

Developing Collaboratively a Model of Integration for Asylum-Seeking Women in  
Greece

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## ABSTRACT

## Developing Collaboratively a Model of Integration for Asylum-Seeking Women in Greece

by Brittany Hines

This thesis focuses on understanding the integration needs of asylum-seeking women in Greece, by developing collaboratively recommendations for a new integration model, using the strategies of the Canadian refugee resettlement system as a point of departure.

Through feminist action research in Greece, I explore the women's own journeys to accessing better services for resettlement. Through focus group and workshop sessions, we embark upon a joint project of conceptualizing a resettlement system that better addresses the women's needs.

Key findings indicate that successful integration of female asylum seekers in Greece is limited when there is a lack of access to information on the asylum process and limited availability of integration programs.

Overall, I conclude that, although the Canadian context and logistics of refugee integration is very different, there are useful Canadian resettlement policies which could be adapted to the Greek asylum-seeking integration framework to help solve some of these issues.

April 11, 2019

## ABBREVIATIONS

AMIF – Asylum, Migration and Immigration Fund  
ATM – Automated Transaction Machine  
ECHO – European Union Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid  
ESTIA – Emergency Support to Integration and Accommodation Programme  
ESWG – Education Sector Working Group  
EU – European Union  
FAR – Feminist Action Research  
FRS – First Reception Service  
GAR – Government Assisted Refugee  
GBV – Gender-Based Violence  
HRC – Halifax Refugee Clinic  
IRB – Immigration and Refugee Board  
IRC – International Rescue Committee  
IRCC – Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada  
ISANS – Immigrant Services Association of Nova Scotia  
JAS – Joint Assistance Sponsorship  
MSF – Doctors Without Borders  
NGO – Non-Governmental Organization  
POS – Point of Sale  
PSR – Privately Sponsored Refugee  
RIC – Reception and Identification Center  
SAH – Sponsorship Agreement Holders  
SOPA – Settlement Online Pre-Arrival  
UN – United Nations  
UNHCR – United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees  
UPP – Urgent Protection Program  
WAR – Women at Risk  
WHO – World Health Organization  
YMCA – Young Men’s Christian Association



## CHAPTER ONE: AN INTRODUCTION TO THE RESEARCH STUDY

### *1.1 Introduction to the Global Refugee Crisis*

According to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), there are currently over 68.5 million people forcibly displaced worldwide, with more than 44,000 people *newly* displaced from their homes each day (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees: Statistical Yearbooks, n.d.). Furthermore, as of 2017, there were over 3.1 million asylum seekers and 25.4 million refugees globally (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees: Statistical Yearbooks, n.d.). However, only a very small percentage of this population has been permanently resettled in another country, despite the fact that there are millions of people who are in need of safety.

Ultimately, this humanitarian crisis has resulted from a lack of political leadership concerning the development and implementation of global resettlement and integration policies, despite the fact that the right to seek asylum has been a basic human right since 1948. This right is guaranteed under section 14 of the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*, where it is stated that “*everyone has the right to seek and to enjoy in other countries asylum from persecution*” (United Nations, 1948). This right is also enshrined in the *1951 United Nations Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees* and the subsequent *1967 Protocol Relating to the Status of Refugees*, which outline the international laws for the minimally acceptable treatment of refugees, which must be followed by all signatories (United Nations, 1951).

According to the UNHCR, refugee resettlement is defined as the “*transfer of refugees from an asylum country to another state that has agreed to admit them and ultimately grant them permanent settlement*” (United Nations High Commissioner for

Refugees: Resettlement, n.d.). To successfully resettle refugees, a country must have an effective integration framework that can ensure the availability and accessibility of resettlement support services. These services can include (but are not limited to) psychological support, cultural orientation, language training, educational opportunities and employment development programs. To implement these essential services, the UNHCR notes that collaboration between federal governments, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and humanitarian organizations is essential.

In recent years, it has become especially clear that it is necessary to work toward developing *specialized* resettlement programs, which can more readily address the needs of the most vulnerable newcomers. For example, research shows that women who migrate face a unique set of challenges, including an increased risk of experiencing gender-based violence (GBV). Because of this, it is not surprising to find that this population requires targeted support throughout the resettlement and integration process. To address this, officials must more efficiently consider the needs of women when developing and delivering resettlement initiatives, especially long-term. To bring attention to the precarious journeys that many asylum-seeking women face, this work intends to specifically explore the resettlement experiences of women who have had to forcibly migrate, and who are now working to integrate into a new society.

To begin exploring the resettlement experiences of women, I focus on two countries in particular throughout this work which have very different resettlement systems. Firstly, I examine the refugee resettlement system in Canada, a country which has been a front-runner in the delivery of effective settlement practices. Through collaboration with the UNHCR and local organizations, the Canadian government supports female newcomers by

providing programs that offer various support services. While it must be acknowledged that this system is certainly not without its flaws, Canadian partners in resettlement strive to overcome obstacles and identify solutions to problems that at-risk women deal with when adjusting to life in a new society. It is important to note that throughout this work, women who resettle in Canada through the UNHCR are referred to as “refugees”, while those who arrive on their own without legal status are referred to as “refugee claimants”. These definitions will be explored in detail later on in this work.

Secondly, I examine the integration system in Greece, a country that has been overburdened by massive numbers of incoming asylum seekers in recent years. Since the beginning of the Syrian civil war in 2011, hundreds of thousands of asylum seekers have entered Greece after crossing the Mediterranean Sea from Turkey. Although Greece *does* have a refugee integration framework in place, the system has not been able to withstand the growing demand. As a result of this, many newcomer women have been forced to endure dangerous and unsanitary conditions in island reception centers after arriving in Greece. It is important to note that, throughout this thesis, the term “asylum-seeker” is used as an umbrella term to refer to newcomers who are in various stages of the asylum procedure. For example, this includes people who have applied for asylum and are waiting for a decision, those who have arrived but not applied for asylum protection, those who have had their asylum applications rejected, and those who have successfully navigated the asylum process and who have received refugee protection.

Ultimately, the discrepancy in the success of these two systems is a result of the unique challenges which Greece has had to face, largely without support from international partners, such as the European Union (EU). For example, Greece has had to deal with

copious numbers of asylum seekers arriving on the shores of the Greek islands, many of whom have been smuggled across the Mediterranean Sea in small boats. Because Greece is a signatory to the *1951 United Nations Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees* and the subsequent *1967 Protocol Relating to the Status of Refugees*, the country has a legal obligation to provide due process to asylum seekers in accessing protection, even if it may result in a distressing situation for authorities. Contrastingly, Canada has not experienced such a problem given the northern position of the country which makes it impossible for large groups of people to arrive in small boats, unannounced.

In light of the evident need for refugee integration programs which directly address the problems of female asylum seekers, I began this research working collaboratively with women at the Melissa Network for Migrant Women in Athens. At this center, which is a grassroots resettlement organization that focuses on female empowerment through communication, active citizenship and education, the staff and clients expressed the desire to learn about, reflect upon and possibly adapt to their own needs, the much-celebrated Canadian refugee resettlement system. Thus, my research question, with their input, was developed as follows: How can the Canadian refugee resettlement system be utilized as a point of departure to develop practical recommendations for action to improve integration services and experiences for female asylum seekers in Greece? By exploring the current states of both the Canadian and Greek refugee resettlement systems, in collaboration with female asylum seekers themselves, I sought to come to terms with the experiences of these women as they learned about and reflected upon the Canadian system with me, in search of answers to what might be done better to avert or address the challenges they had experienced.

Overall, the data collected for this thesis was gathered from two different stages of research. In the first stage, I sought to understand the structure of the Canadian refugee resettlement system, by conducting semi-structured interviews with representatives of three organizations that carry out Canada's resettlement policies, in Halifax, Nova Scotia. The second stage of this research took place in Athens, Greece, where I spent four weeks at the Melissa Network for Migrant Women. Here, I was fortunate to hold two workshop and focus group sessions: one with staff practitioners of the organization, and the other with asylum-seeking women who visit the organization daily. During these sessions, I generated discussion and gathered feedback about the experiences of asylum-seeking women, from their own perspective. Upon being provided with a concise presentation that outlined the major parts of the Canadian resettlement system, the participants were given the opportunity to comment extensively on whether and how, specifically, they felt Canadian resettlement services might be useful to them or other women in their circumstances.

### ***1.2 Outline of the Thesis Structure***

Immediately following this introduction, the second chapter of this thesis will present an overview of the gender and migration theory, which was the theoretical framework used to guide the development and execution of this research. As this project focused primarily on the experiences of female asylum seekers, I opted to use this theory due to its exploration into the experiences of women undergoing forced migration. This chapter will also provide an overview of the key concepts of the gender and migration theory, and will summarize the work of prominent scholars in the field.

Next, to understand how this study was carried out, chapter three will explore the major mixed-methodologies used to collect the qualitative data that formed the basis of this

work. Briefly, these methods included semi-structured interviews, informal observation techniques and feminist action research.

To provide somewhat of a foundation for comparison between the two countries, chapter four will consist of a brief look into the current state of refugee affairs in both Canada and Greece. This is meant to provide an overview of the major differences between the refugee crises each country is facing. In chapter five, I will build on this by exploring, in-depth, the structure of the policies and procedures that form the Canadian refugee resettlement system, and how they are carried out. The sixth chapter of this work will provide the key findings of the semi-structured interviews which took place with representatives from the three refugee resettlement organizations in Halifax, Nova Scotia, Canada.

Continuing on, the seventh chapter will then present an exploration of the legal and policy aspects of the Greek reintegration system (similar to what was done in chapter five for the Canadian system). The eighth chapter will complement this by exploring the data that was collected during my four weeks at the Melissa Network for Migrant Women in Athens, Greece. Throughout this chapter on Melissa, I provide details from my informal observation period, as well as the input and feedback that was gathered from the workshop and focus group sessions. Lastly, in the ninth chapter of this work, I explore the two recommendations for a hypothetical model of Greek integration, which were collaboratively developed using the framework of the Canadian refugee resettlement system as a point of reference and inspiration.

Ultimately, I conclude that by developing theoretical recommendations for action, in collaboration with asylum-seeking women in Athens, that we can hypothetically address some of the major challenges these women face with the Greek integration system.

## CHAPTER TWO: THE THEORETICAL UNDERPINNINGS OF GENDER AND FORCED MIGRATION

### ***2.1 A Theoretical Approach to Refugee Reintegration: Gender and Migration***

Understanding the needs of female asylum seekers is a complex undertaking, which depends on a number of factors including the woman's economic status, education, employment and past trauma. In light of this, I concluded in the planning stage of this research that this work would be most effective if it were driven by female asylum seekers themselves, and understood from their unique perspective. By involving the women in this project, which studies their resettlement experiences, my research was designed to allow them to exercise their own agency. As such, this thesis was developed using the gender and migration theory as its theoretical framework. By exploring the unique journeys of refugee women through this lens, I hope to contribute to female empowerment by allowing asylum-seeking women to be co-researchers, and think through the research question with me.

