to have had a family profile—something more than names, dates and gender. Sometimes we asked questions which resulted in a torrent of tears and I felt bad and didn't know what to do. This was traumatic for both the sponsor and the refugee." Some indication of the psychological state of the refugees was mentioned by sponsors whose families had relatively severe distress: "We should have known more about suicide as part of post traumatic stress." "There was no assessment that some of these refugees had special needs and that they would need a lot more care."

Other sponsors felt that the information they received in the orientation sessions could have been organized differently: "We received information that could have been handled later, such as schooling for the children. What we needed to learn about was the day-to-day things, the making of appointments for health care, communicating with them, knowing what money the refugees were going to get, and following the list of things one was supposed to do." Sponsors reiterated the need for accurate cultural information, and

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some indicated that they would have liked to have had a little information on the Albanian language to help them communicate in the first few weeks.

For those sponsors whose refugee families repatriated, there were other concerns: "I did not know about the opportunity for them to return to Kosova. That would have changed my level of emotional involvement." "I would have liked to have information as to what the situation in Kosova was really like at the end of July, 1999. We had no idea how to advise them about what they were going back to. The refugees decided [in the absence of this] information which might have influenced their decision to go back." The sponsors who took their Kosovar families to the airport for repatriation would have liked information on what they could or could not take back with them. In addition, there were concerns about the government payments, which were cut back in the last month, if the refugees had decided to return. Sponsors felt they needed specific guidance or, at the very least, a heads-up on these issues.

One sponsoring group of a KOF family indicated that they would have liked to have been apprised of what happened at the military base at Gagetown. "I would have liked to know what our [refugee] family missed out on. I didn't realize that some families had stayed there for two months."

#### Information Regarding the Sponsoring Experience

Given that there were many people involved in the Kosovar project who had not sponsored refugees in the past, there was a perceived need for more support, and more information at the outset regarding the mechanics of sponsoring. "They could have mentioned it's really a full-time job." "We should have been advised to work as a larger group from the beginning." "It would have been nice to have a manager for the sponsor group. If this had been formulated before the refugees came then it would have been easier." Closely related to this need for information on the sponsoring experience was a desire for follow-up from CIC. "A regularly scheduled follow-up from CIC would have been most helpful."

#### *Will Sponsors Participate in Sponsorship Arrangements in the Future?*

Despite the heavy time commitment and the frustrations felt by many of the sponsors, only 17% said that they would not participate in sponsoring arrangements again. Sixty-two percent stated that they would be willing to sponsor refugees without hesitation, and another 17% said they would consider it after a period of a few years. The remaining 4% either did not know, or indicated that it was not their decision, but that of their church to make.

#### *Sponsors' Suggestions for Future Refugee Initiatives*

Although the majority of sponsors expressed willingness to be involved in sponsorship arrangements in the future, they had several suggestions for the federal government. The most commonly mentioned recommendations, in rank order, are:

1. Provide the same level of support for all refugees as was given to the Kosovars.
2. Develop strategies for integrating refugees into the labour market.
3. Develop a sponsorship training program, and build follow-up into all sponsorships.
4. Eliminate long delays in the sponsorship process for non-Kosovar refugees.
5. Provide more support in the areas of medical and dental treatment.

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6. Provide specific information about the refugees to sponsors (e.g., psychological profiles).

Other suggestions for improvements tended to be quite specific, such as ensuring that refugees are housed in the same area as the sponsoring church; simplifying the forms that refugees are required to complete, and utilizing more interpreters.

#### Level of Support

Many of the experienced sponsors suggested that all refugees should enjoy the same level of support as was provided to the Kosovars. They noted that they had considerably more energy to devote to helping refugees without the worry of fund-raising. "It is my understanding that this is the first time that the Canadian government did not make the sponsorship group make a financial commitment. I think that helped the sponsorship program. I think it removed a barrier by not having to come up with \$1500 or more a month ... I think more people would be willing to sponsor newcomers if the federal government decreased the financial commitment [for sponsors] ... What we have been able to give to our refugee family is much more important than the money." "I think that getting the money from the federal government gives the family more control and a feeling of independence. They are not financially connected to those people who are trying to help them."

Not everyone agreed with the level of support provided to the Kosovars. A minority voiced concerns such as the following: "Too many resources were thrown at them. Too many people involved. It's like sending a school bus to pick up two people." "I think we are giving them too much money to start with and they don't want to work until two years is up."

#### Integration of Refugees into the Labour Market

Some sponsors expressed concern over the problem of finding suitable jobs for refugees, echoing calls from settlement agencies, academics, and the popular media for the federal government to address this issue. In some instances, they specified the case of professionals, who have great difficulty re-entering their previous occupations: "The refugees need to have their credentials recognized. To have credentials evaluated is time consuming and expensive." Others felt that the Kosovars, in particular, expected to get good jobs right away, and did not want to alter their expectations just in order to work: "They see only the result, not the process, like being a janitor first and moving on to be a manager. They want to begin in Canada by being a manager." A few sponsors felt that refugees should "work for the money they are receiving" and that they should "do community service jobs." The motivation to work was also discussed: "When a refugee earns money his or her cheque is reduced for that amount over 25%. [Support cheques are reduced by the amount earned that exceeds 25% of the total amount of support allocated in a given month.] This is a de-motivator. If the government expects refugees to become independent, it has to do something about this current policy. Perhaps it could reduce the amount over 25% by only half for each dollar earned. The refugees would gain Canadian job experience and most refugees would work anyway because of job satisfaction."

Rather than simply change policies, some sponsors advocated a direct involvement of CIC in program delivery: "There needs to be more strategy in the transition from learning English to job readiness and employment .... CIC should contribute to this transition. They could help with filling job applications, preparing refugees for job interviews, advising them about job opportunities, offering job experience and providing some training projects." One individual commented on the

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complexity of the issues: “Monetary support from the government is very important to allow more people to participate in the sponsoring of refugees (JAS). Somehow the financial model needs to change, though, so that there is a real incentive for the refugees to enter the workforce faster. How to do that may be very difficult.” As another sponsor put it, “the sponsors need more help with employment issues and the refugees need an employment sponsorship that includes counselling about employment.”

#### Sponsorship Training Programs

There were two types of comments on sponsorship training, the first of which came primarily from individuals who had no previous experience. It was suggested that the sponsor group should have a core group of about 5 or 6 members. “I think we could have used a larger group.” “A regular debriefing is good every so many months.” “Debriefing is necessary—The one all-day session I attended (PTSS) was good. It was good to be with other sponsors and hear about their activities.” On the whole, sponsors were appreciative of the orientation that they received, but would have liked more help. They also wanted easy access to someone at CIC who could answer their questions immediately. Several people indicated that they felt the need for follow-up from CIC.

The other concern came from a sponsoring group of a non-Kosovar refugee: “Sponsorships should be more serious. Sometimes the sponsorship is on paper only. The sponsoring group should take it seriously and expect to do something. Paper sponsorships are not a good idea because the sponsors are really legally responsible and if something goes wrong they will have to help but they are not ready or willing to.” The problem of private sponsors who abdicate their responsibility is one that may not be completely unavoidable, but ongoing follow-up on the part of the government might encourage sponsors to take their responsibilities seriously.

#### Elimination of Delays in the Sponsorship Process

Several experienced sponsors who had been involved with either private or JAS programs in the past commented that the length of time it takes to get a refugee family here from a refugee camp overseas is unreasonably long. Having seen the speed with which Operation Parasol was conducted, these sponsors recognized that it is possible to accelerate the process.

#### Support for Medical and Dental Treatment

This theme emerged at several points in the focus group interviews. In general, the sponsors were in agreement that medical and dental treatment should be made available in the settlement period, with few restrictions, even if there are procedures involved that are not ordinarily covered: “If procedures are initiated at the military bases (e.g., medical or dental treatments) they should be flagged so that follow-up can be done.” There appeared to be an assumption that the procedures carried out at the bases were done by military personnel, but in fact, much of the dental work was done by volunteer dentists, who offered their services at the sustainment sites. If similar circumstances arise in the future, it might be preferable to treat only those who need immediate care and wait until the refugees have reached their final destination before initiating work that is not urgent. Any procedures that are started but not completed at a base should certainly be treated with alacrity on arrival at the final destination.

The sponsors also felt that the communication around health care provision needed to be improved: “Health, welfare and education are basically a provincial affair. These people, however, were wards of the federal government. They should be treated as

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if they were military personnel. That was one of the problems with the medical forms. They didn't fit the provincial norms." In future, the terms of the federal government interim health agreement should be communicated to all stakeholders, prior to the arrival of the refugees.

#### Specific Information on Refugees

This theme also came up in several places throughout the interviews with sponsors of KOSs and KOFs. The sponsors felt that they did not get sufficient information on the refugee families they were helping. They wanted information not only on the background of the Kosovars, but about the specific people who were put in their care, especially where such information could advise their actions in assisting the refugee family. They were most anxious to have medical and psychological information.

#### *Sponsors' Recommendations*

As might be expected, the 119 sponsors who participated in this study held disparate views on nearly every issue; in fact, they sometimes expressed assessments that were diametrically opposed. What they share, however, is a concern for refugees, and a desire to help newcomers integrate successfully into Canadian society. Although several people expressed frustration with various aspects of the sponsorship process, the majority of them were willing to consider sponsorship again. The Kosovar project was unique in many respects. Because it is customary to focus on problems, the *lessons learned* identified by the sponsors are heavily weighted to addressing the difficulties they faced. However, there were differences in the government's approach to handling the Kosovars that were very positive as well. These included the broadening of the definition of family, the practice of keeping family together both in the sustainment sites and in the cities to which they were eventually destined, the rescinding of the ROLF, the subsidy of housing costs, and the speed with which the government acted. Many of the experienced sponsors noted that the local CIC staff in Edmonton did their utmost to be of assistance.

#### **Summary**

1. Sponsors of Kosovars were asked to provide social integration, but, unlike the case of non-Kosovar sponsors, were not asked to provide any financial support.
2. The majority of the sponsors of Kosovars had no previous experience.
3. CIC, in conjunction with CSS and other service agencies, provided sponsor orientation sessions, although not all sponsors attended.
4. Sponsors of Kosovars found their role to be onerous, particularly in terms of emotional investment and demands on their time.
5. Sponsors of Kosovars would have liked more opportunity to debrief and to have contact with other, experienced sponsors.

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6. Some of the sponsors' initial expectations of the Kosovars were at odds with reality.
7. Many of the sponsors of the Kosovars felt that the refugees had unrealistic expectations of them and of life in Canada.
8. Sponsors expressed a need for more information about refugees and the sponsoring experience.
9. The majority of sponsors interviewed stated that they would consider sponsoring in the future.

## 7. SERVICE PROVIDERS' EXPERIENCE WITH KOSOVARS <sup>1</sup>

### **Introduction**

The arrival in Alberta of a large number of Kosovars in the summer of 1999 required immediate action, especially on the part of many SPOs that routinely deal with newcomers. The focus for this component of the study is on those agencies that provide services designed specifically for newcomers, and on those that provide services to the larger public, including newcomers. In addition to administering a short questionnaire, we conducted focus group and individual interviews with staff from five settlement agencies (two in Grande Prairie); instructors representing three adult ESL institutions; ESL teachers from an elementary school, a junior high, and a high school; two mainstream agencies in Edmonton (Canadian Red Cross and Salvation Army); a group of Albanian-English interpreters; a dentist; and representatives of the federal and provincial governments. In total, 60 service providers from 16 organizations participated in 20 focus group discussions representing 23 programs offered to Kosovar refugees.

The questions addressed to the participants focused on planning needs, channels of communication, training needs, the uniqueness of the Kosovar group, and recommendations for future efforts. The participants' responses have been grouped according to these categories. The common themes are summarized at the end of the chapter.