According to scholars Donato, Enriquez and Llewellyn, contemporary gender and migration theory ultimately aims to highlight the inherently different experiences that men and women have throughout the migration process (Donato et al., 2017). This means that a person's gender can impact all stages of the migration process, including pre-migration, the actual migration itself and post-migration. In 2006, an article entitled *Glass Half Full: Gender in Migration Studies* made the claim that gender structures all human relationships and all human activities, identifying the critical need for migration studies to take into consideration these differences between the experiences of men and women (Donato et al., 2006).



Before exploring the framework of the gender and migration theory, there are several key terms, according to the International Organization for Migration (IOM), which first need to be identified to accurately describe the precarious migration experiences of a woman. Firstly, *gender*, in this circumstance, refers to the socially constructed roles, relationships, personality traits, behaviors, values, power and influence that a society associates with males and females differently (International Organization for Migration, 2015). In this circumstance, the term *migration* refers to the movement of a person or group, either across an international border or within a nation state. It can include the migration of refugees, displaced persons, economic migrants and people moving for purposes of family reunification (International Organization for Migration, 2018a).

## ***2.2 The Framework of the Gender and Migration Theory***

For many decades, the unique migration experiences that women had were overlooked by scholars of migration theory; it was simply assumed that women and children migrated solely to accompany the “breadwinner” of the family. Silvia Pedraza, author of *Women and Migration: The Social Consequences of Gender*, noted in 1991 that despite the growing presence of female migrants around the world, there was still a widespread assumption that the “international migrant” was a young, economically motivated man and that women only migrated as a secondary movement to follow them (Pedraza, 1991). Because of this assumption, migration was often viewed by some scholars as a process in which gender was not a major factor (Rudnick, 2009). However, contemporary gender and migration theory seeks to dispel this assumption by engendering the migration experience to acknowledge the unique journeys that women undertake (Rudnick, 2009).

It is also important to note that gender matters in the context of migration for a number of other reasons (Rudnick, 2009). Firstly, gender can help to identify the roles, characteristics and expectations which are attributed to both men and women in different societies; interestingly, some scholars believe that these same attributions explain what motivates many women to migrate in the first place. For example, a woman may be sent away by a male relative based on her cultural “standing” in a family structure; alternatively, a woman may migrate alone in order to access a more open labor market that is less discriminatory toward females, or better economic opportunities (Rudnick, 2009). Women also may migrate to escape dangerous situations, in which they have been victims of GBV. Ultimately, by acknowledging the need for a gender-based understanding of migration, we can help to bring awareness to female empowerment. *Empowerment*, in this circumstance, means recognizing that all individuals’ lives are inherently different, and that people have different experiences, needs, issues and priorities which must be considered (International Organization for Migration, 2015).

According to Suzanne M. Sinke, author of *Gender and Migration: Historical Perspectives*, it was not until the late twentieth century that researchers and theorists fully began to accept this unique role that gender plays in the migration experience (Sinke, 2006). By 1965, historical research on international migration was becoming more popular, in part due to an increase in migration to the United States from Europe, Asia and Latin America. During this time, women also began entering post-secondary institutions and the field of migration studies; as such, the perspective on the importance of gender in migration studies began to shift. By engaging with economic models of research, historians and researchers alike began to critique the traditional “genderless” interpretation of migration theories, in which the reasons for why women migrate were not considered (Sinke, 2006). As the years

progressed, social scientists began to use surveys, ethnographies, and participant observation to put the spotlight on the experiences of the migrant woman (Donato et al., 2006).

While researchers slowly became more aware of how migration matters could be linked to social issues, such as gender, the overall study of migration still was not adequately acknowledging the unique analytical approach that needed to be adopted in order to understand the experiences of women (Pedraza, 1991). In 2003, Monica Boyd and Elizabeth Grieco, authors of *Women and Migration: Incorporating Gender into International Migration Theory*, presented findings which were consistent with the understanding that the role of gender was critical in the migration context (Boyd and Grieco, 2003). To emphasize the importance of the female migration experience, Boyd and Grieco identified barriers that exist for female migrants as a result of gender inequality. For the purpose of this work, *gender equality* refers to the equal rights, responsibilities and opportunities of all individuals, no matter the sex they were assigned at birth (International Organization for Migration, 2015). Ultimately, Boyd and Grieco noted that these barriers exist in different stages of the migration process, including the pre-migration stage, the actual migration across international borders, and the post-migration experience in the receiving country (Boyd and Grieco, 2003).

In the pre-migration stage, Boyd and Grieco argue that there are a number of factors that affect whether or not a migration is even possible for a woman, including cultural gender relations, their status and role as a woman in society, and the institutions which govern their home country (Boyd and Grieco, 2003). During the formal migration stage, the immigration laws of many nations affect the gendered migration experience. For example, restrictive immigration policies in a woman's country of origin may prohibit her

from exiting the country on her own without being acknowledged as the “daughter” or “wife” of a man (Boyd and Grieco, 2003). During the post-migration stage when a woman has arrived in her new country, she may find herself at risk of being treated differently because of her ability to integrate into a new society, or based off of her legal status (Boyd and Grieco, 2003). It is important to note that legal statuses can also affect a woman’s social rights and entitlements in her new country, including access to language classes, job-training and eventually, employment opportunities (even if the person is highly skilled) (Boyd and Grieco, 2003). Ultimately, Boyd and Grieco hold the position that gender is crucial in determining who migrates, how they migrate, and the overall success of their migration. Understanding the factors that affect the experience of female migrants is necessary to understand what needs to be done to help eliminate some of the ongoing obstacles that women face.

### ***2.3 Involuntary Movement: Understanding the Role of Gender in Forced Migration***

While the gender and migration theory has begun to acknowledge the need for an engendered understanding of migration patterns and the experiences that are unique to women, it is also important to explore the effect that *forced* migration has on the female migrant. According to scholar Anastasia Bermúdez-Torres, *forced migration* refers to the involuntary movement of people, notably refugees and asylum seekers, who have had to leave their native land in search of safety (Bermúdez-Torres, 2002). In her work, Bermúdez-Torres notes that the main causes of forced migration include war and armed conflict, but can also include natural disasters or any other event which would result in the involuntary movement of a population (Bermúdez-Torres, 2002). The forced migration theory recognizes that a gender-centric approach to migration does not end with a woman’s

arrival in a new country; ultimately, the experiences which a woman has during the migration will affect her future livelihood, healthcare, education, employment and overall integration into a new society (Birchall, 2016).

Despite the fact that gender is not one of the main criteria for the right to seek asylum, as outlined in the *1951 Convention for the Status of Refugees*, there is growing need for protection from gender-related persecution, and from gender-based discrimination during the forced migration process (Sadrehashemi, 2011). Research shows that, while there are certainly a number of challenges to be faced by any person undergoing a forced migration, women and girls are at risk of experiencing additional obstacles simply because of their gender (Bermúdez-Torres, 2002). In modern times, it is important to note that migration, especially forced, is not a gender-neutral issue; this is simply because there are many reasons why women migrate which would not affect men equally (Rudnick, 2009).

To fully understand the impact of gender disparities in forced migration, the following section of this chapter will explore some of the various challenges which women may experience as a result.

### **a. Experiencing Gender-Based Violence**

Firstly, one of the main concepts of the gender and forced migration theory is that women are at a higher risk than men of being victims of gender-based violence (as noted earlier in this chapter). GBV, which refers to any harmful act committed toward someone against their will, is primarily based on the differences between men and women (International Organization for Migration: Gender Mainstreaming, n.d.). Generally, this increased risk of GBV, including sexual violence, is due to the fact that many women are alone during their migration, but are expected to maintain their regular gender roles while

living in precarious situations. Women may also be vulnerable to harm if they are living where there is a general break down of law enforcement (El-Bushra, 2000). At the origin of this gender-based victimization of women lies patriarchy and its multiple institutional (legal, policy, social) and interpersonal expressions. Displacement and forced migration increase the vulnerability that makes GBV, a possible threat to all women, more likely against forcibly migrating and asylum-seeking women.

Exposure to GBV can occur at any point during the forced migration experience, whether it happens during the initial journey, or after a woman has settled somewhere and claimed asylum. Specifically, women can be vulnerable to sexual assault while moving from one country to the next, especially if they are being smuggled (Freedman, 2016). According to scholar Jane Freedman, many women fall victim to police and armed forces along their route, who are supposed to be there to protect them. Men may also take advantage of migrating women and the difficult situations they are in, and could demand sexual favours in exchange for passage to Europe (Freedman, 2016). Furthermore, many women are exposed to GBV because they are unable to escape from abusive husbands; often times, these women have children whom they cannot provide for during a migration without the man's support (Freedman, 2016). According to Freedman, many women also report feeling afraid of other refugees who they may meet along the way, notably single men (Freedman, 2016).

### **b. Navigating Gender-Based Socio-Economic Challenges**

The gender and forced migration theory also asserts that women can face unnecessary socio-economic challenges due to gender-based discrimination. During forced migration, women are routinely economically disadvantaged because of cultural and societal divisions

that exist between men and women, regardless of exceptional circumstances. Women may also continue to experience such disadvantages after they have arrived in their new country and begun the process of integration (Bermúdez-Torres, 2002). For example, the purchasing of goods and services, including food, is normally a job for the male “head of household”. However, not all women who are forcibly migrating have a male companion that they can rely on (Bermúdez-Torres, 2002). Many women migrate alone, possibly because the male members of their families were killed, kidnapped or have joined the armed forces. Additionally, some women are accompanied by males who are simply too ill or injured to uphold their role as the head of household. Unfortunately, a woman’s inability to secure the basic needs of life on her own can lead to malnutrition and exploitation (Bermúdez-Torres, 2002).

Moreover, another socio-economic challenge that women face is that they may be required to present legal documents throughout the forced migration journey (for example, at an international border or at checkpoints along the route) (Rosenow-Williams and Behmer, 2015). However, in many countries, the issuance of legal documents, including passports and identity cards, is a privilege only afforded to men. If the women have lost such documents and cannot have them replaced, they could have difficulty in their escape from persecution (Rosenow-Williams and Behmer, 2015).

Lastly, after a woman has claimed asylum and begun the process of resettlement, it is possible that she could have problems securing employment or education. This is because, in many cultures, these opportunities are solely reserved for men who are seen as the “better investment” (Rosenow-Williams and Behmer, 2015). Women, rather, are expected to take care of the household and children (Rosenow-Williams and Behmer, 2015).

### **c. Managing Needs in Precarious Circumstances: Life in a Refugee Camp**

Gender and forced migration theory also takes into consideration the difficulty of being a woman who is trapped in a refugee camp. While there is no doubt that life in a temporary holding site can be difficult for everyone, regardless of their gender, age, or ethnicity, women experience risks which are different from the typical issues that men would face. For example, following up on the idea that women face socio-economic challenges, some researchers note that women also go without their basic needs while living in a refugee camp, given that the distribution of food and other goods is typically organized by male leaders who will only provide to other men (Bermúdez-Torres, 2002).

Furthermore, although awareness about issues in refugee hotspots has increased, women are still at risk of not being able to find safe housing. In the event that a migrant woman *has* found shelter, it is likely that she is confined to cramped living spaces which provide her with little privacy or access to support services (Bermúdez-Torres, 2002). Because of this, many girls and women are forced to live in tents, making them easy targets for sexual predators who stalk the confines of the camps each night. Something as simple as retrieving water or using the washroom could have devastating effects for a woman living in such conditions (Freedman, 2016).

Lastly, women are exposed to a number of health challenges while living in refugee camps which would not affect men. Because of the likelihood of GBV, women face an increased risk of complications with the reproductive system. Many young women who are victims of rape become pregnant and have nowhere to turn for proper neo-natal care (Bermúdez-Torres, 2002). Additionally, some women do not have access to basic hygiene



needs or safe birthing conditions. Often, there is simply no assistance or support resources for feminine hygiene and health for women to take advantage of.

#### ***2.4 How Gender and Forced Migration are Linked to International Development***

According to scholar Judy El-Bushra, there is a clear relationship that exists between the forced migration of women and international development studies. By exploring the implications of forced migration from a gendered perspective, it is possible to improve the planning of humanitarian projects, as the challenges affecting female migrants will become more evident to policy makers (El-Bushra, 2000). By identifying some of the unique issues that women face (including GBV and lack of access to markets, education and employment), El-Bushra stated that humanitarian interventions can also be more effectively implemented because they will have been developed with a targeted audience in mind (El-Bushra, 2000). This connection between migration and international development studies is directly related to the thesis research at hand, as I have sought to understand the integration needs of women, many of whom are recent asylum seekers themselves. By bringing a gendered understanding of migration into international development studies, those who design resettlement and integration programs for female newcomers can more effectively consider the needs of women, and the intended outcomes of their projects.

However, it is also important to consider another perspective. Despite the fact there are obvious negative impacts that come with the forced migration of women, times of conflict and upheaval can often force women to find new ways of survival, which can be empowering for them in the long run (Bermúdez-Torres, 2002). El-Bushra states that local governments and NGOs in receiving communities should be prepared to have programs

which will help to build on the skills that women may have gained during their migration. Having such specific resources in place is important to the empowerment of women because when a person learns new skills, it can help them to find the positive in their past trauma, build their confidence and work their way into a new society to which they can freely contribute (El-Bushra, 2000).

Furthermore, scholar Nina Glick Schiller suggests that when large populations of migrants settle in an area, it can create a “transnationalism” effect, meaning that intercultural ties between different groups of people can be strengthened, and previous notions about race and gender can be abandoned in favour of community (Glick Schiller, 2009). Ultimately, migrants bring new social and economic needs which can lead to the enhanced development of labour markets in areas where there was simply no previous demand (Glick Schiller, 2009). In light of this, Glick Schiller says that migrants can be agents of active contemporary transformations on local, national and global scales. The value that they bring to their new homes can allow the local area to be restructured with new value (Glick Schiller, 2009). Because many migrants are highly skilled, they also help to increase the capital that is produced by each city, and bring knowledge to previously struggling industries. Overall, the inclusion of migrants in existing social fabrics will help to weave a new, more improved version that effectively contributes to development on many levels (Glick Schiller, 2009).

Yet, according to author Srilakshmi Gururaja, the gender and migration theory still has a long way to go before it will adequately acknowledge all of the various challenges associated with the migration of women. Upon making this suggestion, Gururaja states that there are several strategies for action that need to be taken to break down barriers of

discrimination against women (Gururaja, 2000). Gururaja says that there are two main prerequisites:

1. Firstly, there needs to be a global understanding of how gender affects migration. This means that governments and humanitarian organizations need to employ rights-based approaches based on equality, accountability, participation and protection (Gururaja, 2000).
2. Secondly, there needs to be a global understanding and analysis of the social structures which make up populations of forcibly displaced persons. This means that it is crucial to examine the characteristics and traits of forced migrants, to implement effective humanitarian policies (Gururaja, 2000). There must be a more concrete effort to help women undergoing forced migration adjust to their new circumstances and understand their own human rights (Gururaja, 2000).

Gururaja secondly notes that women should be seen as survivors of the forced migration process and not victims; this means humanitarian assistance projects and resettlement programs should plan to encourage women's empowerment and self-advocacy initiatives, and not simply ignore the presence of women or assume that the process of migration is gender-neutral (Gururaja, 2000). For example, it has become increasingly important to support educational and awareness initiatives about gender protection. One major step that could be taken, according to Gururaja, is to support the sensitization of people who work in refugee hotspots or makeshift processing centres. This could help inform staff of the dangers that women face during the forced migration process (Gururaja, 2000).

### ***2.5 Conclusion: Acknowledging the Impacts of the Gender and Migration Theoretical Perspective***

Ultimately, contemporary gender and migration theory asserts that gender must be considered as an important factor when exploring the reasons why people migrate, and the different experiences that female migrants and asylum seekers have during this process. In this chapter, I examined the case of forced migration which looks at the experiences of women who must leave their homes due to safety reasons, including armed conflict,

violence and fear of persecution. Since the late 1990s, many major scholars have sought to understand the forced migration patterns which are unique to women, to acknowledge the obstacles they face when searching for safety in a country other than their own.

I have also explored three major challenges which support the idea that there needs to be an engendered approach to global migration, including forced migration. Firstly, I examined the issue of GBV which many women face during the migration process given the cultural and societal divisions between men and women, and a lack of protection. Moreover, I explored the gender-based socio-economic challenges that women face when migrating, as a result of discrimination against them in the market, based on traditional gender roles. Lastly, I identified the different challenges that women deal with while living under precarious circumstances, including in a refugee camp, with little security or access to basic needs.

While it should be applauded that the gender and migration theory has gained more legitimacy in general migration theory scholarship, there is still a long way to go before international players fully acknowledge the importance of examining migration through a gendered lens. If world-stage politicians and organizations were more readily prepared to understand the motivations and experiences of female migrants, it is possible that they would be more prepared to positively contribute to international development studies and humanitarian programs.

## CHAPTER THREE: THE RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

### *3.1 Introduction*

To answer the research question at hand, and to collaboratively develop recommendations for action for a hypothetical model of integration in Greece, I have undertaken a mixed-methods investigation which included two dimensions, a geographical and a conceptual. Geographically, my research consisted of two stages: the first stage involved data collection occurring in Halifax, Nova Scotia; and the second stage involved data collection taking place in Athens, Greece. Conceptually, my research design included extensive and in-depth review of secondary data resources on refugee resettlement and integration in Canada and in Greece; and secondly field work/primary data collection in both Halifax and Athens. In late December of 2017, I began with my conceptual research in Halifax, Nova Scotia, by undertaking an in-depth review of secondary data sources that examined the policies and procedures of the Canadian refugee resettlement system. By exploring the various streams through which refugees and refugee claimants resettle in Canada, I developed an understanding of the reintegration programs which exist to provide newcomers with access to support during their first year in the country. After completing this preliminary work, I conducted semi-structured interviews with employee and volunteer representatives of three major Canadian resettlement organizations in Halifax, in early January of 2018. These interviews were conducted both in-person and over the phone, and ultimately provided me with a clear understanding of how the programs of the Canadian refugee resettlement system are delivered.

Upon completing the Canadian research (secondary and primary data collection) I started exploring existing resources that provided information on the Greek integration system. To do this, I examined a plethora of secondary data sources to learn the details of

Greece's various integration policies. Upon completing this step, I traveled overseas to Athens, Greece in January of 2018 for fieldwork. Here, I was fortunate to partner with the Melissa Network for Migrant Women, where I collected first hand data by using feminist action research strategies. Specifically, I held two workshop and focus group sessions: one with staff practitioners of the organization, and the other with asylum-seeking women themselves, in which I explored the women's own perception of their resettlement experience with them.

At this point, I wish to highlight the use of the word "collaborative" throughout this work, and what it means in relation to the various stages of my research. Firstly, collaborative techniques were used in the initial conceptualization of this project, then in the methodological design, and finally in carrying out the research, in the following ways. In order to develop a partnership with the Melissa Network that would be mutually beneficial, and in the spirit of feminist ethics, my supervisor and I sought to find a way through which I could contribute something useful to the organization, without adding to any "foreigner fatigue" that the center may have already been experiencing. In this case, "foreigner fatigue" refers to the idea that the Melissa Network is already inundated with foreign students who wish to volunteer. Through a process of exchange, discussion and mutual understanding of advantages and constraints, it was agreed upon that the women of the Melissa Network, who had expressed interest in learning about the Canadian refugee resettlement system, would learn about it through workshop and focus group presentations that I would deliver. This would be done while reflecting upon how the Canadian system's services might have benefitted them or other women in their circumstances, and by providing me with their feedback. Overall, this allowed me to begin understanding where there were gaps in the Greek integration system, and whether or not Canadian polices could

be of use in solving some of these issues. Therefore, it was my ongoing collaboration with the organization that enabled me to develop recommendations for action toward a hypothetical model of Greek integration.

The rest of this chapter will now examine the various parts of the methodology which guided this research study, beginning with a review of the research design and methodological paradigm that structured this work. I then explore the details of the above-mentioned data collection periods. Finally, the last part of this chapter will explain how the collected data was analyzed, and will identify the limitations that come with this sort of research study.

### ***3.2 Identifying a Research Paradigm: Using Feminist Action Research to Answer the Research Question***

Because this would be a research project with more than one period of data collection, it was necessary at the very beginning to identify a methodological framework which would help guide this study toward answering the research question. Because I had undertaken an examination of the gender and migration theory, and as such, was able to recognize the importance of gender in this context, I opted to use the feminist action research approach (FAR) as the methodological framework. According to Colleen Reid, a researcher from Simon Fraser University in British Columbia, Canada, and author of *Advancing Women's Social Justice Agendas: A Feminist Action Research Framework*, FAR is a conceptual and methodological research framework that is fundamentally about exploring and pursuing social justice opportunities for women through research (Reid, 2004).

Overall, it was clear that this approach was the best methodological choice for my research study, given that action research normally includes a series of data collection strategies that mix both theory and action to address important organizational, community,

and social issues. Generally, this is done in collaboration with the people who experience such issues first hand (Mackay, 2015). FAR is also used as a research approach which incites awareness of social issues that are unique to women, while acknowledging that many of these issues stem from the ways that the role of the woman is interpreted culturally, politically and economically in different societies (Reid, 2004). Reid also states that FAR studies have found that women are more likely than men to experience deprivation, and as such, the effect of gender on socio-demographic trends must be further emphasized in scholarship (Reid, 2004). Ultimately, FAR seeks to improve the conditions of women's lives, both individually and collectively (Ristock and Pennell, 1996).