### **Planning**

When the respondents were asked whether or not their agencies were involved in the planning process for the Kosovars, 44% said that they were not, yet 77% reported that they were actively involved immediately upon the arrival of the refugees. Half the participants felt that they had had enough preparation time. The Kosovars who were served by the organizations represented in the focus groups were generally referred by CIC, sponsors, and other agencies, in that order. Seventy percent of the agencies also served sponsors through the delivery of orientation sessions and general communications. Only 30% of the representatives indicated that they received immediate funding for the services they were asked to provide; of those, 86% said that the funding was sufficient.



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### *Government Perspectives*

Several of the staff in the local CIC office and representatives of Alberta Learning, the lead provincial Ministry on issues of immigration, were interviewed. It should be noted that the general funding of immigrant-serving agencies in Alberta is unlike that of the rest of the country. The two levels of government co-fund the ESL assessment centres in Calgary and Edmonton; they also jointly fund settlement agencies across the province. Although the provincial government said that the local CIC did their utmost to include them in their planning, the province was not consulted initially regarding the number of Kosovars to be sent to Alberta, nor were they consulted regarding the demands on the resources of the settlement agencies, many of which were intensely involved with making arrangements for the Kosovars. However, representatives of Alberta Learning were contacted regularly by the CIC Regional and Edmonton offices on a number of other matters.

The staff in the CIC office in Edmonton indicated that they had to adjust very quickly to an influx of Kosovars; a decision was made locally to do whatever seemed appropriate and to do it immediately. The local office received little direction from NHQ and the Regional office until fairly late in the process. Even when daily conference calls were initiated, many of the specific aspects of the pressing issues facing the Kosovars could not be addressed by NHQ or the Regional office. It was the understanding of the local CIC staff that the Kosovars would be treated like other private sponsorships. Local CIC thought that it was not necessary to involve the SPO community in this initial phase of the project. "They [the Kosovars] received some essential services at the sustainment sites. It was to be the role of the sponsors to provide the remaining support. The SPO role was much later in the process. Similar to others in the RAP stream, they don't provide assistance for some time." The CIC staff reported that they wanted to rely on established SAHs: "We needed as many seasoned sponsors as we could get."

CIC invited the Edmonton branch of the Canadian Red Cross to handle media relations. A meeting was called by CIC to discuss the imminent arrival of the Kosovars. Several representatives from the settlement community had been invited, but the meeting was announced in the media as being open to the public; consequently, a large number of willing would-be sponsors came, only to be told that they could not stay. It was decided that a committee be established to keep the settlement community informed. The *Edmonton/Kosovo Refugee Coordinating Group* was to serve as a planning forum; however, the settlement agencies viewed the meetings as a one-way dissemination vehicle for CIC for the first several weeks. Only later did they feel that they had input into the meetings.

### *Settlement Agencies' Perspectives*

Once the Kosovars started to arrive, the CIC office recognized the need to include the settlement community in order to prepare for these refugees; they contacted CSS because it is the lead agency in Edmonton for reception and early settlement assistance. They also arranged to hire an individual to serve as a liaison between CIC and CSS. From the standpoint of CSS staff, their involvement in the planning process was too little, too late. They were initially informed that their services would not be required, given that all the Kosovars would have sponsors. As a representative of CSS said: "We got a mixed message from the federal government representatives about our and other settlement agencies' role in the resettlement of Kosovar refugees. We were told that this was going

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to be a separate initiative and that the Kosovars were going to be assisted by private sponsors who would take care of everything. The federal government representatives' initial response was that this special movement and initiative was not going to affect our agency at all. This was not the way it turned out. In fact, very quickly we became involved, however unintentionally, in several aspects. During those first few weeks our agency received between 200-250 calls a week from the community, from concerned citizens and potential sponsors. We spent a lot of time answering calls, responding to the community's strong expression of concern and willingness to help. We were explaining what sponsorship means, what government-assisted sponsorship means, what settlement plans mean, potential ways of helping, etc. In many ways we were doing the work of the government, explaining the program and its intent. A government hotline was eventually set up, but there were some difficulties with that and we continued to receive and handle information calls." Eventually, CSS was asked to locate accommodation, to find interpreters, and to coordinate the sponsorships. The CSS representatives reported that they did not have enough lead time for the sponsorships: they estimated that they needed a month, but they had a week to get everything organized. The other large settlement agency in Edmonton, the MCN, was not approached by CIC for its expertise, other than to assist in orientation sessions.

The MCN staff's assessment of the initial planning was that they should have been involved from the beginning, since they were delivering services from the start (obtaining clothing for the refugees, developing programs for children, and participating in workshops for sponsors). The participants from a very small settlement agency, Edmonton Immigrant Services Association (EISA), also felt that they should have been contacted; their concern was that they have very few clients and the Kosovars would add to their client base.

The agencies in Grande Prairie felt that they had been included in the planning process from the outset. They were pleased to have had the opportunity to receive Kosovars in their community and felt that the communications with CIC Edmonton were very helpful.

#### *Planning in Mainstream Agencies (Red Cross and Salvation Army)*

The Edmonton branch of the Canadian Red Cross was contacted early in the process, once it was known that Kosovars were coming to northern Alberta. CIC felt it would be inappropriate for their own office to deal directly with the media. Since the Red Cross had been coordinating many responsibilities on the bases, including media at one stage, it seemed a logical choice for the local CIC to invite the Edmonton branch of the Red Cross to take on the media relations role, despite the Red Cross's lack of experience dealing with newcomers or sponsors.

Like the Red Cross, the Salvation Army is not ordinarily involved with the immediate settlement of newcomers, but in this instance they were asked to provide goods, such as bedding, for the Kosovars' accommodations. The representative interviewed indicated that the Salvation Army workers did not need much information for their role, but that earlier consultation that allowed them to have a voice would have been appreciated.

#### *ESL Teachers' Perspectives*

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The K-12 ESL teachers were drawn from an elementary school, a junior high and a high school, each of which had a high concentration of Kosovar children. The teachers of ESL to adults represented three programs that Kosovars attended (Norquest, New Home and Sacred Heart). In each instance, they indicated that they received little or no warning that the Kosovars were coming; they also indicated that this situation is the norm for them. They never know far in advance who will be registering in their classes. It is also not unusual for them to receive refugee students who have been through trauma, so, in many respects, it was business as usual for the ESL teachers.

#### *The Perspectives of Interpreters and a Dental Care Provider*

Two of the three interpreters interviewed had been at military bases and one worked in Edmonton only. Their responses to questions about planning referred to their experiences at the sustainment sites. Initially they found it very difficult because no one “really knew what we were doing,” but “after the first ten days, everything went smoothly.”

The dentist we interviewed had received several Kosovar clients. She did not feel that there was any need to be included in the early stages of the planning, but she was concerned that once the Kosovars had arrived and were accessing health services, there was not enough information concerning the benefit plan.

### **Channels of Communication**

Communication was a central concern in all the interviews with service providers. There was a general appreciation of the difficulties posed by the sudden course of events, and several people commented on the efforts of individuals across the board to make the best of challenging circumstances; however, there were numerous suggestions for improved communications in the future.

#### *Government Perspectives*

As mentioned above, the local CIC felt compelled to make decisions in the absence of policy direction from NHQ or the Regional office, because they wanted to respond to the needs of the Kosovars as quickly as possible. They recognized that, since many of the sponsors were inexperienced, they would need to provide orientation sessions: CIC, CSS, MCN, and Red Cross, in cooperation with the First Presbyterian Church, developed three-hour panel presentations for sponsors that they delivered several times. In these sessions they discussed cultural background information about the Kosovars as well as the responsibilities of the sponsoring groups. One of the CIC staff members also flew to Grande Prairie to conduct an orientation workshop there.

The CIC, Edmonton tried to keep in touch with the key players; they recognized that there were gaps in the information, but they too had difficulty getting the answers they needed. The cultural background information with which they had been provided was not completely accurate, and clarification on the federal interim health plan was delayed.

From the perspective of the provincial government representatives, “there was a real gap in communication with the regional CIC office. We were ‘in the loop,’ whereas the local CIC office was not.” “The federal government was doing the conference calls

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with the provinces so we would have the information but the local CIC delivery office was not in on the conference calls so they didn't have the information." The provincial government indicated that although they were consulted regularly, they felt that the federal government should have had more resources such as fact sheets, checklists and so on, particularly with regard to the federal health plan. Although the federal government took responsibility for many of the health care needs of the Kosovars, it is at the provincial level that the care was implemented. There was conflicting information for some period of time; practitioners could not get a clear answer about which costs the federal government would cover. In addition to a lack of guidance on the nature of the plan, the provincial government noted that the Kosovar profiles with health information arrived late, and that there was a lack of consistency in the level of detail in the files.

#### *Communication from the Settlement Agencies' Perspective*

One of the key concerns of the representative from CSS regarding channels of communication had to do with knowing in advance how many people would be coming, and what psychological state the newcomers would be in, that is, how many people were suffering from the effects of torture or trauma. They were told that the refugees received thorough physical and psychological examinations, yet relevant information was not passed on to the coordinators or the sponsors.

In addition, CSS commented on communication with the refugees; they indicated that the Kosovars had been given information and orientation at the sustainment sites that seemed overly general and thus prone to misinterpretation upon settlement in the community. The Kosovars told settlement workers at CSS that they had received two hours of orientation to Canada each day at the military bases where they heard that (a) they would receive very large cheques upon arrival in Edmonton, (b) all their expenses would be covered, and (c) they could become Canadians in three years' time (at that point the Kosovars were not landed immigrants; one can become a Canadian three years after gaining landed status). The confusion around eligibility for citizenship subsided later when Kosovars were informed that half of their time in Canada under a Minister's Permit would count towards the residency time needed to become a citizen. However, when the Kosovars came to Edmonton and found that circumstances were not what they had expected, they thought that the interpreters either at the sustainment site or in Edmonton had lied to them. Some of these misunderstandings could have been avoided if the information given to the Kosovars had been more precise and if they had received written summaries of the orientations in Albanian.

The representatives from the MCN pointed to the need for accurate cultural background information, improved communication around health care, and training for sponsors. They indicated that CIC had invited them to attend the *Edmonton/Kosovo Refugee Coordinating Group*, and through it each of the participating agencies identified needs and proposed distribution of tasks; however, they felt that they had not been consulted in terms of what they perceived the needs to be.

The participants from the programs in Grande Prairie both indicated that the lines of communication with CIC were very good. They felt that they were well informed throughout the process.

#### *Red Cross and the Salvation Army*

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The Red Cross and the Salvation Army had ongoing contact with CIC through the *Edmonton/Kosovo Refugee Coordinating Group*. Representatives from both organizations felt that they had the information they needed to make their contributions to the project.

### *ESL Teachers*

In each instance, CIC contacted the directors of the ESL programs at the adult institutions to give them advance notice of the arrival of the Kosovars. Some of the ESL teachers expressed a need for more background information on the Kosovars, particularly with regard to the effects of psychological trauma. They indicated that some of the information provided to the sponsors (for example, how to access interpreters) would have been useful to them as well. The teachers in the K-12 system were unaware of any contact between CIC and the school principals. They were on their own in determining the needs of the Kosovar children.

### *Interpreters and Dentist*

The interpreters were registered with CIC and were contacted through that connection. Their main concern regarding channels of communication had to do with information given to the Kosovars. It was their contention that more cultural and legal information about Canada should have been presented in the ESL lessons provided to the refugees at the sustainment sites. They also suggested that in future, information be provided in written form in the refugees' first language, in order to prevent some misunderstandings.

The dentist indicated that the Kosovars came to her clinic because they had heard through word of mouth that she speaks Serbo-Croatian. She had no official notification of their arrival. Once the refugees started to receive dental care, however, the dentist received information regarding dental benefits from the MCN. She did not hear directly from CIC until March of 2000, when a letter arrived concerning refugee benefits. "The letter was not clear regarding the time frame for this coverage. In order to clarify this (for example, if the coverage was for a fiscal year or a calendar year), our office made three separate phone calls on three separate occasions to the 1-800 number mentioned in the letter. On each occasion our office received different information. CIC did not have a consistent interpretation on the directive. This caused a lot of confusion and misunderstanding."

## **Training Needs**

### *Government Perspectives*

The staff from CIC, Edmonton were in agreement that there needs to be more training for sponsors. They mentioned that a training package had been developed at NHQ. From the standpoint of CIC, it is the contracted responsibility of the SAHs to conduct sponsor training, using the materials developed by CIC. CIC indicated that they had supplied each sponsoring group, including the sponsors of KOSs and KOFs, with a RAP binder, which provides information on what to do in the first few weeks of a sponsoring arrangement. When asked whether there is a need for training of agencies that serve the general public,

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such as health care providers, educators, and small business associations, one CIC staff member indicated that there is not as much a need for training as there is for general awareness of the circumstances of refugees and immigrants. This is a role for settlement agencies, supported financially by CIC.

The respondents from the provincial government felt very strongly that sponsors need training. Many of the sponsors did not know about the services available to refugees. "We need some basic system in place where sponsors can learn about the situations they will be facing."

The provincial representatives also stated that "training is key for agencies that serve the public." One example of the type of resource that could be developed is a manual for health care practitioners who will be working with newcomers, particularly refugees.

### *Settlement Agency Viewpoints*

The liaison staff person funded by CIC to work at CSS arranged for the majority of the sponsor orientations. Her recommendations around training included arranging for more training in general, and having more accurate cultural background information, better communication, and group meetings for sponsors. She suggested that more funding be allotted for sponsor training and that immigrant-serving agencies receive more financial resources to carry out their work.

The orientation sessions for sponsors in Edmonton were in groups of 60 to 80. The staff at CSS were of the opinion that this type of orientation cannot answer specific questions, nor be responsive to specific informational needs of those attending. As a result, the orientation session was not sufficient, yet there was no time to conduct further sessions. One way of addressing this gap would be to bring the sponsors together on a regular basis to allow for the sharing of experiences and answering questions as they arose. They also feel that more 'hands-on' training sessions should be developed which employ techniques such as role-play. When asked about training for mainstream service providers, CSS staff indicated that health practitioners and landlords would benefit from precise information relevant to their interactions with refugees.

Representatives from the MCN advocated strongly for sponsor training, particularly with regard to boundary-setting: "Some invaded the refugees' homes. Some refugees felt like children again." One individual noted that inexperienced sponsors received no support from the SAHs. Another staff person commented that mainstream agencies need to learn more about the experiences of refugees, and that "training is especially needed for social workers who are known for retraumatizing newcomers." The representative from the EISA also suggested that sponsors need training.

The settlement workers in Grande Prairie echoed the sentiments of those in Edmonton that sponsors need training. In addition, they stressed the need for better dissemination of information within sponsor groups.

### *Red Cross; Salvation Army; ESL Teachers; Interpreters*

The Red Cross representatives maintained that settlement agencies should provide training to sponsors and public agencies to insure that misunderstandings are kept to a minimum. Some of the ESL instructors thought that sponsors should have received some guidelines on their roles vis-à-vis the ESL programs. They reported that some sponsors

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caused problems because they wanted to meet with teachers on a daily basis to review the progress of the Kosovars they were sponsoring.

The interpreters, in reference to the stressful nature of their jobs, recommended that training be provided for interpreters who work with refugees; they also indicated that they would have liked an opportunity to debrief.

## **Uniqueness of the Kosovars**

The situation of the airlift of refugees to Canada is unprecedented. From the time the decision was made to initiate Operation Parasol, the Kosovars have received differential treatment. Each of the service provider groups was asked to comment from their perspectives on the experiences of the Kosovars versus those of other refugees.

### *Government*

One of the first differences between the Kosovars and other refugees who have come to Alberta was their initial reluctance to come. The refugees had to be convinced that Alberta was a good place to live; many would have preferred to remain close to Gagetown.

The local CIC determined that, aside from the KOFs who had relatives in Grande Prairie, the Kosovars designated for northern Alberta would resettle in Edmonton where there was ready availability of services, such as ESL and interpreters, and the Centre of Survivors of Trauma and Torture. This decision caused some concern in smaller communities where there were experienced private sponsors; however, in retrospect, the CIC staff believed that the Kosovars resettled better than they would have, had they been distributed across several smaller cities. Given the fact that Kosovars have large size families and the close-knit relations among them, CIC staff believed that it was good to keep them together as much as possible.

There were many other differences in the federal government's treatment of the Kosovars and other refugees, some of which were widely publicized in the media. The Kosovars were not loaned transportation money or damage deposits; instead, the government footed the bill. Neither were they required to pay the right of landing fee (this fee has since been eliminated for all refugees). In Edmonton, the local CIC subsidized housing in parts of the city where refugees are not ordinarily placed, in an effort to keep family groups together. They also paid for utilities in some instances. The health care arrangements for the Kosovars differed from those of other refugees in that they were more extensive. The most obvious difference, however, was the classification of a whole group of people as CR5s—the special needs category for refugees. In the past, this classification has been decided on a case by case basis. As CR5s, the Kosovars received two years of living support. The local CIC found this arrangement was difficult for the community to understand. It was a challenging task to educate the SPOs about the difference between this particular group and other refugee groups.

The CIC staff were acutely aware of another unique feature of the Kosovars' experience. Most refugees who enter Canada have spent years in a refugee camp, or, as refugee claimants, they have mentally prepared themselves for some time to leave their own countries. The Kosovars came directly from a war-torn situation and had very little time to assess their options. "They didn't have that period to grieve and to really figure

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out 'Ok, this is my life reality now. I have to live it; I have to plan how I am going to survive and make it work for me'." "Other refugees [who have been in camps] have unloaded some of their pain and now accept that they must make a new start."

Finally, the Kosovars' situation is distinct from that of any other refugee group in that they had the opportunity to make exploratory visits back to their homeland to determine whether or not to stay in Canada permanently. Giving people the choice to go back to Kosova "is asking a heck of a lot of people." "I don't agree with the exploratory visits; they're not ready." "It was physically impossible for them to stay. They [Kosovars] didn't sleep. They wandered. They were just obsessed with getting on that plane and leaving."

The participants from Alberta Learning noted many of the same differences in the treatment of the Kosovars compared with that of other refugees; the health care issues had the greatest impact from their standpoint. They also applauded CIC's level of consultation with the province regarding the Kosovars. They recommended that the province have the same degree of involvement in all refugee situations (currently the province is not consulted with regard to non-Kosovar refugees).

### *Settlement Agencies*

Each of the settlement agency focus group discussions evoked a list of differences in the treatment of the Kosovars similar to those highlighted in the CIC interview above. One participant also addressed the fact that such a large number of sponsors had to be found in such a short period of time. Although many people came forward, there was insufficient time and resources to train them adequately.

There have since been negative consequences for agencies whose responsibility it is to attract sponsors for new refugees. "The sponsorship program in Canada took a heavy, heavy blow, because sponsors were put in the position of having to respond to something the system didn't allow for. There was no opportunity to recruit and train sponsors. Suddenly we heard the Minister of Immigration making announcements on the news asking Canadians to open their homes. We were pulling our hair out because this is a very complex and difficult cross-cultural situation and there must be proper training and support in place. The government really put us in a position where we were getting requests from across the country from potential volunteers that we couldn't possibly respond to in an organized manner and couldn't adequately deal with in terms of training and support. And guess what? Two years later, can we find sponsors for Sierra Leone? No. Why? Because the sponsors had such a terrible experience with the Kosovar sponsorships. They've been burned out; they have poisoned relationships and they are not going to offer their voluntary services and their money again. I know that money was not involved in a big way, but some of the families that left Canada left huge phone bills behind when they went back, and the churches had to pick up those phone bills .... It really had a very negative impact on the sponsorship program across Canada."

### *Red Cross and the Salvation Army*

Neither the Red Cross nor the Salvation Army is ordinarily involved in refugee settlement support, and therefore they could not comment on differences between the Kosovar situation and that of other refugees.

### *ESL Teachers*



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The K-12 teachers were not aware of any differences in the treatment of Kosovar and other refugee children within the school system. The adult ESL teachers noted that a SAH Centre was established for the Kosovars, and special classes were established solely for Kosovar students. A LINC class, levels 1-3, was established, with some full-time and some part-time students, as well as children over the age of 10. Unlike other federally funded ESL programs, the Kosovars were allowed to be absent a lot—"it was almost like a drop-in." The SAH Centre was created because other LINC programs have strict attendance policies, and the Kosovars had to have medical appointments, making their attendance sporadic. "I have mixed feelings about the SAH Centre. It's nice that a new group has a place to go, but do it for everybody. Don't give all this preferential treatment." The fact that Kosovars had more benefits than other newcomers sometimes caused problems in ESL classes. The teachers indicated that they would have liked to have had an explanation for the Kosovars' blanket CR5 status to explain to other students the discrepancy in levels of financial support and English language training (the Kosovars were eligible for four months more ESL than other refugees).

## **Recommendations for Future Efforts**

### *Government*

The Edmonton CIC staff had several recommendations for future efforts. The experience with the Kosovars has pointed to a need for clear policy direction and communications with regard to health care benefits and procedures under the interim federal health plan. For example, NHQ couriered medical files of Kosovars to local CIC offices in some cases, and in other cases the refugees brought them from Gagetown themselves. Late in the process the sponsors were made aware that the refugees and their medical files should have been referred to the doctors. Policies and procedures concerning family reunification were clear from the beginning, however, the decisions were made on a case-by-case basis causing confusion for everyone involved.

The CIC respondents also pointed to the need for training for sponsors that is specific to the refugee group being brought in. They emphasized the need for accurate cultural profiles and suggested that if there are similar airlifts in the future, the staff at the sustainment sites could develop a package of information prior to the dispersal of refugees across the country. The extremely strong family ties in the Kosovar population were cited as an example of the information that would have been useful to have in advance.

The exploratory visits should be curtailed, or at the very least, delayed; the timing was not right psychologically for many of the Kosovars, who had not had a chance to adjust to their new circumstances. Some of the Kosovars who undertook exploratory visits had to work under the table to find the money to travel. In effect, this encouraged misuse of this policy.

The CIC staff were not completely sure that the unique treatment received by the Kosovars should have been so different from other refugee groups. Although they readily acknowledged the unique circumstances of the Kosovars, especially the lack of time to adjust, they were not convinced that all of the extra benefits have made an appreciable difference to successful settlement.

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The Alberta government recommended training for sponsors, clear direction with regard to the federal interim health care plan and billing procedures, and increased consultation with the province in the settlement of all refugees. They were very pleased that CIC had invited a high degree of involvement from the provincial government in the Kosovar situation. The provincial representatives also indicated that they support longer term assistance from the federal government. "Because the federal government is saying that refugees are selected not on the basis of settlement but based on potential, then we really want the refugees to succeed. We need to provide all the support that we can through refugee programs."

If similar situations arise in the future, with a large number of refugees arriving at once, the government of Alberta would like to be consulted regarding the role of the settlement agencies that they fund jointly with CIC. Related to this, the representatives suggested that, in future, there be a plan in place to manage the media response to an airlift and to calls for volunteer sponsors. An open invitation to all Canadians is likely to overwhelm the settlement system and encourages disappointment among those potential volunteers who are turned away.