There are several main principles which guide the FAR framework, from which I selected the following to guide the process of this research (Reid, 2004):

- **Inclusion:** The first principle emphasizes that no topic or population should be excluded from research. This is a relevant concept to this work, given that the unique experiences of asylum-seeking women have traditionally been excluded from migration studies. The use of this concept allowed me to identify key issues and incite change for a population which has often been ignored (Reid, 2004).
- **Participation:** The second principle proposes that researchers should encourage consensual collaboration and cooperation between themselves and the women who may have experienced the issues at hand (Reid, 2004). Naturally, much of the data collected in this work was a result of examining the Greek integration system from the perspective of asylum-seeking women.
- **Social Change:** The third principle suggests that social change is one of the major goals of all research. By working to develop recommendations for action which could, theoretically, be applied to a hypothetical model of Greek integration, I hope to contribute to social change where the lives of asylum-seeking women are improved (Reid, 2004).

### ***3.3 Exploring the Research Design Used in the Research Project***

Ultimately, I decided to use a mixed-methods approach in this study due to the multi-step nature of the work being conducted. While it was clear to me from the beginning that traditional methods of data collection could be employed in Canada, I knew I would



need to use an alternate technique, such as the principles of FAR, in order to connect with the women in Athens and to understand how their situations are a product of an integration system with many shortcomings.

#### **a. Data Collection Methods in Halifax, Nova Scotia, Canada**

As noted above, the first phase of data collection in Halifax was largely carried out through the use of traditional methods. By beginning with a detailed exploration into the current state of the Canadian refugee resettlement system, I analyzed how the policies are carried out and the challenges that exist. To do this, I examined many government documents, reports and websites that outlined the programs available.

Secondly, I organized a series of qualitative, semi-structured interviews with five representatives from three resettlement organizations in Nova Scotia, including the Immigrant Services Association of Nova Scotia (ISANS), The Halifax Refugee Clinic and the YCMA YREACH program. By holding these interviews, I engaged in an exploration of the services provided by each, and was able to further understand how refugee resettlement policies are delivered in Canada. The details of these interviews, including the questions which were asked and the results which were obtained, will be explored in chapter six of this work.

It is important to note that, although this stage of my research only included interviews with refugee resettlement organizations located in Nova Scotia, the information I gathered about the services provided is representative of the types of services a newcomer may access at other organizations throughout the rest of Canada. This is due to the fact that the majority of resettlement organizations operate under the same federal law and policy

framework of the overall Canadian resettlement program, and, as such, provide similar supports and opportunities.

### **b. Data Collection Methods in Athens, Greece**

The second phase of data collection for this work took place at the Melissa Network for Migrant Women in Athens, Greece. As noted, this part of the research project was largely directed by the FAR framework. Because I would need to have an excellent understanding of the Greek integration system, and how women who have been victims of forced migration experience it, I firstly conducted a review of secondary data sources including Hellenic government documents and reports compiled by organizations including the Red Cross and the UNHCR. Following this step, I travelled to Athens to gather first-hand data from the Melissa Network. During the first two weeks of my time, I was fortunate to be able to volunteer at the organization, which also allowed me to informally observe my surroundings. In the last two weeks of my research, I held the two workshop and focus group sessions.

The first of the two workshop and focus group sessions was held with a group of nine female staff practitioners from the organization who represented a number of occupations including lawyers, translators, psychologists, and resettlement experts. Recruitment for this session was unnecessary, as the event was organized as a meeting for staff who were willing to participate and who were interested in discussing both the Canadian and Greek resettlement systems. The workshop part of this session consisted of a detailed presentation on the major parts of the Canadian refugee resettlement system, during which participants were free to ask questions. The focus group portion was a facilitated, open discussion that took place about the information presented, and provided

the staff an opportunity to express how they felt about Canadian resettlement policies, in comparison to how things function in Greece.

The second workshop and focus group session was held with asylum-seeking women themselves, who visit the Melissa Network for services on a regular basis. This session was attended by 18 adult women who represented asylum seekers from war-torn countries including Syria, Afghanistan, Iraq, and Iran. The recruitment for this focus group was done primarily through word of mouth, and through encouragement from staff members. Overall, the session followed the same structure as the first; by beginning with an open presentation on the Canadian refugee resettlement system, followed by a facilitated discussion, during which the women gave their opinions on what they had heard, and how it compared to their own experiences. The women also had the opportunity to discuss whether or not they felt these Canadian programs could have been beneficial to them. Much of the data collected during the second focus group was through Farsi and Arabic translators, provided by the Melissa Network.

In terms of representativeness, the Melissa Network is a very typical example of a feminist, grassroots organization that offers gender and culturally sensitive integration and orientation services. Through such an organization, female asylum seekers can seek psychological support and take part in educational opportunities. While such services may be limited in Greece, I believe the Melissa Network is an accurate representation of how gender and culturally sensitive integration services can be effectively offered for maximum benefit to the clients.

#### ***3.4 Analyzing the Unique Data collected from the Melissa Network in Athens, Greece***

Ultimately, the data collected from the Melissa Network in Athens was used to understand how participants felt about whether or not Canadian resettlement policies could be adapted to improve the experiences of women like themselves. To eventually develop recommendations for action for a hypothetical model of integration in Greece, the information collected from the workshop and focus group sessions at the Melissa Network was reviewed for common themes and concerns. To do this, I used the deductive approach, a method of qualitative data analysis that uses the research questions from workshops and focus groups as a way to separate and categorize the information collected. By using this approach, I examined the data for repetitive patterns, trends of similar feedback from staff and clients, and then separated common themes as required. This analysis tool was also an obvious choice given the fact that it is often used to understand data when there is an idea of a likely response from the sample population.

### ***3.5 Research Limitations and Conclusions***

While there were many benefits that came with using the FAR approach, there were certain limitations experienced that could potentially cause concerns related to the validity of the data collected. In the case of this study, the biggest limitation was the sample size of the second workshop and focus group session at the Melissa Network (held with female asylum seekers). Due to the language barriers and the personal circumstances of many women, it was difficult to find a time when all of the women who wanted to participate could take part, without worrying about their responsibilities (i.e. being distracted by when they needed to pick up their children/worrying about children present during the session). However, although the group was small, it should be assumed that the findings apply to a

large population of female asylum seekers in Greece, given the current state of refugee affairs in the country.

Secondly, a further limitation I faced during this project was adhering to the strict parameters which are set by the Saint Mary's University Research and Ethics Board. In order to maintain my permit to carry out research involving humans, I had to ensure that I did not involve any participants who were under age 18, or participants who were unable to provide written consent that they understood why they were providing information. This created a limitation in my research at the Melissa Network, as many of the clients who attend the organization are unaccompanied minor girls roughly between the ages of 14 and 16, who likely would have had very interesting perspectives on the integration system and how it affected their migration.

Moreover, to address the "vulnerable population" and "sensitive issues" concerns of the Saint Mary's University Research Ethics Board (REB), I had to take the approach of collecting data indirectly, through feedback and reaction to the presentation on the Canadian resettlement system, rather than collecting data by asking direct questions through one-on-one interviews. In sum, the use of questioning in interviews was deemed potentially too intense, given the sensitive nature of the data collected, and the traumatic experiences that many of the women had been through escaping from conflicts, arriving to Greece "irregularly" and so forth. However, it is also important to note that the set-up of collecting data via reaction and feedback in the workshop and focus group sessions was ultimately beneficial to myself as a researcher, and to the Melissa Network, as it allowed for a true, win-win partnership. Through this partnership, I was able to provide the participants with information on the Canadian refugee resettlement system, as requested by

the organization, while also learning about where there were gaps in the system based on the discussion with practitioners and clients of the organization.

Lastly, another limitation of this research is the uncertainty of for how long the key findings and conclusion will remain valid for, given that the humanitarian crisis in Greece is rapidly shifting. For example, while there is significant evidence that many newcomers to Greece remain in precarious situations, and are still in dire need of assistance (notably on the islands), the total number of new refugee claimants arriving has decreased in recent months. As such, it is difficult to say when the data collected in this work will become outdated.

## CHAPTER 4: EXPLORING THE CURRENT REFUGEE SITUATIONS IN CANADA AND GREECE

### ***4.1 Introduction***

It is now important to explore the state of refugee and humanitarian affairs in both Canada and Greece. By doing so, I will create a frame of reference from which to draw on when examining the details of both resettlement systems. Therefore, this chapter will be divided into two sections; one which will provide information on the current refugee situation in Canada, and the other which will provide the details of the refugee situation in Greece.

### ***4.2 The Current State of Refugee Affairs in Canada***

In Canada, the current refugee climate is quite stable. As a signatory to the *1951 Convention Relating to Status of Refugees*, Canada is often regarded as a front runner on the world stage when it comes to the successful reintegration of refugees. Through the federal resettlement system, people with a well-founded fear of persecution can be referred to Canada by the UNHCR, when officials determine that this is the best option.

Under normal circumstances, there are a number of official actors who make decisions about whether or not a person will be admitted to Canada for resettlement, but the UNHCR is ultimately responsible for organizing the initial referral of all refugees. Once a refugee arrives, either the Canadian government or a private sponsor would become financially and socially responsible for them. The newcomer would also be eligible to receive assistance through local organizations, which may be funded by the Government of Canada or privately funded by the province or local sponsors. Generally, such programs are meant to provide refugees and refugee claimants with the resources they need to successfully resettle and integrate into a new society, especially in the first few weeks or

months. In many cases, these programs work directly with the person to meet their needs, including finding them accommodation, providing financial assistance to buy groceries, and giving the newcomer an introduction to the education and health care systems. These programs also provide different workshops and orientation sessions which help children and adults to learn about their new environment.

In recent years, the Government of Canada has heightened their commitment to welcoming more refugees than ever before, in order to assist with the growing number of displaced persons around the world. According to a press release by the UNHCR, 2016 was Canada's most successful resettlement year on record since the enactment of the *1976 Immigration Act*. Throughout 2016, a staggering 46,700 refugees were successfully resettled in the country (Nyembwe, 2017). The UNHCR states that this represented a 133% increase in refugee resettlement compared to the previous year (Nyembwe, 2017).