### *Settlement Agencies*

CSS recommended that if a similar large scale resettlement project occurs in the future, there needs to be coordination among all the stakeholders: all three levels of government, the appropriate NGOs such as the Red Cross, settlement agencies and SAHs. Stakeholders should have access to comprehensive and accurate information about the historical and cultural background of the refugees.

CSS indicated that the procedures and cooperation in the Edmonton area were far better than the experiences of their counterparts in other areas of the country. "We had good cooperation and collaboration with the local CIC. For example, the local CIC recognized our experience in securing housing for refugees and approved funding for one of our employees to begin this task immediately. In all cases we worked with individual sponsoring groups, and this experience saved everyone a lot of time and frustration."

With regard to the two years of funding, CSS recommended that there be incentives to encourage people to become independent. "The refugees should be encouraged to start looking for work, not be penalized when they do earn money."

CSS, in commenting on training for sponsors, suggested that there should be two orientation sessions, one for sponsors alone, and one with both the refugees and sponsors. They also suggested more extensive training for sponsors, which could be conducted by settlement agencies who have the appropriate and necessary knowledge of sponsorship and settlement.

Representatives from the MCN also stressed the need for comprehensive training of sponsors. They were particularly concerned that boundary-setting be emphasized. They suggested that there be improved screening of potential sponsors, given the importance of identifying people who have an understanding of the effects of trauma.

A representative of MCN suggested that if there are going to be other airlifts, there should be communication with the NGOs on-site in the region of conflict to obtain accurate information regarding the refugees' needs. There should also be a partnership with the settlement agencies in Canada. "We in the NGO community often feel that although we are involved in the consultation, we are not listened to. When we talk about ways in which the sponsorship program needs to be supported, it doesn't happen .... I do

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wish that there would be more of a culture of openness to actually take us more seriously.”

Both agencies in Grande Prairie recommended sponsor training programs and better dissemination of information within sponsoring groups. Both felt that the two year funding period should be re-examined; one individual suggested that the funding in the second year should be allotted on condition of “some sort of work experience” to encourage self-reliance. Another representative concluded that the two years of support invites people to learn helplessness.

### *Red Cross and the Salvation Army*

The Red Cross representatives recommended that refugees be given a more realistic view of Canada. “Refugees need to know the cost of things; some of them had the impression that most things here are either free or very cheap, like long distance telephone costs. The information needs to be fed to them more gradually and thoroughly.” They also felt that the funding of the refugees should be considered on a case-by-case basis, according to needs.

The Salvation Army’s recommendation for future large-scale initiatives like Operation Parasol has to do with coordination of efforts on the part of NGOs. One of the respondents had spent several weeks in Kosova, and in other conflict sites. He was struck by the difference in humanitarian support. “There needs to be a coordinated effort about the appeal money coming from around the world. At the moment, the NGOs are let loose on that, and what happens is that some parts of the country get all and others get nothing. We need to coordinate how that money is utilized. There must be a coordinated effort with appealing for money—the UN should do it. When you think about it, it’s probably big business that supports most of the NGOs, because they want to start new industries in these countries.”

### *ESL Teachers*

The teachers at New Home suggested that in future situations, the media be less involved. “Refugees don’t need all that exposure. They want to be settled and left alone.” They also indicated that there be special summer ESL programs developed for teenagers; this age group appeared to be left out of the ESL planning. The teachers were concerned about the inequitable treatment of the Kosovars as compared to other refugees; they recommended that all refugees receive the same benefits.

Norquest, the institution charged with establishing the SAH Centre, recommended that if a similar situation arises in the future, any special assistance should be set up immediately. “The Canadian government responded very quickly, but not quickly enough. The Kosovars themselves said that if the [SAH] Centre downtown was set up even three weeks before, it would have been a lot better .... If there were something already in place it would have been easier. The Kosovars were very troubled.” Norquest representatives also commented on the need for sponsor training.

Sacred Heart ESL teachers recommended training for sponsors and they indicated that GARs should have sponsors just as the Kosovars did. The K-12 teachers had few recommendations for future efforts, but they stressed the importance of ESL. They also indicated that it would be helpful if refugee parents were given information about the school system here.

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### *Interpreters and Dentist*

The interpreters recommended that the two year funding be re-examined. They felt that the Kosovars were discouraged from working because of the regulation that they would be docked for any monies over 25% of their living allowance.

The dentist recommended that there be more communication between CIC and the dental profession. She also recommended that the coverage allowed by the federal interim health plan be revisited. There is no provision for preventative care, such as teeth cleaning. She advocated increasing the annual amount for basic care from \$400 to between \$800 - \$1,000 in order to ensure that refugees get the dental care they need.

## **Summary**

### *Planning Needs as Perceived by Service Providers*

1. There was very little time to plan; decisions had to be made locally.
2. CIC Edmonton was under the impression that the Kosovars' settlement would be like that of other privately-sponsored refugees.
3. Not all stakeholders were included from the beginning, most notably settlement agencies, which were besieged by calls from the start.

### *Communication Needs*

4. Not enough information about the cultural and psychological background of the Kosovars was provided.
5. Refugees arrived in Edmonton with many misconceptions based on information they had received at the sustainment sites.
6. The details of the federal interim health care plan were not clear enough for straightforward implementation.

### *Training Needs Perceived by Service Providers*

7. There was an assumption that SAHs would train sponsors.
8. All service providers indicated a need for more extensive sponsor training, to be provided by settlement agencies.
9. Interpreters felt they needed training for working with refugees and debriefing.

### *Uniqueness of Kosovars from Service Providers' Perspectives*

10. Kosovars were classified as CR5s (high risk, two-years of funding) as a group rather than on a case-by-case basis.
11. Kosovars were not required to pay the ROLF, transportation fees or damage deposits.
12. Kosovars had housing and utilities subsidized.
13. Kosovars had more extensive health benefits than other refugees.
14. The Kosovar family groups were kept together.
15. Kosovars spent little or no time in a refugee camp.

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16. Kosovars spent an average of two months in sustainment centres.
17. Kosovars were allowed to repatriate at Canada's expense.
18. Kosovars had the opportunity to make exploratory visits to Kosova.
19. Kosovars received more ESL than non-Kosovars and were provided with separate ESL programming.

*Recommendations from Service Providers for Future Large Scale Admissions of Refugees*

20. Implement clear policy directions and procedures (e.g., federal health plan).
21. Implement extensive training for sponsors.
22. Delay exploratory visits.
23. Consult all stakeholders from the beginning.
24. Encourage work experience for refugees.
25. Examine the two-year funding period.
26. Provide more precise information to refugees.
27. Clearly define funding for service agencies.

**Note**

1. Substantive quotations in this chapter have been approved by the respective respondents.

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## 8. KOSOVAR REPATRIATES

### **Introduction**

In the spring of 1999, the UNHCR appealed to a large number of countries to provide temporary protection for the Kosovar refugees who were displaced into Macedonia. Most European countries plus Australia were prepared to provide asylum to these refugees, on the understanding that they would be sent back to their country of origin once it became safe to do so. This, in general, was the UNHCR's strategy. However, certain other countries, notably Canada and the United States, while in agreement with the larger political goal of repatriation, chose to resettle the Kosovar refugees on a permanent basis, while recognizing that these refugees might opt to forfeit their right to permanent resettlement and voluntarily return to Kosova.

This chapter tells the story of those Kosovar refugees who first resettled in northern Alberta but then decided to return to Kosova. For several reasons, it is rare in refugee studies to locate and interview refugees who returned to their homeland. First, such research is very expensive. Second, researchers may encounter difficulties in conducting interviews in a devastated area where addresses are hard to find and life is not entirely back to normal. Third, repatriates in their countries of origin are technically no longer refugees, a reminder of how the term refugee is socially (and politically) constructed. Nevertheless, the decision to interview repatriated Kosovars in the context of this study was influenced by two important considerations.

The first consideration favouring the decision to proceed with such interviews was that one of the Albanian-speaking interviewers for this project, a Kosovar refugee who resettled in northern Alberta, happened to be visiting relatives in the area and was willing to interview repatriated Kosovars. The second consideration favouring the extension of interviews into Kosova was more germane to the policy relevance of this study. Specifically, what were the repatriates' motivations for returning to Kosova? Was it because of push or pull factors? Did they feel they made the right decision? What might the policy implications of a misguided decision be? And, now that they have forfeited their residence status in Canada, what do they say about returning to Canada? Thus, apart from the possibility of making a scholarly contribution through these interviews, the research team reasoned that policy-makers who sponsored this study might be interested in having first-hand information about the attitudes and motivations of the Kosovar repatriates.

### **International Context of Repatriation**

When NATO intervened against Yugoslav President Slobodan Milosevic's security forces in Kosova, it was emphasized that the primary objective was to safeguard the return of hundreds of thousands of refugees to Kosova. Ironically, the war against Serbian security forces initially accelerated the displacement of ethnic Albanians, but the tide was reversed by the end of the war. To quote Roger Winter, Executive Director of the US Committee for Refugees:

Once NATO bombing began on March 24 [1999], Serbian

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security forces violently uprooted hundreds of thousands of ethnic Albanians. By the end of May, about 1.4 million Kosovars had been uprooted, including 442,000 in Albania, 250,000 in Macedonia, more than 600,000 displaced within Kosovo, and more than 67,000 displaced into Montenegro.<sup>1</sup>

Between May 4 and 26, 1999, the airlifts of Kosovar refugees to Canada took place.

However, after 78 days of NATO bombing, a cease-fire agreement was reached on June 10, 1999, following which NATO peacekeeping troops promptly entered Kosova. This ushered the return of the overwhelming majority of Kosovar refugees, including 550,000 sheltered temporarily in Macedonia and Albania and 115,000 dislocated into Bosnia, Germany, Turkey and other countries.<sup>2</sup> Thus, the objective of the war was achieved, even though the ultimate Kosova question remains unanswered.

### **The Kosovar Repatriates from Northern Alberta: General Characteristics**

According to CIC records, a total of 120 Kosovar refugees who were resettled in northern Alberta decided to return to Kosova. This section focuses on the general characteristics of this entire group of repatriates, while subsequent sections in this chapter are based primarily on the results of interviews conducted in Kosova with a sample of the repatriated Kosovars.

The information available on the total group of repatriates is rather limited. However, a few facts gleaned from CIC records and from telephone calls made by one of the interviewers to selected contacts/informants in Kosova will provide some useful background information. This information will also be useful in assessing the representativeness of the sample of the Kosovars selected for interview.

A large majority of the Kosovar repatriates (N=101; 92%) were former residents of Edmonton and the remainder (N=10; 8%) were former residents of Grande Prairie. In terms of sex and age distribution, 64 (53%) were male and 56 (47%) were female. Using age calculations for 2000, 58 (48%) of them were 25 years of age or younger, 52 (43%) between the ages of 26 and 65, and 10 (8%) were 65 years of age or older. On average, the repatriates were slightly older than the non-repatriates (average age of 32 and 25 years, respectively). This age difference is further illustrated by the fact that 28% of the repatriates and only 11% of the non-repatriates were 45 years of age or older.

Eighty-seven of the 120 Kosovar repatriates were eligible for interview as they were 16 years of age or older, and the remainder (N=33) were ineligible for interview as they were 15 years of age or younger. Disregarding the one case for which information is unavailable, virtually all of the eligible repatriates arrived in Canada in May 1999. Information on the dates of return to Kosova is available for 79 of the 87 individuals. Of the 79, the large majority (N=68; 86%) repatriated between July 26 and November 10, 1999, and the balance (N=11; 14%) repatriated between April 10 and May 20, 2000. A closer examination of the data shows that the decision to repatriate tended to be made rather quickly, and more specifically within the first 3-4 months of resettlement.

Two observations need to be made at this point. First, the quickness of the decision to return to Kosova should not come as a surprise because of the stir that accompanied the entry of NATO troops into Kosova in the summer of 1999, and the simultaneous withdrawal of the Serbian security forces from that region. Indeed, for

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hundreds of thousands of dislocated Kosovars, peace had finally arrived and it was time to go back. Second, despite the fact that Kosovar refugees everywhere were naturally excited and ready to return to their home country, it is remarkable that only a minority (34%) of those resettled in northern Alberta decided to repatriate.

As a result of our explorations in early 2001, we were able to locate the addresses of 70 Kosovar repatriates. Of these, 32 (46%) were residing in Perlepnice, 23 (33%) in Pristina, 6 (9%) in Malisheva, 5 (7%) in Glogovc, and 4 (6%) in Zhiti. We were unable to locate the addresses of the remaining 17 repatriated adults.

For practical considerations, only 30 Kosovar repatriates were interviewed. This sample represents 43% of the Kosovar repatriates whose addresses were known. Under the circumstances, a non-probability or *convenience* sample was the most feasible option available. However, the interviewer was instructed to ensure representativeness in terms of age, sex, family membership and geographical location, subject to the overriding consideration of the interviewer's personal safety.

As reported in Chapter 2, essentially the same interview schedule used with the Kosovar refugees in northern Alberta was also used with the sample of Kosovar repatriates, modified slightly to suit the new situation (for a copy of the interview schedule used with repatriates, see Volume 2, Part I of this report). The results from the interviews in Kosova are discussed below.

## **Demographic Characteristics of the Sample**

The distribution by sex is representative of the larger repatriate group. Seventeen (57%) of the respondents were male and 13 (43%) were female. They were almost equally divided between the age groups 16-34 (N=14; 47%) and 35-54 (N=13; 43%), and the remainder (N=3; 10%) were 55 years of age or older. In terms of education, one respondent had no schooling, 9 (30%) completed 8 years of schooling, 2 (7%) completed 9-11 years of schooling (no high school diploma), 16 (53%) completed 12-14 years of schooling (with high school diploma), and 2 (7%) graduated from university.

Since most of the repatriated Kosovars were located in Pristina and Perlepnice, 11 (37%) of the respondents were drawn from each of these two cities, for a total of 22 (73%); 4 (13%) were drawn from Glogovc, and 2 respondents (7%) from each of Malisheva and Zhiti. Twenty-nine of the respondents arrived in Canada during the period May 5-19, 1999, and one arrived shortly thereafter, on June 27. Also, twenty-nine of the respondents were classified as KOS and only one as KOF, suggesting that the presence of relatives in Canada may have dampened the desire to repatriate.

The majority of the respondents (19; 63%) were married, while the remainder (N=11) had never been married. All but four of the married respondents had children and none of them gave birth to a child while in Canada. Of the 15 respondents who had children, three had one child, five had two children, three had three children, three had four children, and one had five children. About four out of 10 children were 16 years of age or older. Seven respondents came to Canada with 1 to 3 siblings, and seven came with one or both parents. Although many of the respondents came to Canada with children and other close relatives, they nevertheless left behind in Kosova many equally close relatives (children, parents, siblings, sisters-/brothers-in-law, mothers-/fathers-in-law, and so forth).



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## **Leaving the Country of Origin and Coming to Canada**

When asked why they decided to leave their home country, a small majority of the respondents (N=16; 53%) attributed their departure to war, terror and violence, and the remainder (N=14) said that they were forced to leave. Twenty-one respondents (72%) escaped from their hometown with other members of their family; and 19 said that they had left family members behind when they were fleeing their hometown.

The average length of time between leaving their homes and coming to Canada was 24 days for the repatriates, compared to 60 days for the non-repatriates. This suggests that the repatriates were the most reluctant to leave their home in the first place. All but one of the respondents stayed at a UNHCR refugee camp. In terms of help received, all of them acknowledged that they had received services provided by both the UNHCR and the Red Cross, and they rated these services very positively. In addition, 100% of the repatriates reported that they received help from their compatriot (Albanian) community in Macedonia.

In response to a question about whether or not the respondents had a choice of going to a country other than Canada, a small majority (N=16) said yes and the remainder (N=14) stated that they had no choice. Reflecting on why they came to Canada, a large minority (N=10; 33%) said they were attracted to Canada because it was "peaceful and/or democratic." Other reasons for coming to Canada were also given but in each case they were selected by only one or two respondents: "Canada is the best/liked Canada." "Prior knowledge of Canada." "English/French language." "Home not safe." "Didn't have choice." A plurality of the respondents (N=13; 43%) selected the category "other family members decided."

The following question was asked of all the interviewees: How much did you know about Canada before leaving Kosova? Clearly, prior to their coming to Canada, the overwhelming majority of the Kosovar repatriates (95%) had no or very little knowledge about their new country of resettlement. Probing further into this area, the respondents said that they would have liked to have known the following before coming to Canada: 'people/culture' (N=10), 'education system' (N=6), 'civil/refugee rights' (N=3), 'life in general' (N=3), 'weather/temperature' (N=1), and 'everything' (N=6). Significantly, this response pattern is common to all the Kosovar refugees resettled in northern Alberta.

## **The Repatriates' Experience on the Military Bases in Canada**

### *Needs and Services Provided*

The military bases where the respondents first lived when they came to Canada were Aldershot (55%), Gagetown (38%), and Kingston (7%). Their most urgent needs when they arrived in Canada (in descending order of mention) were 'sleep/rest' (83%), 'medical attention' (72%), 'clothing' (66%), 'safety' (52%), 'finding family members' (24%), and 'food' (3%). The survey results show that the services which the respondents received at the military base more than covered their stated needs. Specifically, the services received (in addition to such basic amenities as clothing, food, and shelter) included the following (in rank order): physical health services (100%), psychological support services (100%), interpretation (100%), orientation (learning about Canada)

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(100%), filling in forms (such as Social Insurance and Child Tax Benefit) (96%), English language training (93%), and finding and contacting family members (54%). The respondents were asked to rate these services on a 4-point scale where 1 meant *not at all helpful* and 4 meant *very helpful*. Almost all of the respondents found some of these services *very helpful*: physical health services, interpretation, filling in forms, and finding and contacting family members. Eighty-five percent of the respondents found English language training *very helpful*, and 76% of them rated psychological support services as *very helpful*, with the remainder finding the services *helpful*. In other words, none of the respondents found the services unhelpful.

#### *Pastime Activities and Children's Schooling*

The results further indicate that the adults could engage in a variety of activities of their own choosing during their free time. Popular pastime activities on the military base were walking to the village, sports, watching TV, caring for family, chess, reading/writing, and resting.

When the respondents' children were not attending school on the military base, the children tended to play and socialize and engage in sports and games. Virtually all the parents were *very satisfied* or at least *somewhat satisfied* with their children's schooling and leisure time activities on the base.

#### *Duration of Stay at the Military Base*

The military base experiences of the Kosovar refugees who remained in northern Alberta (the non-repatriates) on the one hand, and the Kosovar repatriates on the other, were essentially the same, except for responses to the following question: Regarding the time you spent at the military base, was it *too long*, *just right* or *too short*? Among the Kosovar refugees who remained in northern Alberta, 49% stated that the time spent at the military base was *just right*, 23% felt it was *too short*, and 28% thought that the time spent at the military base was *too long*. In contrast, among the Kosovar repatriates, 62% stated that the time at the military base was *too long* and 38% thought that it was *just right*. Interestingly, none of the repatriates thought that the time spent at the military base was *too short*.

Important as these differences in response patterns are, there were even more significant differences between the two groups of Kosovars in how they responded to the question: Why was the time you spent at the military base too long? Among the non-repatriates, frequently mentioned reasons included: "The barracks were so crowded." "Living in a camp is not a normal life." "It was hard to stay there." "I missed having my own place to live." "We were curious for the new place we will go." In contrast, nearly 6 out of 10 Kosovar repatriates gave reasons indicating that they were worried about homeland and/or family. "I was worried about Kosova." "I was worried for my hometown." "I thought about my fatherland." "Because I was worried for my daughter." "I missed my son." And "I was worried about my relatives in Kosova." The remainder of the respondents gave such reasons as "sad/confused," "life at the military base was difficult," and "missed home." It may be that the repatriates' sentiments, as expressed in the way they articulated the reasons for considering the time spent at the military base to be too long, were a precursor to their decision to return to their home country.

Turning now to the *just right* category, the repatriates' two most frequently mentioned reasons for considering the time spent at the military base to be *just right* were

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“feeling of security” (40%) and “life was well organized” (30%). Other less frequently mentioned reasons were “had good time,” “spiritual state better,” and “together with people.” These reasons are not unlike the ones mentioned by the non-repatriated Kosovars in northern Alberta (see Chapter 5).

In an attempt to obtain an overall assessment of the respondents' experiences at the military base, the following question was asked: Overall, how *satisfied* or *dissatisfied* were you with your experience at the military base? Four response categories ranged from 1 *very satisfied* to 4 *very dissatisfied*. A majority of the respondents (N=18; 62%) were *very satisfied*, 35% were *somewhat satisfied*, and only one respondent was *very dissatisfied*. Clearly, the Kosovar repatriates had very positive experiences at the military bases and Canada's decision to settle them temporarily there can not in any way be considered a factor in their decision to repatriate.

Parenthetically, it may be noted that although the majority of repatriated Kosovars were temporarily settled at CFB Aldershot and not CFB Gagetown where most of the non-repatriated Kosovars were temporarily settled, the difference in location between the two groups did not seem to have influenced their experiences on the base.

## **Settling in Northern Alberta**

After spending an average of two months on the military base, the Kosovar repatriates under study along with other selected Kosovar refugees were destined to northern Alberta for resettlement. Chapter 5 provides an overview of the non-repatriates' settlement experiences in Edmonton and Grande Prairie. This section provides a parallel overview of the repatriates' settlement experience. Comparisons between the two groups are made where differences are significant or may give a hint about factors influencing the decision to repatriate.

### *Assistance Received*

Like other Kosovar refugees, the repatriates received assistance largely from their sponsors; however, the one respondent classified as KOF lived with and received assistance from relatives in Canada. None of the KOSs lived with their sponsors. In the first month of resettlement, about 90% of the respondents reported that they met with their sponsoring group 4 to 6 times a week and 10% met with their sponsoring group 1 to 3 times a week. Table 8.1 shows the types of assistance sponsors provided to the respondents. The table also shows that in the majority of cases, 90-to 100% of the respondents evaluated these contacts to be *very helpful*. The one service which was not highly required or needed in the first month in northern Alberta was ‘looking for a job,’ and in the limited number of cases where it was provided, the respondents did not feel that the sponsoring groups' efforts in this area were particularly helpful. Significantly fewer repatriates than non-repatriates found their contact with sponsors or relatives to be very helpful in areas of social activities (40% of repatriates, 74% of non-repatriates), and comforting when sad or lonely (21% of repatriates, 72% of non-repatriates) as shown in a comparison of Tables 5.2 and 8.1. Although the repatriates appreciated the tangible services they received while in Canada, their emotional ties to Kosova were so strong that they were less able to take comfort from the psychological assistance offered.

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### *Stress Level and Feelings of Sadness*

Repatriates were asked to respond to the following question using a 4-point scale: During your first month in (Edmonton/Grande Prairie), how stressful was your life? It will be observed from Figure 8.1 that all of the respondents agreed that their lives were *somewhat* or *very stressful*. In contrast, about three-quarters of the non-repatriates in northern Alberta felt that their lives were *somewhat* or *very stressful* (see Figure 5.1). The high degree of stress and sadness among the repatriates during their first month in Edmonton or Grande Prairie was probably a factor in their decision to repatriate.