At the beginning of November 2017, Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada (IRCC) set out a departmental plan for 2018-2020. Overall, the goal of this plan was to identify the anticipated numbers of immigrants who would enter Canada during this time. For 2018, a total of 43,000 UNHCR-referred refugees were anticipated, with another 45,650 in 2019 and 48,700 in 2020 (Government of Canada, 2018a). These numbers would include those refugees who entered the country either through the government assistance program, the private sponsorship program, or the blended visa office-referral program (to be explored in further detail in chapter five). However, it should be noted that there are also refugee *claimants* who would be processed at Canada's borders, which were not accounted for in this plan. Between January and October of 2018, there were more than 23,275 refugee claims filed at various ports of entry (Government of Canada, 2019a). While



the total number of claims being made in Canada has decreased, it is still important to account for these people, given that this is still a significant number.

In addition to the refugee claimants who are entering the country, there has been an increase in irregular crossings at the Canada-United States border, where people are entering the country between established points of entry (Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada, 2019). Between February 2017 and September 2018, there were roughly 34,854 irregular border crossings. Of this number only 3,142 claims were successful, while another 28,314 cases are still pending a decision. Additionally, a total of 3,393 refugee claims made by irregular border crossers were either abandoned, withdrawn or rejected (Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada, 2019). As of September 2018, approximately 320 irregular border crossers were being held in Canadian detention centers (Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada, 2019).

Overall, the outlook for refugees who resettle in Canada is good. In 2016, the IRCC published a report which evaluated the refugee resettlement system and its programs in Canada. The findings of this report indicated that Canada has contributed effectively to international protection needs and was one of the top three resettlement countries between 2010 and 2014 (Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada, 2016). The findings of this report also showed that Canadian citizens have demonstrated an active interest in refugee sponsorship and inclusion, which has helped foster a refugee-positive atmosphere in Canada (Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada, 2016). Moreover, the report suggested that refugee resettlement programs in Canada are aligned with the priorities of the Government of Canada, and that humanitarian policy objectives are being met (Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada, 2016).

Of course, while the current state of affairs for refugees in Canada is quite good, there are still challenges which exist that prevent the resettlement system from being fully accessible to those who need it the most. For example, the IRCC Evaluation of Resettlement Programs report also found that there needed to be more oversight of the reintegration programs being carried out across the country, and that there should be a stronger coordination process to ensure that all refugees have access to services (Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada, 2016).

#### ***4.3 The Current State of Refugee Affairs in Greece***

Compared to the situation in Canada, the current state of affairs for refugees in Greece is significantly less stable, as a result of the fact that Greece is dealing with a humanitarian crisis on a much larger scale. Since 2012, Europe has seen a huge increase in the number of refugees seeking international protection due to ongoing conflicts in the Middle East and Northern African. As such, some countries located in close proximity to migration routes have had to deal with unprecedented amounts of asylum seekers.

For example, because of the Greece's geographical position at the southern tip of Europe, the country has had to take on a massive portion of the asylum seekers who wish to move to Europe. According to the International Rescue Committee (IRC), there are presently at least 62,000 refugees stranded in Greece, with more than 1.3 million people having traveled through the country since 2013 (International Rescue Committee: Greece, n.d.). Of those still there, approximately 2,000 are unaccompanied minors who are without accommodation or financial assistance (International Rescue Committee: Greece, n.d.).

Between January 2014 and March 2018, the UNHCR estimates that there have been over 1.1 million sea arrivals in Greece, with the majority having landed on one of the Greek

islands (United National High Commissioner for Refugees Operational Portal, 2018). Although the emergency situation has passed in terms of extreme numbers, there are still many vulnerable people arriving to over-crowded island reception centers all the time. While the majority of these individuals hope to move to other European countries quickly, the reality is that they may have to stay in Greece long-term, while waiting for their asylum claims to be processed or for a more permanent solution. As of 2018, Greece continues to work toward the creation of a more stable refugee integration framework which ensures that all asylum seekers have access to services that protect their basic human rights to life, honor and freedom (The Greek Ombudsman, 2017).

Unfortunately, this massive influx of asylum seekers in Greece has created both a humanitarian and political crisis for the nation. Despite the European Union's commitment to international law and human rights, they have recently made a number of policy decisions which have resulted in a stalemate between themselves, the Greek government and the asylum seekers. One such policy which has had serious consequences is the EU-Turkey Deal, which was officially implemented in March of 2016 (Collett, 2016). Overall, the goal of this agreement was to decrease the number of asylum seekers that were being smuggled across the Aegean Sea and into Greece, from Turkey. Under this deal, it became legal for Greek officials to return all asylum seekers to Turkey.

In exchange for Turkey agreeing to take back the newcomers, the EU promised the country more funding to help them create their own resettlement program (Collett, 2016). As a result of this agreement, more than 53,000 refugees have become stranded in Greece, as they wait for a decision on whether or not they will be returned to Turkey. Since this law has been passed, some NGOs have stated that it is a human rights violation, as the asylum claims of newcomers were not being given fair consideration; the government was rejecting

applications on the premise that Turkey was a safe place to which the claimant could return (International Rescue Committee: Greece, n.d.). While the deal has somewhat slowed the incoming flow of people, it has also placed a heavy burden on Greece to more effectively handle those newcomers who are now stuck in limbo between the two countries. The implementation of such a deal has also created a certain paradox, as the EU has spent many years working to help other nations commit to their own high asylum standards (Collett, 2016).

In 2016, as a result of the EU-Turkey Deal (and the subsequent closure of several EU borders surrounding Greece), a “containment” policy was issued on the Greek islands. Essentially, this was meant to keep asylum seekers confined to the Reception and Identification Centers (RICs), where they had initially arrived after their migration. The goal, according to the Greek government, was to keep all newcomers in one spot so that they could be returned to Turkey as efficiently as possible (Terre des Hommes International Federation, 2018). This policy has been extremely detrimental to asylum seekers. Many of these RICs are well over capacity and do not meet minimal standards for human rights. Because basic needs are not being met, many people are facing malnutrition, unsanitary conditions, and threats of sexual assault and violence. Specifically, female asylum seekers are at a higher risk of sexual harassment and violence, both in the RICs on the islands and on some mainland sites. Unfortunately, there are very limited services which can help women deal with these problems, and without sufficient numbers of interpreters and police officers to handle the trauma these women have faced, there is major insecurity in the refugee hotspots which makes the asylum process a very dangerous one (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, 2018a).

As of October 2018, there were still more than 17,900 asylum seekers living on the Greek islands, mainly from Afghanistan, Iraq and Syria (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, 2018a). On the mainland, there are currently another 49,200 asylum seekers living. While the conditions are slightly better here with less overcrowding than on the islands, there are still challenges in ensuring that there is shelter available, adequate supplies to prepare for winter and sufficient medical and social services (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, 2018a).

#### ***4.4 Conclusion***

Overall, research shows that the refugee situation in Canada is quite stable, although there are certainly improvements which can be made to the system, specifically regarding program funding and availability. When a refugee arrives in Canada, they would be provided with the basic needs of life. In the following weeks, the person would normally receive support from organizations which work in collaboration with the government to help them learn about their new environment and the steps they need to take to succeed both personally and professionally.

Sadly, this is in stark contrast to the situation in Greece, where the outlook for refugees is bleak. Because of the enormous numbers of people coming into the country, Greek officials have struggled to keep up with the needs of so many vulnerable people. Unfortunately, this has led to major overcrowding in RICs on the islands and in other refugee hotspots, where many facilities are at twice their capacity and thousands of people are stranded without access to adequate support services, washroom facilities, running water or electricity.

## CHAPTER FIVE: AN IN-DEPTH LOOK AT THE CANADIAN REFUGEE RESETTLEMENT SYSTEM

### *5.1 Introduction*

As noted earlier in this work, Canada has a long history of providing assistance to those in need; according to official information provided by the government, Canada first began accepting refugees in 1776, before it was even a country, when 3,000 Black Loyalists migrated to flee the oppression of the American Revolution. Today, in 2019, Canada continues to accept refugees and refugee claimants through the federal resettlement system, run and funded by the IRCC. This system is governed by strict policies and procedures which allows the nation to welcome newcomers so that they can start safe and prosperous lives (Government of Canada, 2017a). To provide some context, the Canadian refugee resettlement system is made up of two major parts: The Refugee and Humanitarian Resettlement Program and the In-Canada Asylum Program. Although these programs differ in their procedures, including how they accept newcomers for refugee resettlement and how they offer support, both branches of the system operate with the same goal: to provide people who are fleeing their home country with a safe and secure place to live.

To enter Canada through the Refugee and Humanitarian Resettlement Program, a person would first need to be referred by the UNHCR, and could then come to Canada through one of the following ways: through the government assistance program (funded by the IRCC), through the private sponsorship program (funded by a pre-determined private group) or through the blended visa office-referral program (funded through both the IRCC and private groups) (Government of Canada, 2017a). To enter the country through the In-Canada Asylum program, a newcomer would need to make a refugee claim directly at the border. It is important to note, however, that someone who makes a refugee claim from

inside Canada does not jump the queue of people being referred by the UNHCR; a claimant would need to go through the same lengthy approval processes (Government of Canada, 2017a).

Recently, the Government of Canada has expressed its willingness to accept as many refugees as possible, particularly in light of the Syrian civil war which has displaced over one million people. According to the most recent statistics available, Canada has welcomed more than 46,700 refugees into over 350 communities across the country (not including Quebec), since the beginning of 2016. There have also been more than 29,793 asylum claims made at air, land and marine ports of entry since January of 2017 (Government of Canada, 2019a).

## ***5.2 Relevant Definitions***

Before delving further into the details of these programs, it is first necessary to understand what it means to be “refugee” or a “refugee claimant” in Canada. For example, what criteria needs to be met in order to be considered for referral by the UNHCR? What factors are involved in making a refugee claim at a Canadian border?

### **a. The Definition of Refugee in Canada**

Given that Canada is a signatory to the *1951 Geneva Convention*, a person would need to be outside of their home country due to reasons beyond their control, to come to Canada as a UNHCR-referred refugee. They would also need to be unable to return to their home country for one of the following reasons (Government of Canada: 2018b):

- their race;
- their religious beliefs;
- their political opinions or affiliations;
- their nationality; or
- their membership in a social group (such as being female, or being LGBTQ+).

In general, if a person is found to meet these criteria, they would be known as a Convention refugee. Following this, a person would *not* qualify for refugee status in the event that (Government of Canada, 2018b):

- they have another stable option for protection (such as an offer to be resettled in another country);
- they became a citizen of another country;
- they choose to return to the country they left; or
- the reasons they left their country no longer exist.

If a person does not qualify as a Convention refugee but is living in “refugee-like” circumstances, it is possible that they may be considered by the UNHCR for a special category, called “country of asylum class” refugees, which is a legal status officially recognized by the Government of Canada. This special category is for people who have been seriously affected by civil war or armed conflict, who routinely have had their human rights violated, and who cannot find an adequate solution to the situation in a reasonable period of time (Government of Canada, 2018b).