It is interesting to note that stress among the Kosovar repatriates did not subside in Kosova. Figure 8.1 reveals that during the month preceding the interview, 86% reported that their lives were *somewhat* or *very stressful*. On the other hand, a much smaller percentage of the repatriates (7%) reported that during the past month they were *somewhat* or *very sad*. Although repatriates experienced high levels of stress during the month prior to the interview, the repatriation process proved to be beneficial to their psychological state.

### *Uniqueness of the Kosovars*

In response to the question: Do you know of any differences in the benefits or services to Kosovar refugees compared to refugees coming to Canada from other countries?, nearly half of the respondents (47%) said *yes*. All of the respondents who were aware of such differences correctly noted that the Kosovar refugees had two years of government support, compared to only one year of support for the other refugee groups.

### *Recommendations for Improvement of Sponsorship Program*

One of the goals of this study was to evaluate the sponsorship program and make suggestions about how it could be improved. Accordingly, the Kosovar repatriates were asked how the sponsorship program could be made more helpful to newcomers. Twenty two of the 30 respondents (73%) offered comments and suggestions. Although the numbers are small, it may be interesting to report the results. Of those who responded, 8 (36%) felt that everything was fine, 10 (46%) emphasized the need for more assistance in finding employment, two respondents suggested that there was need for more information about life in Canada, how Canadians live and social customs, one respondent underlined the need for more financial support to newcomers, and one respondent emphasized the need for help with education.

As noted in Chapter 5, newcomers experience many social and cultural differences between life in Canada and in Kosova. Accordingly, the Kosovar repatriates were asked if their sponsoring group and/or Canadian relatives had shown any knowledge of or had given them any advice about these differences. The majority of the respondents (77%) indicated that their sponsors were aware of differences and gave them advice. The advice received revolved largely around "personal rights" (39%) and "taught us about life" (30%). Other areas of advice mentioned by one or two respondents included "religion," "be respectful," "education and banking," and "everything."

## **Adjustment to Life in Northern Alberta**

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The repatriates who had children under sixteen years of age were asked to respond on a 4-point scale: Overall, how well had your children been adjusting to their new life in Canada? Twelve parents answered the question. Two parents felt that their children had *not adjusted* and ten parents felt that their children were *well adjusted*.

#### *Friends and Social Contacts*

Virtually all the respondents (29 out of 30) reported making new friends in Canada. These friends came largely from the ranks of other Kosovar refugees, sponsoring groups, and neighbours. To a much lesser degree, the new friends came from the ranks of people they met at school or of other immigrants from a different culture. A very small number of respondents indicated that the new friends were people they met at work or other Canadian friends, not including their sponsors. It is clear that the repatriated Kosovars were not a socially isolated group.

#### *Assessment of Life in Northern Alberta*

The respondents were asked to give their opinions on a number of statements about their community of residence (Edmonton or Grande Prairie) on a 4-point scale ranging from 1 to 4 where 1 meant *strongly disagree* and 4 meant *strongly agree*. The statements addressed (a) the location being a good place in which to live, (b) having good job opportunities, (c) being a good place in which to raise a family, and (d) being a friendly and welcoming place. One hundred percent of the respondents strongly agreed with the first and second statement, 93% strongly agreed and 7% agreed with the third statement, and 100% agreed with the fourth statement. Clearly, the respondents were very satisfied with the city to which they were destined for resettlement in Alberta.

Parents of children born after 1984 were similarly asked for their opinions on a statement whether schools in their community had good ESL programs. Without exception, all such parents strongly agreed with the statement.

#### *Best and Worst Thing about Living in Northern Alberta*

Two separate questions were asked: What was the best thing about living there [in northern Alberta]? and What was the worst thing about living there? The answers to the first question singled out 'English language/ESL' (43%), 'employment' (40%), 'education' (13%), and 'freedom/safety/peace' (3%). The order of these responses is quite different from the one noted for the non-repatriates who selected 'freedom/safety/peace' first, followed by 'education' and 'employment' (see Chapter 5).

With reference to the worst thing about living in northern Alberta, 37% of the repatriates selected 'learning English,' followed by 'lack of employment' (33%) and 'too far from Kosova' (30%). Again, the non-repatriates' ordering of the worst things were slightly different: 'climate/mosquitoes' (25%), 'lack of employment' (18%), and 'too far from Kosova' (17%), 'other responses' (40%) (see Chapter 5).

#### **Contacts with Community Agencies**

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Only a minority of the repatriates (N=10; 33%) were aware of any local agencies in Edmonton or Grande Prairie that provided settlement assistance to newcomers, and all of these respondents contacted one or more agencies for assistance. Assistance was accessed in the following areas: Language Benchmark testing (N=10), interpretation and translation services (N=9), ESL enrolment (N=8), enrolling children in schools (N=2), and finding missing family members (N=1). Without exception, the respondents rated the assistance received as *very helpful* on a 4-point scale.

With particular reference to ESL or LINC, 14 (47%) of the respondents indicated that they had taken courses in Canada and the remainder said they did not take such courses. When those who had not taken ESL courses were asked why, 10 (63%) of the respondents said that they were planning to return to Kosova and the remaining six gave various answers including they needed to rest, were caring for children, or else they knew English.

When asked about other areas of assistance such as applying for landed immigrant status, physical health needs, psychological support services, finding employment, education/funding, food, and clothing, none of the respondents sought help in any of these areas from immigrant serving agencies.

## **Kosova After Northern Alberta**

### *Location in Kosova and Future Plans*

The large majority of respondents (93%) stated that they were living in the city/village/area in which they lived before the war, and 89% were living in the same house. Those who changed location, i.e., were living neither in former city/village of residence nor in the same house, attributed the change to the fact that their houses burned down. When asked whether they were planning to stay in Kosova, 73% (N=22) said *yes*, and 27% (N=8) said *no*. Significantly, in response to a follow-up question: Where are you planning to go?, all those that said *no* were planning to return to Canada.

### *Date of Repatriation*

Twenty-three respondents returned to Kosova in 1999 and seven in the spring of 2000. In the former year, two repatriated on July 1, four on August 2, and seventeen on September 3. Of those who repatriated in 2000, two did so on April 4 and five on May 5. It is clear that the decision to repatriate tended to be taken rather early in the period of resettlement. Also, judging from these statistics, it appears that repatriation, in general, was a family rather than an individual act.

### *Employment in Kosova*

The repatriates' employment history shows that, before coming to Canada, 10 out of 17 males (59%) and only one out of 13 females (8%) were employed in Kosova. Three of the men worked as economists, three as salesman, and only one person was employed in each of the following occupations: professor, teacher, market controller, and worker. The only female who worked in Kosova before coming to Canada worked as a clerk. In terms of tenure, five respondents spent 10 or less years in their primary occupations, four spent 11 to 20 years, and two spent more than 20 years (range of 3 to 33 years).

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Against this backdrop, a number of questions may be raised. How successful were these respondents in securing employment after returning to Kosova? Were they able to return to the jobs they left behind (or find new ones)? Is the picture of their employment after repatriation the same as before the war?

In response to a question about current employment, eight respondents (6 males and 2 females) stated that they were employed in Kosova: two as teachers, one as a salesman, and one as an interpreter (information missing on four). Of the currently employed respondents, five returned to the same workplace they were in before the war and three found new employment. When asked why they did not return to the same workplace, one respondent stated that the firm closed, one stated that she was not employed before the war, and one wanted to change professions. These results indicate that about 73% of the respondents who were gainfully employed before the war were also employed after repatriation. Thus, it can be said that, in terms of employment, there were some disappointed repatriates.

## Reasons for Repatriation

Table 8.2 provides information on the reasons for repatriation. It will be observed that about 27% of the respondents said that the war was over/Kosova was free/it was safe to return. Another 30% were motivated by love of their homeland where their roots were. About 17% were prompted to return to Kosova by homesickness and nostalgia, and 13% were motivated by desire for family reunification. Other less frequently mentioned reasons included family/parents decided, resume work/school, and I was worried (I was waiting for landed status but I could not get it). It is interesting that women, more often than men, tended to state as reasons for repatriation "war was over" and "cultural roots are in Kosova."

The following is a sample of the reasons given in the respondents' own words: "The war was over." "Because the war was interrupted." "I thought in Kosova is peace." "Because we thought it is safe." "Because I like my country." "I love my country." "Because I spent all my life in Kosova and I wanted to spend the rest of my life there." "Nostalgia for my town." "Because here are our roots." "Because Kosova is our country." "I was homesick." "In Kosova were my parents and my sister." "Because one of my sons was in Kosova." "Because Kosova was free and my son was there." "I was lonely and I felt sad for my sister and friends." "Because here are our family." "My parents decided." "Because it was family decision." "My daughter wanted to learn in her own language." "Because of employment and children's schooling." Significantly, all of the reasons given indicate that *pull* rather than *push* factors were at work in the decision to repatriate.

In response to a relevant question, none of the respondents returned to Kosova for an exploratory visit before making the decision to repatriate. However, they proactively sought information about the situation in Kosova from various sources: telephone contacts with friends/family (93%), radio/television (37%), Internet (27%), and newspapers (7%).

The respondents were also asked whether they received enough information to make a good decision. A large majority (76%) said that they did not receive enough information and the remainder felt that they did. When asked what they would like to have known, 50% said they would have liked to receive more information about

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security/safety, 41% would have liked more information about employment, and 9% would have liked to receive more information about life conditions/standards in Kosova.

When asked about whether or not they were satisfied with the decision to repatriate, 53% (N=16) of the respondents said they were not satisfied. Why so? Eight respondents were not satisfied because living conditions were difficult/insecure/unsafe, three said they were worried about the future, three were not satisfied because of unemployment, and two respondents said they were not satisfied because education was expensive. The repatriates' verbatim responses included: "It was not as we thought." "Life conditions are not normal." "I am excited because we are uncertain." "Because I don't have a job and I am not safe." "Life is difficult for my family." "I am afraid about my future." "I do not have a job and life is not safe." "Education is too expensive and life is not safe." For these respondents, the homeland did not live up to its hoped-for promise.

In contrast to the above, the ones who said they were satisfied with their decision to repatriate justified their position by saying they were in their own country/back to their roots (N=9; 69%); or because they had a job (N=2; 15%); or because they were reunited with their family (N=2; 15%). A sample of their responses included: "I live again in my country." "I am again with my family in my country." "Because here are my roots." "Because we are in birthplace." "Because I have a job." "Because I returned to my previous job."

Parentetically, it is worth noting that nearly eight out of ten Kosovar respondents in northern Alberta knew of friends or relatives who had moved back to Kosova. The perceived reasons for repatriation given by these respondents, as reported in Chapter 5, are not unlike the above noted reasons given by the repatriates themselves. Also, non-repatriates knew that many of the repatriates would like to return to Canada, again for reasons that are not unlike those given by the repatriates themselves. These results indicate that the communication networks are unfettered both within the Kosovar community in northern Alberta and between that community and the home country.

Finally, the interviews were concluded with the following question: Is there anything else about your experiences as a refugee, before or after coming to Canada, that you want to talk about? More than one response to the question was allowed. Virtually all the responses revolved around Canada. Among the responses were: "Thank the Canadian government" (N=21). "Want to return to Canada" (N=7). "Happy with hospitality in Canada" (N=2). "Greetings to all" (N=2). "Good education system in Canada" (N=1). Two responses, both of which relating to the situation in Kosova, were on the negative side, one expressing "disappointment with security" and the second expressing "worry about the future."