### **b. The Definition of Refugee Claimant in Canada**

According to the Canadian government, a refugee claimant (known as an asylum seeker in Greece) is someone who arrives to Canada at an international border and wishes to apply for Convention refugee status in order to stay permanently. As with the UNHCR referral process, a person would not be eligible to apply if they have been convicted of a crime or have been previously recognized as a refugee by another country. Moreover, if a person has already made a refugee claim that was denied by the Immigration and Refugee Board in Canada (IRB), they would not be able to apply (Government of Canada, 2017a).

### ***5.3 The Refugee and Humanitarian Resettlement Program***



As mentioned earlier in this chapter, one of the two major parts of the system for refugee resettlement in Canada is known as the Refugee and Humanitarian Resettlement Program. This program is made up of three different streams through which refugees can be resettled to Canada: the government assistance refugee program, the private sponsorship program, and the blended-visa office-referral program (Government of Canada, 2018b). To resettle in Canada through one of these three streams, a person would need to be referred by the UNHCR to Canadian officials as a Convention refugee. Once the request is received by the Canadian government, a visa officer would review the file and schedule an interview, normally in close proximity to where the applicant is located (Government of Canada, 2017b).

However, before a person can actually resettle in Canada, there are still additional steps that an applicant must complete. For example, the potential newcomer to Canada would need to pass a medical exam and a criminal record check which could take many months, depending on where the applicant is located (Government of Canada, 2018b). Generally, these checks are done to ensure that the refugee is in good health to travel to Canada, and to ensure that the person does not have a previous conviction which was missed during preliminary screening. Refugees would also be required to provide basic biometric information, such as fingerprints and a digital photo. During this process, the IRCC would work with other departments, such as the Canada Border Services Agency, to make sure this process is completed as quickly as possible.

After the UNHCR referral has been processed, a resettlement organization in Canada may step in to help the person organize all of the necessary paperwork they will need to leave their country and would help them arrange travel to Canada. The organization

may also be able to provide briefing information on what the person can expect once they arrive.

**a. Government-Assistance Program**

The first of the three programs to be explored is the government assistance program, which allows UNHCR-referred refugees to come to Canada with the total financial support of the federal government and their service providers. Frequently, refugees who arrive in Canada through this program are known as “GARs” (government assisted refugees) (Government of Canada, 2016).

Once Canadian visa officials receive the resettlement referral, the application processing times for GARs can vary hugely, depending on both the nationality of the newcomer and where they are currently living. As of mid-2018, the processing time for a GAR from Syria was roughly 23 months, while the processing time of a GAR from Iraq was significantly faster, only about eight months (Government of Canada, 2016). The speed of the process can also depend on if an application was correctly completed upon submission, and on how many other applications have been received in the same time span. Once the visa for the GAR is approved, it may take more time for the government to arrange the documents needed for departure, especially if the person is living in an active war zone where access to resources may be scarce (Government of Canada, 2019b).

Ultimately, the Government of Canada is responsible for supporting the full integration of government assisted refugees for up to one calendar year; it is possible, however, that a person may receive support for more or less time, depending on their individual needs and situation (Government of Canada, 2016). Because adjusting to life in Canada may not be easy for some GARs, the Government of Canada also developed the

Resettlement Assistance Program, which gives newcomers immediate access to services which can help support their needs (Government of Canada, 2016). This Resettlement Assistance Program would be responsible for providing a pre-determined amount of monthly financial support to each household, based on the current social assistance rates in the province where the GAR has settled. Some of the other support services offered through this program include (Government of Canada, 2016):

- greeting by a resettlement expert at the airport;
- assistance finding temporary housing;
- assistance obtaining appropriate clothing;
- help to register in mandatory federal and provincial programs (health care, insurance); and
- an orientation to community services, including public transportation, education and healthcare institutions.

Furthermore, the service providing organizations who work in collaboration with the federal government would continue to offer support as required in the days and months following the initial arrival of the refugee to Canada, by providing the following (Government of Canada, 2018c):

- help with finding employment and in becoming self-sufficient (for example, providing direction to resources which can assist GARs in developing their employability skills and helping them to create a resume);
- assistance with personal finance matters such as budgeting, setting up a bank account and using debit and credit cards; and
- referrals to other refugee resettlement programs as required.

Such organizations may also provide other services, including counseling appointments, cultural orientation, information sessions, referral to community services, translation and language training (Government of Canada, 2018d). To find an assistance organization, a person would need to visit [Canada.ca](http://Canada.ca), where they identify their province and a list would appear with the names of different organizations and their contact information.

## **b. Private Sponsorship Program**

Under the Refugee and Humanitarian Resettlement program, the second option for refugees to come to Canada is through the private sponsorship program. Under this option, different Canadian groups can apply to sponsor the resettlement of a refugee for up to one year, both financially and socially. Similar to the processing time for GARs, it takes about 26 months for a private sponsorship application to be processed (Government of Canada, 2018e). As of January 2017, the UNHCR estimated that there were more than 14,000 privately sponsored refugees in Canada.

To begin, there are three different types of groups in Canada which are legally allowed to privately sponsor refugees (Government of Canada, 2018e). They include:

- **Sponsorship Agreement Holders (SAH):** An SAH is an incorporated organization which has signed a formal sponsorship agreement with the IRCC, stating that they have the means to sponsor a refugee's resettlement in Canada, without government assistance. Most SAHs are religious groups, ethno-cultural groups, or humanitarian organizations.
- **Groups of Five:** This category refers to a group of five Canadians or permanent residents over age 18, who have agreed to support a refugee. Before sponsorship would be approved by the government, the Group of Five must be able to prove that they can financially support a newcomer for up to one year, and must provide a settlement plan which demonstrates their ability to meet all of the needs the person will have upon arrival and in the days and months that follow.
- **Community Sponsors:** A community sponsor is a local organization which has agreed to privately sponsor a refugee. Similar to the Groups of Five, a community sponsor would also need to prove that they can financially handle their commitment and that they have a plan for when the person arrives.

Once a private sponsor has been identified and approved, the group would need to undergo mandatory training from the Government of Canada. Only after this training has been completed would the sponsor be allowed to identify the UNHCR-approved refugee that they would like to bring to Canada (Government of Canada, 2019c). Once all parties

to the private sponsorship have been approved, the sponsor would become solely responsible for the following (Government of Canada, 2019c):

- providing the cost of food, rent and household utilities and other day-to-day living expenses for up to one year;
- providing clothing, furniture and other necessities for a household;
- locating interpreters;
- selecting an appropriate family physician and dentist;
- assisting the newcomer with obtaining provincial health-care insurance;
- enrolling children in school and adults in language training as required;
- providing orientation with regard to banking services, transportation, and other local amenities; and
- helping in the search for employment.

It is furthermore important to note Canada recognizes there are some refugees in more urgent situations than others, and that some people need more assistance. In light of this, there are several smaller programs within the private sponsorship structure, which are meant to help the most vulnerable refugees find security. For example, Canada runs the Joint Assistance Sponsorship (JAS) program; this allows refugees with special needs to receive a mixture of private sponsorship and government support, for an extended period of time (Government of Canada, 2019c). According to the government, a “special need” is defined as a physical or mental disability which may need to be treated in Canada, or an unusual family configuration such as a single parent family, separated minors, or the elderly. Once a person is identified as having a special need, the IRCC would match this individual with a private sponsor who is prepared to help someone with a special need. Because of the often-precarious circumstances of refugees who are eligible for this program, the government assistance and private sponsorship support are offered for up to 24 months in order to give the person the best opportunity to succeed (Government of Canada, 2019c).

Additionally, the government also runs the Women at Risk (WAR) program, which seeks to streamline the process of private sponsorship for women who find themselves in situations where they face imminent danger, and where they are unable to be protected by local law enforcement. Although they must still qualify as a Convention refugee, there is more flexibility for a woman who is experiencing GBV or sexual harassment. In most cases, a woman who comes to Canada under these conditions would also be a recipient of the Joint Assistance Sponsorship program (Government of Canada, 2019c).

Moreover, a crucial part of the private sponsorship program is the Urgent Protection Program (UPP), which is a way for those who are in desperate situations to get into Canada faster. In the case of privately sponsored refugees, the person would need to visit UNHCR office located nearest to them to present their case. If the office agrees that there is a real, immediate threat to the person's life, a final decision on the application would be made in 24-48 hours; if successful, the refugee would be considered a JAS recipient. It is the goal to have the person en route to Canada in three to five days after the initial referral was made. If the person was not already paired up with a private sponsor, they could still enter this program, but would be considered as a GAR. On average, Canada accepts roughly 200 UPP refugees per year (Government of Canada: Get Government Assistance, 2017c).

### **c. Blended Visa Office-Referral Program**

In the event that a refugee is not able to connect on their own with a private sponsor in Canada, there is a possibility that the UNHCR could match them with a group through the blended visa office-referral program. In this case, a person would need to go through the same process they would to become a GAR, but would not need to seek out a private sponsor through their own means (Government of Canada, 2018f). According to the

Government of Canada, the blended visa office-referral program takes on average 26 months to process an application, although the country in which a person is currently living may affect the overall wait time (Government of Canada, 2019c). As of January 2017, the UNHCR estimated that nearly 4,000 refugees had entered Canada through this process.

#### ***5.4 In-Canada Asylum Program***

The second major part of the Refugee Resettlement and Humanitarian Program is the in-Canada asylum program, which allows people seeking protection to make a claim for Convention refugee status from within the country (Government of Canada, 2017a.). To seek refugee status through the in-Canada asylum program, a newcomer would first need to file a claim for asylum in one of two ways: the first is to file a claim at a land, sea or air border (Government of Canada, 2018g). The officer who receives the claim would decide if it is eligible to be referred to the IRB. If the decision is positive, the claimant would have 15 days to complete all of the documents in the application and would then be given a date for a hearing (Government of Canada, 2018g). The second way in which a claim could be made is at an IRCC office. In this case, the claimant would need to have all of their paperwork already prepared. If the application has been completed correctly, an officer would provide them with a date for a hearing with the IRB (Government of Canada, 2018g.).

In both cases, the hearing is used to determine whether or not the claimant has reasonable justification to seek refugee status in Canada (Government of Canada, 2018g). This means that the person would need to demonstrate that they are seeking protection in Canada due to a well-founded fear of persecution, risk of torture, or cruel or unusual punishment in their home country (Government of Canada, 2017a). The claimant has the

right to obtain legal counsel to represent them at their hearing, but this would be at their own expense.

In 2017, there were more than 22,185 claims filed for protection. According to the IRCC, most of these were filed Quebec and Ontario due to their physical proximity to the United States. Of these, roughly 15,315 were filed at land, sea or air borders (Government of Canada, 2019d).

### ***5.5 A Brief Look at the Challenges with the Canadian Refugee Resettlement System***

Although the refugee resettlement structure in Canada is admired globally, there are, of course, still flaws in the system which make the resettlement process more difficult for newcomers. The following section of this chapter will explore two of the major problems which refugees face when going through the system: fraud, and lack of access to legal representation.