The following comments are typical of the responses of many respondents: "Thank you very much for your help." "My family is grateful to the Canadian authorities and sponsors too." "I thank the Canadian government for keeping us safely and for helping us to return to our country." "Thank you, you did a lot for us." "Thank you for your care." "Thank you and farewell dear friends." "Thank you, I wish all the best for you." "I would like to thank the Canadian authorities for being generous." "I would like to return to Canada." "Our wish is to return to Canada." "I am disappointed and I would like to return to Canada."

### *Interview Assessment*



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All of the interviews were conducted in the respondents' homes. At the conclusion of each interview, the interviewer was instructed to record her personal assessment in terms of the ease or difficulty with which the interview was completed. Available assessments indicate that 21 interviews were somewhat easy and six were somewhat difficult to conduct. In response to a question about why the interview was difficult to conduct, the interviewer stated that in three cases the interview was conducted by candle light and in the remaining three cases a family member had just died.

### **Summary and Conclusions**

1. This chapter examines the results of interviews with Kosovar refugees who first resettled in northern Alberta and then decided to return to Kosova. A sample of 30 repatriates was selected and all interviews were conducted in Kosova. The interview schedule used with this sample is a slightly modified version of the one used with the Kosovar refugees in northern Alberta. The purpose of this component of the study is to gain first-hand knowledge of the context and process of repatriation and any policy implications for Canada's refugee resettlement program.
2. Like the Kosovar refugees who remained in northern Alberta, the Kosovar repatriates experienced the stress of war in Kosova, displacement into Macedonia, life in refugee camps, airlifts from Macedonia to Canada, initial settlement in military bases in Canada, and finally relocation to northern Alberta for permanent resettlement.
3. About one-half of the Kosovar repatriates had a choice of going to another country but decided to come to Canada, and the other half had no choice.
4. Generally speaking, the settlement experiences of the Kosovar repatriates at the military bases, where they spent an average of two months, and with the sponsors in the city to which they were destined (Edmonton or Grande Prairie) were uniformly positive. Such positive experiences could not have fuelled the desire to return to Kosova.
5. The decision to repatriate tended to be made within the first three months of resettlement. This decision is strongly associated with: (1) a high level of self-reported stress and feelings of sadness; (2) sentiments reflecting a high degree of disquiet about the homeland and relatives in Kosova.
6. According to the repatriates' self-reports, the decision to repatriate was motivated largely by sentiments of kinship, nationalism, and a belief that peace returned to Kosova. Significantly, all of the reasons given by the respondents indicate that *pull* rather than *push* factors were at work in the decision to repatriate.
7. A majority of the repatriates felt that they did not receive sufficient information from friends/relatives in Kosova or from the mass media for making an informed decision about repatriation, nor were they satisfied with the decision to repatriate. And while 7 out of 10 repatriates plan to stay in Kosova, the balance would like to return to Canada due to unfulfilled hopes in the country of origin.

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8. Because the repatriates opted to forfeit their right to landed immigrant status in Canada, there is no special provision in Canada's immigration policy which would allow them to return to Canada at will. A policy change in this area is an option for Canada to consider.
9. Unlike the Kosovars who chose to remain in Canada, the repatriates' plan was to return to Kosova. For this reason, although they accessed some settlement services, they were intent on leaving as soon as possible.

#### **Notes**

1. Roger Winter, "The Year in Review." In *World Refugee Survey 2000*. Immigration and Refugee Services of America 2000, p.17.
2. *World Refugee Survey 2000*, p.13.

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## 9 LESSONS LEARNED AND POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

### Introduction

This study has generated a wealth of information about the Kosovar refugees before and after coming to Canada; Operation Parasol, the Kosovars' initial settlement at military bases in eastern Canada, and their subsequent resettlement in northern Alberta; and the roles and activities of key players in the entire operation. This concluding chapter draws on our research to determine the lessons learned and to make policy recommendations. For supportive evidence concerning any of the lessons learned and/or recommendations, the reader should refer to the related sections of the report.

In making our assessments, we were guided by a series of questions: Should a similar international situation arise in the future, how should Canada respond? What should be avoided? What procedures and activities should be modified? And what new measures should be taken? The focus of this chapter is on what worked and what didn't work, successes and challenges, and the factors influencing these outcomes.

Many recommendations offered by the respondents or gleaned from official documents are presented in the report. Excellent as they are, not all of these recommendations are taken up in this final chapter. What follows are broad, substantive issues, addressed as lessons learned and/or policy recommendations, which merit special attention in the future.

### 1. Operation Parasol and Future Operations

*Perhaps the most important lesson learned from Operation Parasol is that in an emergency situation of the type faced in Macedonia, Canada now has a track-record of success and, therefore, can be confident that it can undertake a successful large-scale evacuation operation in order to provide refugees with protection.*

By any standard, Operation Parasol was an outstanding success. Given the challenges involved in such an operation, no other country in the world as distant from Macedonia as Canada is, was prepared to confront the challenge and undertake a similar mass evacuation operation in such a short time period. CIC must be given full credit for the speed and excellence with which it mobilized its resources to deal with the situation. But it is important to remember that the success of Operation Parasol was contingent on at least three additional conditions.

The first condition influencing the success of this operation was the high level of cooperation among a large number of individuals and organizations in situ, including CIC—the lead agency for Operation Parasol, DND, the UNHCR, and the IOM. In the absence of such cooperation, the daily airlifts over a three-week period would not have been possible, or at least would not have run as smoothly.

The second condition influencing success involved the Canadian public, politicians, and the media. The unreserved openness of the Canadian public to respond positively to the plight of the Kosovar refugees and to resettle as many of them as

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possible in Canada, and the presence of a sustained political will to proceed with the airlifts and ensure operational success were remarkable. Canadians' attitudes toward the Kosovar refugees, at the both the governmental and non-governmental levels, were undoubtedly nourished by sympathetic media coverage of their dire situation in Macedonia and other neighbouring countries of first asylum.

A third critically important condition for success was the readiness of the military bases in Canada to provide temporary housing, sustenance and social support for thousands of Kosovar refugees, pending the finalization of sponsorship arrangements in selected cities of resettlement across Canada. Despite some challenges faced at the military bases (to be addressed later) as well as the initial reservations about using military sites to accommodate refugees fleeing the ravages of civil war, the Kosovar refugees' experiences at these sites were very positive. Teamwork and inter-agency cooperation at airhead and sustainment sites, coupled with the outpouring of professional volunteer and community support, contributed to the success of this venture.

The efficiency and effectiveness of the Canadian military, along with its streamlined organization of the sustainment sites, renders DND an indispensable partner in any future international operation similar to Parasol.

## **2. Role Clarity for Participating Agencies at the Military Base**

*The roles (including duties, obligations and expectations) of all participating agencies involved in the operation of the sustainment sites must be clearly defined and publicized and must come under one ultimate authority, namely, the lead agency for Operation Parasol.*

The results from this study strongly indicate that one key organization, in this case the Red Cross, misconstrued its role and authority. This unfortunate situation resulted not only in undermining the morale of other key players and volunteers at the military bases, but also in operational inefficiencies.

## **3. Higher Standards for Selection and Performance of Volunteers at the Military Base**

*Volunteers must be screened and carefully selected, their roles (including duties, obligations and expectations) clearly defined and communicated, and their activities at the military base closely monitored.*

According to our respondents, there were difficulties and problems created at the sustainment sites by volunteers who were neither experienced nor trained, and who lacked appropriate direction. These volunteers were viewed as well-meaning people, but they simply did not understand their role. The following examples illustrate this point: some volunteers came with the expectation of developing friendships and 'taking care' of Kosovars; they often gave advice that was in contravention of information given by experienced professionals; some volunteers misadvised Kosovar refugees that they would

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get a certain sum of money in their new community, that they could bring their family members, or that they need not go to a specific city of resettlement. Simply and bluntly put, there is no room for such assistance in a delicately balanced situation.

It may not be easy to recruit a large cadre of well-trained and experienced volunteers on short notice. In such a case, the less-trained or the inexperienced volunteers should be quickly identified and provided with pre-service training or, at the very least, orientation to their new role and what is expected of them. Above all, they should come under the direction of strong professional leaders on-site.

#### **4. Higher Standards for Selection and Performance of Interpreters at the Military Base**

*Interpreters must be screened and carefully selected by professionals who are fluent in the refugees' language (in this case Albanian), and their performance and activities at the military base should be closely monitored.*

Our respondents reported a number of misunderstandings and problems created at the sustainment sites by interpreters who lacked linguistic proficiency in Albanian and/or English. In some cases, the interpreters acted in contravention to their mandate by treating the Kosovar refugees with disrespect or by adding their own views into the translation.

#### **5. Family Reunification**

*The emphasis given to family reunification in the context of Operation Parasol, characterized by a relaxed definition of family members, has had far reaching positive effects on the well being and integration of Kosovar refugees.*

CIC's highly concentrated effort to keep Kosovar families together on their journey to Canada is unprecedented and most praiseworthy. The effort began with selection in the refugee camps in Macedonia, continued with the airlifts to Canada, with the choice of a sustainment site for initial settlement, and later with the choice of the city of resettlement as well as the choice of community within that city where refugees would be placed. What were the effects of this emphasis on family reunification?

Findings from our study show that Kosovar refugees who were settled in communities with extended family members reported higher levels of happiness and lower levels of stress than their non-Kosovar counterparts during the initial period of settlement. This is understandable because the Kosovar refugees depend on family networks for support and companionship as they settle in Canada. Also, our study shows that the rate of secondary migration is much lower among Kosovar refugees; that family reunification is mentioned by Kosovar repatriates as one of the reasons for returning to Kosova; and that after one year of settlement, the non-Kosovar refugees are preoccupied with issues of family reunification, whereas the Kosovar refugees are largely focussing their attention on settlement and integration. These are powerful results emphasizing the importance of family reunification.

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## **6. Consultation with the Province of Alberta**

*Regular consultation between CIC officers and the province of Alberta as was the case in the context of Operation Parasol, increases respect and admiration within the provincial government.*

Available evidence indicates that representatives of the Alberta government were very pleased with the regular consultations they had with CIC personnel regarding plans and developments concerning the Kosovar refugees. If regularized, CIC's consultative approach could be of great benefit to both the federal and provincial governments.

## **7. The Absence of an Emergency Response Plan**

The consensus is that CIC was highly successful in implementing the government's decision to accept thousands of Kosovar refugees over a very short period of time, and on short notice. CIC's efforts and planning activities concentrated on many fronts including the selection and processing of refugees in Macedonia, the airlifts, the airheads and sustainment sites, and the relocation of the refugees to cities of resettlement across Canada. A great deal of detailed work and countless contacts occurred with regional offices, provincial governments, refugee sponsors and service providers. In the time that was available, CIC's work was admirable and all staff members must be credited with pulling off one of the most difficult and complex operations in recent memory.

*The above observations notwithstanding, there is recognition within CIC, coupled with evidence derived from this study, that an emergency response plan is required. It could ensure greater consistency across regions in CIC's (and also sponsors') treatment of refugees. For example, in northern Alberta, CIC personnel decided not to settle Kosovars in settlement houses, but rather to settle them directly in their own rented accommodation. This decision proved to be beneficial as it helped to minimize disruption to the settling families. Best regional practices could be integrated into a CIC national emergency response plan in order to provide advice on a number of issues at all phases of response. Two such issues, addressed below, relate to communication and to management of expectations.*

## **8. Communication**

*An orderly, timely, open and authoritative communication plan developed by CIC on a wide range of issues could have alleviated misperception and/or misunderstanding of CIC's decisions and expectations concerning the treatment of Kosovar refugees.*

There was no dispute whatsoever over the government's decision to resettle Kosovar refugees in Canada. However, some of the details associated with this decision were not well understood due to the absence of clarification to the general public, and service providers, as well as to the refugee community already in Canada. For example: (1) the

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decision to fund the Kosovar refugees for two years (which was perceived to be invidious and lacking in justification), without making it clear to the public and the SPO community the special needs status of these refugees; (2) the decision to make a public appeal for sponsorship of the Kosovar refugees without clearly outlining the requirements and responsibilities of sponsorship; (3) the decision to change the criteria for family reunification was not well understood, particularly by the Kosovar refugees themselves. In addition, there was a need to disseminate to sponsors, service providers, volunteers, CIC personnel, etc. more information about the Kosovar refugees, their culture, religion and customs. Such information would have been helpful to all concerned.