#### **a. Fraud**

According to the government, one of the biggest concerns for incoming refugees to Canada is fraud (Government of Canada, 2017d.). This is because most refugees are not used to the way that the Canadian government does business, and some may not be familiar with what the standard procedure for refugee resettlement is. They may not be able to recognize when someone is trying to take advantage of them, especially if they are desperate to escape their current situation.

For example, a Government of Canada webpage that warns newcomers to beware of immigration scams notes that there has been a recent increase in scams where fraudsters pose as Government of Canada officials. The scam artist may target someone who is going through an immigration process and claim over the phone that the newcomer has not filed



their paperwork or that they have filed it incorrectly. The scammer may tell the newcomer that they owe a fee as a result (Government of Canada, 2017d). It is possible that the caller may threaten the person and tell them that they will be deported or lose their refugee status if they do not pay immediately (often through Western Union or another money transfer company where it would be difficult to trace the money once it has been wired). In order to fight this, IRCC routinely reminds people that they will never collect fees over the phone, nor will they threaten to harm you or your family (Government of Canada, 2017d). Moreover, refugees and other newcomers may fall victim to scams that Canadian citizens have likely encountered before. These may include phone calls or emails which suggest the person has won a prize or a trip; they may also include scams where a person is told they have a computer virus and that they need to provide a username and password to have it fixed (Government of Canada, 2017d).

**b. Lack of Access to Legal Representation**

A second challenge that is often experienced by refugees in Canada is that they do not have access to counsel to represent them throughout legal processes. This can be especially detrimental to those who enter the country using the in-Canada asylum program, as they would need to attend an IRB hearing to have their refugee claim heard. While claimants have the option to represent themselves through this process, having access to a lawyer or paralegal to help them through the situation may enhance their chances of successfully navigating the system. Not only can a law professional guide someone through the procedure, but they can also assist with the language barriers and paperwork that are difficult for many people. Unfortunately, the ability to obtain legal assistance is out of reach

for many refugees given the costs associated with these services. In the next chapter, I will examine this issue more in-depth.

## CHAPTER SIX: EXAMPLES OF REFUGEE RESETTLEMENT SERVICES IN NOVA SCOTIA, CANADA

### *6.1 Introduction*

In the previous chapter, I examined the two major programs of the Canadian refugee resettlement system. This included an overview of the various channels through which refugees can enter Canada, and the services that are available to them once they arrive. At this point, I explore three examples of resettlement organizations in Nova Scotia, Canada, to understand how Canadian integration programs are delivered and the challenges that are faced. The resettlement organizations that have agreed to participate in this research are the Immigrant Services Association of Nova Scotia (ISANS), the Halifax Refugee Clinic (HRC) and the YMCA YREACH program.

All of the information presented in this chapter has been gathered through the analysis of secondary data sources and through semi-structured interviews with representatives from the three organizations. Ultimately, the data collected from each organization has been broken down into the same seven categories for the purpose of comparison:

- **Pre-Arrival Information Provided:** Does this organization provide information to refugees prior to their arrival in Canada to help them know how to prepare?
- **Reception Conditions:** Does this organization offer greeting services? For example, will there be an employee from the organization to meet the refugee at the airport?
- **Orientation Services Available:** What sort of services does this organization provide to help refugees learn about the basic functioning of their new environment?
- **Resettlement Services Available:** Once the refugee has arrived to Canada, and has had their immediate needs met, what sort of services or programs exist to help them integrate into their new society?

- **Private Sponsorship Opportunities:** Does this organization privately sponsor refugees to come to Canada?
- **Gender-Based Programs:** Is there an opportunity for female refugees to participate in programs designed to help them navigate the unique challenges they face as forced migrants?
- **The Challenges:** What sort of challenges does this organization face in developing and implementing their resettlement services?

While this information is important in terms of identifying the services that are used to run the Canadian refugee resettlement program, the data collected on these three organizations also served as the basis for the workshop and focus group sessions which took place at the Melissa Network in Athens, Greece. As noted earlier in this work, these sessions were held in order to receive feedback and perspective on if and how Canadian resettlement strategies could benefit the Greek system, and to collaboratively develop recommendations for action.

## ***6.2 Immigrant Services Association of Nova Scotia***

To begin, the first resettlement organization that I explored was the Immigrant Services Association of Nova Scotia. Known as ISANS, this organization is home to largest refugee reintegration program in the province. To provide an accurate outline of the services offered at ISANS, I began my research by thoroughly reviewing the contents of their website, including annual reports and documents. Following this preliminary research, I conducted an in-person interview with an employee who works directly with the organization's refugee resettlement program, who will be known in this chapter as \*Sarah. During our interview, \*Sarah provided me with first-hand information on how ISANS works to support refugees who come to Nova Scotia. Located in downtown Halifax, the capital city of Nova Scotia, ISANS works primarily with government assisted refugees by

supporting their unique needs related to orientation and settlement. According to the official website, there are four main streams of assistance provided by ISANS: resettlement, orientation, health skills and life skills (Immigrant Services Association of Nova Scotia: Refugee Support, n.d.). In 2016, ISANS serviced 1,500 refugees, which marked a significant increase from the previous annual average of 200 (Interview with \*Sarah, 2018).

**a. Pre-Arrival Information Provided**

Firstly, ISANS recognizes the importance of providing pre-arrival information to refugees when possible, to prepare them for their resettlement experience. To make this possible, ISANS partnered with the IRCC to introduce to the “Settlement Pre-Arrival Online” (SOPA) program for their clients (Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada: SOPA, n.d.). According to the main webpage for SOPA, the program is funded by the IRCC and is operated through individual organizations in six provinces. Open to any UNHCR-approved refugee who has been referred to Canada, those who wish to access this program must still be living outside of the country, must have an acceptable level of English, and must have access to a computer and high-speed internet (Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada: SOPA, n.d.). Once approved to join this program, the refugee would need to register online and would then participate in an intake and orientation session to provide them with basic information on where they will be living and the cultural norms there. This session also connects the newcomer to a SOPA counsellor who is located in the same province that the person will resettle. According to the webpage, the job of this counsellor is to guide the newcomer through a consultation session to help plan their overall settlement and career goals. In these sessions, the following may take place (Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada: SOPA, n.d.):

- a needs-based assessment may be created;
- an action plan may be developed;
- the counsellor may refer the newcomer to appropriate SOPA courses;
- the counsellor may refer the newcomer to post-arrival employment services; and/or
- the counsellor may refer the newcomer to additional post-arrival resettlement services.

After this initial session, the SOPA participant would then be able to partake in any of the other free online courses, many of which are designed to help the person find employment (Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada: SOPA, n.d.). The goal of these courses is to develop professional skills, to learn how to work with others, to learn the best job search strategies, and to understand how to integrate into the Canadian workplace (Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada: SOPA, n.d.).

#### **b. Reception Conditions**

Another integral part of the resettlement process that ISANS focuses on is the reception process. To ensure that the newcomer receives a warm welcome and has their immediate needs met, an ISANS counsellor would meet them at the airport once they arrive in Nova Scotia. In the days following the persons arrival, this counselor would be available to provide the refugee with support and advice. The counsellor would also help the person to find accommodation if this had not already been arranged. Once these first steps have been taken, the counsellor would provide other pivotal information that may be relevant, including the basic laws in Nova Scotia, where and how to access healthcare, and how to open a bank account.

#### **c. Orientation Services Available**

Orientation is also a very important part of the resettlement process. During my interview with \*Sarah, we discussed the various orientation services which are offered by

ISANS. According to \*Sarah, all orientation programs that are available are a part of the larger Canadian Resettlement Assistance Program, which was explored earlier in this work (Interview with \*Sarah, 2018). As such, the orientation services available to ISANS clients are well-established and largely focus on newcomer participation in a series of group sessions that provide information on the services available. The information presented during these sessions is also meant to help acquaint newcomers with their surroundings, and to help them become more familiar with the new society they live in (Interview with \*Sarah, 2018). Orientation information sessions may aim to educate newcomers about legal aid, recreation and health care in the province.

A prime example of one of the orientation sessions that ISANS offers to newcomers is the “Introduction to Nova Scotia” session. This session, which is held twice a day and delivered in many different languages, has been designed to provide details on different aspects of life in Canada (Immigrant Services Association of Nova Scotia: Introduction to Nova Scotia, n.d.). Some of the topics that would be covered in these sessions include:

- family life and parenting;
- housing and apartment living;
- healthcare;
- public transportation;
- education and training; and
- banking and managing finances.

In terms of more long-term orientation, ISANS also organizes a variety of seasonal workshops that focus on different material during the relevant time of year. For example, the organization may host income tax return workshops in the spring, summer recreation sessions in the summer, or weather safety workshops in the winter.

#### **d. Resettlement Services Available**

Once a newcomer has taken part in the orientation sessions that are offered through ISANS, they would then be able to access more general resettlement assistance programs. According to \*Sarah, these resettlement services focus on providing information that is more in-depth and detailed than what is presented during the orientation sessions (Interview with \*Sarah, 2018). In light of this, the resettlement programs at ISANS focus heavily on helping refugees to learn skills that will help them to fully integrate. This can include receiving employment training, learning about government programs, assisting newcomers to understand their personal rights and responsibilities, or providing an introduction to business programs available to government-assisted refugees (Interview with \*Sarah, 2018). \*Sarah also stressed that ISANS provides excellent language classes and interpreters, which she described as one of the organization's best practices (Interview with \*Sarah, 2018).

During the resettlement process, the counselor who was assigned to the newcomer, either through the SOPA program or upon arrival, would work closely with their client to ensure that they have a smooth transition and that the resettlement programs available to them are adequately addressing their needs. The counselor would also be responsible for working with the refugee to ensure that all of the following are accomplished (Immigrant Services Association of Nova Scotia: Settlement Counselling, n.d.):

- establishment of bank accounts/learning about banking information;
- identification of community supports and programs which could benefit the newcomer (such as family resource centers, libraries, YMCAs, and recreation facilities);
- identification of federal and provincial services that the refugee would be eligible for (including programs like the Child Tax Benefit, Nova Scotia Health Card, and Income Assistance);
- assistance with working through stress and culture shock;
- locating the first apartment (this means providing support with the apartment application process, explaining the Tenancy Act and introducing apartment living);
- assistance with household tasks and grocery shopping; and



- introduction to appropriate health care.

As is suggested in the last point, ISANS also prides themselves on supporting newcomer health and works to support access to Nova Scotia health care programs which are appropriate for the client's medical needs and are culturally sensitive, if necessary. This includes helping the person find access to health information, helping them to communicate with service providers who can meet their needs, assisting in the search for health-related services and programs, teaching them about medical and prescription coverage, and/or informing the person on where they can receive mental health help (ISANS: Refugee Support, n.d.).

Another long-term resettlement program that ISANS offer to its clients is the "Life Skills Link" program. This program, offered to all government-assisted refugees who seek services from ISANS, works on helping new refugees build confidence and independence. The program also seeks to minimize the stress of the resettlement experience by partnering each refugee with a citizen of Nova Scotia who can provide additional information and support (Immigrant Services Association of Nova Scotia: Refugee Support, n.d.). The partner that the refugee receives would:

- speak the same language and is familiar with the newcomer's country of origin;
- offer support and community-based orientation that is tailored to the strengths and needs of the newcomer;
- help newcomers and their families with daily life during the first year in Canada;
- provide practical support in areas such as personal and child safety, apartment and city living, shopping, getting to know the neighborhood, public transportation, hospital orientation and accessing community resources; and
- is also an immigrant to Canada.

Lastly, ISANS also offers the Youth Life Skills program, which is meant to address the resettlement needs of younger newcomers who are still in school, who are supposed to

be in school but have gaps in their education, or who are too young to enter the workforce. Generally, this program focuses on providing information on the education system, local transportation and different recreational options, including information on shopping (Immigrant Services Association of Nova Scotia: Refugee Support, n.d.).

#### **e. Private Sponsorship Opportunities**

As noted earlier in this work, government-approved organizations can work in collaboration with local community groups to organize private sponsors for refugees. Although ISANS services are created mainly for use by GARs, the organization does have a program which seeks out private sponsors for refugees who have not been referred to Canada by the UNHCR for government assistance. To do this, the staff at ISANS work hard to find appropriate individuals, community groups, or Groups of Five throughout Nova Scotia that are willing to support the private sponsorship of refugees and their families. Despite having a slow start with only 11 private sponsors found in 2011, this program has become one of the best in Nova Scotia, with over 146 private sponsors having been identified in 2016 (Immigrant Services Association of Nova Scotia: Private Sponsorship Refugee Program, n.d.).

Perhaps most importantly, ISANS works diligently to create awareness amongst the community about who can qualify as a private sponsor, and what the associated costs and responsibilities are. They produce information in both print and electronic form which highlights the important fact that being a private sponsor of a refugee is a long-term commitment. In light of this, ISANS has created a list of basic responsibilities which is provided to groups who believe they privately sponsor someone to come to Canada. Some of the major commitments involved include:

- raising money to go toward the extensive costs associated with helping a person or family start a new life (including funds for furniture, clothing, shelter, school supplies and basic household items);
- assisting the person/family, for at least the first year, in finding appropriate services that they can access for further support;
- ensuring that everything is in order before their arrival so that everything goes smoothly; and
- if applicable, working with any relatives or groups associated with the refugee, who are already living in Nova Scotia.

#### **f. Gender-Based Programs**

During my interview with \*Sarah, it quickly became clear that ISANS places great emphasis on promoting initiatives and programs that empower female refugees, as a way to help them process any past trauma that may have been experienced during their migration (Interview with \*Sarah, 2018). These efforts are noticeable in the different services that the organization offers. For example, there are a number of options for female-only programs that refugees can choose from, including a women's entrepreneurial program where participants can learn the skills required to begin entering the job market. They can also partake in women's family support programs, where they have an opportunity to discuss their home lives with other women who may have endured similar journeys.

Moreover, the staff also offer female volunteer engagement classes, and female-only recreation classes (Interview with \*Sarah, 2018). The organization is proud to offer leadership courses for female youth (Interview with \*Sarah, 2018). \*Sarah also noted that ISANS has a home-based support program for women, designed to help meet the needs of moms who have to stay home with their children, or who may not be able to rely on daycare services (Interview with \*Sarah, 2018).

#### **g. Challenges**

At the end of the interview, I asked \*Sarah about what sorts of challenges ISANS faces when developing and implementing resettlement services. While \*Sarah noted that there are always a variety of different problems, she specifically focused on the issue of funding, stating that it is always a challenge for the organization to receive sufficient money from the government. She also touched briefly on the fact hiring and retaining long-term staff can be very difficult when there is a lack of soft funding, as the organization is unable to plan in advance financially (Interview with \*Sarah, 2018).

In light of the difficulty that can sometimes arise with staffing, the website states that volunteers are an essential part of the organization, as without them it could be very difficult to effectively deliver the programs and services need to make life in Canada a little bit easier for newcomers (Immigrant Services Association of Nova Scotia: About, n.d.). Despite the funding challenge, \*Sarah emphasized that the staff at ISANS always do their best can with what they have available to them.

### ***6.3 Halifax Refugee Clinic***

The second organization that agreed to participate in this research was the Halifax Refugee Clinic (HRC), which is a small legal aid service for refugee claimants also located in Halifax. In January of 2018, I was fortunate to have held an interview with three staff members from this organization, who provided me with an understanding of how the clinic works, and what its goals are. To maintain their anonymity, the three staff participants of this interview will not be named but will be referred to simply as “HRC Interview 1”, “HRC Interview 2” and “HRC Interview 3”.

Originally, this organization was established to help close the gap in available legal aid for refugee claimants (HRC Interview 1, 2018). To provide such services, the HRC is

largely supported by the community and is funded by the Law Society of Nova Scotia (HRC Interview 1, 2018). At the clinic, clients can access support when they first arrive. Staff may help the person to find long-term housing, set up their utilities, find basic household supplies (such as furniture), learn how to access the foodbank, and prepare their work or study permit application if applicable (Halifax Refugee Clinic: Settlement Services, n.d.).

In addition to these services, the HRC also strives to provide integration services to their clients when possible, while they wait to have their IRB hearing. For example, the clinic offers educational opportunities and workshops on a reoccurring basis which aim to support the financial literacy, nutrition, sexual health, rights and responsibilities, and computer literacy skills of their clients (Halifax Refugee Clinic, 2012). According to the main website for the HRC, services are available in English, French, Spanish and Arabic (Halifax Refugee Clinic: About, n.d.).

To offer these services, a variety of professionals from different backgrounds come together to team up with the Clinic (Halifax Refugee Clinic: About, n.d.). These people may include:

- volunteer lawyers and law students;
- research assistants;
- settlement workers;
- translators and interpreters;
- English teachers and tutors;
- psychologists/counsellors; and/or
- placement students from various disciplines such as social work, law, and nursing.

With help from those listed above, the Halifax Refugee Clinic is able to offer a number of pro-bono legal services, including the following (Halifax Refugee Clinic: Legal Services, n.d.):

- representation and assistance throughout the entire refugee determination procedure;
- volunteer counsel provided for each claim;

- assistance filling out Permanent Residence applications;
- assistance preparing applications for Permanent Residence based on humanitarian grounds;
- assistance for refugee claimants who have been detained; and
- assistance preparing work/study/health coverage applications.

However, before a person accesses the services at the Halifax Refugee Clinic, it is important that they ensure they are eligible for Convention refugee status. To do this, the claimant would need to review the information available on the HRC website, which outlines what needs to be proven in order to be successful with the IRB hearing. For example, HRC states on their website that a person needs to prove to the IRB that they can provide the required documentation to support their case, including police reports, medical records, or other documents that help show their story is true (Halifax Refugee Clinic: Legal Services, n.d.). The claimant might also provide documents, such as human rights reports or newspapers that demonstrate what is happening in their home country. Once it has been determined that the claimant is eligible to receive Convention refugee status (and thus eligible to receive assistance from the HRC), employees of the organization would start working through the claim process with them.

It should be noted that this organization is the only of the three Canadian resettlement services examined in this work that is directly similar to the aid services available to asylum seekers in Greece. This is due to the fact that the HRC works only with refugee claimants, and not with Convention refugees. As noted earlier, the majority of people who are coming through Greek borders are asylum seekers who are looking to travel further west into Europe. However, with only roughly 100 active clients each year, the HRC deals with a much smaller population compared to what an organization of similar size in Greece would see.

**a. Pre-Arrival Information Provided**

Given the mission of the HRC, it is not possible for this organization to offer pre-arrival information. This is because the Halifax Refugee Clinic works directly with refugee claimants, who would have already arrived in Nova Scotia.

**b. Reception Conditions**

The Halifax Refugee Clinic does not offer a reception service for their clients, as refugee claimants have already entered Nova Scotia by the time they meet the staff at the clinic. However, upon arriving at the Halifax Refugee Clinic, the staff would arrange a pre-refugee claim consultation with the person to help them receive pro-bono legal aid and other settlement services (Halifax Refugee Clinic: Legal Services, n.d.).

**c. Orientation Services Available**

Although the main focus of this clinic is to provide pro-bono legal aid to refugee claimants for their IRB hearing, the clinic does provide some orientation services in the form of classes which clients can participate in. These classes can also be presented in the form of a workshop, aimed at orienting the newcomer to the social climate in which they have arrived. The clinic also offers free, one-on-one English tutorial services, run by volunteers and community partners (Halifax Refugee Clinic, 2012).

Notably, the Halifax Refugee Clinic recognizes that all refugee claimants are facing different circumstances. Therefore, if there are specific orientation services that are required by their clients that are not normally offered, the clinic may refer them to alternative refugee resettlement and orientation programs in the local area, which may be more suited to the person's needs (HRC Interview 1, 2018).

**d. Resettlement Services Available**

Fortunately, the Halifax Refugee Clinic offer resettlement services. However, these services are only available to refugee claimants who are also receiving legal assistance (for example, a GAR would not be able to visit the clinic for access to settlement services only, they must be receiving legal aid to be eligible). According to my interview with the representatives of the Halifax Refugee Clinic, some of the resettlement services that the clinic offers would include the following (HRC Interview 1, 2018):

- employment counseling;
- English language learning support;
- mental health counseling;
- help accessing income assistance; and/or
- long-term housing support.

During the interview, the staff members also noted that the Halifax Refugee Clinic prides itself on its ability to offer such services on a needs-based model (HRC Interview 2, 2018). For example, one interview participant noted that since the needs and past experiences of each refugee claimant are so vastly different, the HRC takes a very holistic approach to ensuring that clients receive the support they need. It is also important to note that having legal aid available under the same roof as resettlement services is very beneficial to newcomers, as this sort of dual approach is not currently offered elsewhere in Nova Scotia (HRC Interview 3, 2018).

#### **e. Private Sponsorship Opportunities**

As of January 2018, private sponsorship was not available through the Halifax Refugee Clinic (HRC Interview 1, 2018).

#### **f. Gender Based Programs**

Aside from the excellent legal assistance and resettlement opportunities that are available to refugee claimants at this organization, there are also services offered that have



been designed especially for women, to help them with some of the unique challenges they have faced as female asylum seekers. For example, women who use the clinic have access to female-only courses on sexual health and stress management. One of the participants noted during the interview that more specific, female-only programs can be arranged if there is a demand for it, given the clinic's holistic approach to resettlement needs mentioned above (HRC Interview 1, 2018).

#### **g. Challenges**

According to data collected from the interview with staff members