Potentially, more and better communication in the future, as an integral component of an emergency response plan, would avert some of the above noted problems at the sustainment sites, and among sponsors and service providers in cities of resettlement. In other words, steps should be taken to *improve connections within and between stakeholders at all stages of the process*.

## **9. Management of Expectations**

*Unrealistic or inflated expectations are likely to emerge on the part of newcomers, in the absence of consistent and accurate information, provided in counselling sessions, concerning the conditions of their settlement in Canada. Counselling should take place prior to the newcomers' arrival and during their initial time in Canada.*

The results of this study indicate that the Kosovars came to reflect a wide range of unrealistic or inflated expectations. It is possible that the outpouring of generosity and support to the Kosovars at the sustainment sites erroneously shaped their expectations about what they would receive in the communities of resettlement. Also, their expectations of sponsors were often incorrect and unrealistic, as were their expectations regarding free education and dental care.

The *lesson learned* here is not unrelated to the above noted issues of information dissemination and communication. Unrealistic or inflated expectations should be corrected and dealt with promptly and professionally.

## **10. Refugee Sponsors**

A positive aspect of the Kosovar experience was the generosity of Canadians, many hundreds of whom offered to sponsor refugees, even though they had no previous experience in doing so. There are two lessons to be learned with respect to sponsors.

*In Canada there remains a strong under-utilized resource of potential sponsors who are eager to assist refugees.*

*Sponsors need ongoing support and skill-set building in the form of training, mentoring, and debriefing.*

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With regard to the first lesson, it is imperative that, in the future, appeals for assistance from the Canadian public be carefully worded in order to avoid disappointment and frustration from those whose help is not accepted.

With regard to the second lesson, when new sponsors are recruited, a training model is required in which settlement agency staff provide ongoing training with a cultural awareness component (specific to the refugees in question) and an overview of the responsibilities of a sponsoring group. Included in this instruction should be information on structures and organizational schemata (term of office, roles, size of group, etc.) that have proved successful for sponsoring groups in the past. The training program should also include a component for SAHs so they in turn will be able to provide mentorship and ongoing support to the sponsors under their umbrella. Debriefing is essential for helping new sponsors understand the boundaries of their roles, for allowing a forum for ongoing questions and learning, and for providing them with guidance.

Because sponsoring is a volunteer activity, it may be perceived as an area in which the government cannot place requirements on the participants. However, sponsoring is a privilege as well as a service. If an organization or group is willing to sponsor refugees, their members should be prepared to take training and follow guidelines and procedures pertaining to their role.

To facilitate sponsors' access to information, the RAP binder and all other sponsor documentation should be made available on the CIC web site. Email and a sponsor chat room would certainly make communication easier and would ensure that information is disseminated to sponsors with Internet access.

Another recommendation for distribution of relevant information has to do with existing resources that have been used successfully elsewhere. In the case of Operation Parasol, the DND personnel stationed in the Balkans had valuable insights into the cultural background of the Kosovars; however, very little of their information was shared with the settlement destinations. Another example of a resource that would have been welcomed by sponsors is the Albanian/English phrase book that was widely used at the sustainment sites. Communication links across venues are required to share useful information.

## **11. Service Providers**

A recommendation that came out of every sector involved in this study has to do with the deployment of SPOs. It is important not to underestimate the networking capacity of the settlement agencies. Despite the absence of a centralized national organization, settlement services program staff from across the country have the skills and expertise to work with refugees. In any future endeavours, it would be wise to follow the advice of several of the respondents: "*Use the best people for the job*". Settlement agency staff are the best qualified people to work with refugees, whether it is in sustainment sites or in destination communities.

*Given the skills and knowledge that already exist in settlement agencies, it would be expedient for CIC to first, develop training capacity among the service providers and second, to fund the SPOs to deliver sponsor training programs.*



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## **12. Repatriation**

The Kosovars' opportunity to repatriate at the government's expense is one that is not open to many refugees, but we have learned from their experiences of moving back to Kosova. Kosovars were put in the very difficult position of having to decide whether they wanted to repatriate or to stay in Canada. For many, the fact that they had had no time to grieve or to come to terms with their circumstances made it almost impossible to resist going back. Of those who repatriated, a significant minority would now like to return to Canada. *In the case of another mass evacuation, perhaps refugees should be allowed to return to their home country without giving up their Minister's permits for a limited period of time. If they choose to come back to Canada within the specified time period, they should be given the option of applying for a travel loan.*

## **13. Canadian Refugee Policies**

### *13.1 Large-scale Influx*

Everyone who was involved in Operation Parasol learned a great deal in a very short period of time. It was widely acknowledged that the success of the project was in large part attributable to the employees in the government departments involved: they were dedicated, flexible, and innovative. The lessons of this operation should not be lost. *We recommend that a manual be developed for future operations based on this and other final reports.* The manual should have guidelines for the lead agency, presumably CIC, at national, regional and local levels, indicating responsibilities of each branch, departments to be reached for support, training required for staff, and most importantly, a step by step set of procedures. For example, this manual should include clear directions on the implementation of the interim federal health agreement and billing procedures to avoid confusion and delay in the provision of health services. The DND and Health Canada have very detailed documentation outlining their roles; these will be invaluable if another large-scale evacuation takes place. CIC should have a similar reference.

*Related to the recommendation regarding the utilization of the SPOs, the importance of using the best people for the job means that turnover at sustainment sites and in local offices should be minimized.* It also means that the most highly trained and skilled staff should be available to train, mentor and supervise those who are working outside of their area of expertise. There should be continuity in CIC personnel involved in a project like Operation Parasol at all levels.

One of the lessons learned, as mentioned above, had to do with the unrealistic expectations with regard to goods and services that many Kosovars held when they arrived in their settlement locations. At Gagetown, New Brunswick, Kosovars were not only fully provided for, but also had many luxuries, such as free access to long distance telephones and 24-hour access to volunteers on call to meet their every need. *Services at sustainment sites should provide for the specialized and urgent needs of the incoming refugees, but at the same time focus on preparing the refugees for their new communities with attention and services that are somewhat reflective of life in the new community. In addition, refugees would benefit from receiving printed information in their own*

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*languages about their roles and what they should be able to expect in terms of their sponsors, the government and the settlement community.*

*Another lesson learned at the sustainment sites was the value in using an approach of health and well-being rather than one of illness (post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) model). This approach encouraged and assisted refugees to draw from their own resources of health and experience and continue on with their new life in Canada. The support the Kosovars received was culturally appropriate and beneficial. Future endeavours should continue to invite newcomers to participate in decision-making at the sustainment sites to ensure that service is culturally sensitive.*

In any situation where there are many people who do not speak the same language, interpreters play a crucial role. Not only should they be linguistically proficient in both of the languages in question, but also they should be trained to ensure that their presentation of information is neutral. *Finally, interpreters and other individuals working with refugees should never be drawn from the ethnic group that forms the opposing side of the conflict.* Trust is at the heart of successful interpretation; if it is jeopardized, both the interpreter and the refugee are put in a very awkward position.

### *13.2. Standard Refugee Programs*

Although in many respects, Kosovars accessed the same services as other refugees to Canada, it is clear from this report that they also received treatment that was distinct. *A review of the unique aspects of the Kosovar settlement situation is called for to determine whether there are changes that could be made to existing programs.* Two suggestions have emerged in this study from a number of sources. First, given the alacrity with which the Canadian government acted, there is a call for expedited processing of refugees in other parts of the world. Second, the commitment CIC made to keeping families together, and the broadening of the definition of family were remarkable; these had clearly positive effects on the settlement experience of Kosovars. Significantly, fewer KOFs (16%) than KOSs (40%) repatriated. Furthermore, there have been lower rates of secondary migration among Kosovars compared to individuals who have come to Alberta through normal channels: GARs, JAS or privately sponsored refugees. The success of the decision to keep families together suggests that CIC should explore ways of facilitating faster and more extensive family reunification for other refugees.

*The earlier recommendation to create documentation dealing with expectations of refugees in mass evacuations should be extended to all refugees and should be available in their first languages.*

In current refugee programs, most GAR and JAS refugees are classified overseas. The flexibility shown in Operation Parasol should be extended by making it possible to reclassify refugee status in Canada. *It is recommended that initially individuals be funded for up to one year, and then reassessed and reclassified based on settlement progress.*

*We recommend that CIC conduct a longitudinal study of the refugees to determine what a reasonable definition of "successful integration" should be and how best to encourage the appropriate steps to achieve it.* The Kosovars were admitted to Canada without screening for education levels, age, occupation, or linguistic knowledge, and yet their self-assessed language skills are higher than those of refugees who met selection criteria to come to Canada. The extra four months of ESL would certainly have contributed to their scores. If the Kosovars eventually find themselves in a better position in the labour market because of stronger language skills, for instance, their

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ultimate attainment in terms of integration may be greater. A longitudinal study should also focus on different characteristics of refugees to determine what types of programs would be of most assistance to various segments of the population (e.g., older people).

*Finally, CIC should collaborate with HRDC, provincial governments, professional bodies and unions to find ways to help refugees enter the labour market at a level commensurate with their skills.* Consistent with previous studies, the refugees in this study were either unemployed or underemployed to a greater degree than their Canadian-born counterparts. The barriers to employment are well known; strategies to overcome those barriers should be put into place.

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## **GLOSSARY**

CCR	Canadian Council for Refugees
CFB	Canadian Forces Base
CIC	Citizenship and Immigration Canada
CIDA	Canadian International Development Agency
CRC	Canadian Red Cross
CR3	Refugees who are fully sponsored by a group
CR5	Special needs refugees
CSS	Catholic Social Services
DND	Department of National Defense
EISA	Edmonton Immigrant Services Association
ESL	English as a Second Language
FSW	Family Support Workers
GAR	Government Assisted Refugee
HEP	Humanitarian Evacuation Program
HRDC	Human Resources Development Canada
IFH	Interim Federal Health program
IOM	International Organisation for Migration
JAS	Joint Assistance Sponsorship involving the government and the sponsoring group.
KOF	Kosovar refugees who were “fast-tracked” by the Canadian authorities to be reunited with relatives already in Canada.
KOS	Kosovar refugees who boarded emergency airlifts from Macedonia and were to be temporarily settled at selected military bases in Canada
Kosova	Kosovars' designation of their homeland (English: Kosovo).

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LINC	Language Instruction for Newcomers to Canada (Levels 1-5)
MCN	Mennonite Centre for Newcomers
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
NHQ	National Headquarters [of CIC]
Operation Parasol	Emergency airlifts of (KOS) Kosovar refugees who were to be settled temporarily at selected military bases in Canada, carried out between May 4-26, 1999.
PCERII	Prairie Centre of Excellence for Research on Immigration and Integration
PRL	Population Research Laboratory, University of Alberta
PTSD	Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder
PTSS	Post-Traumatic Stress Syndrome
RAP	Resettlement Assistance Program
RCMP	Royal Canadian Mounted Police
RIF	Relative Identification Form
ROLF	Right of Landing Fee
SAH	Sponsorship Agreement Holder
SPO	Service-Providing Organization
TB	Tuberculosis
TELUS	A Canadian telecommunication company
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees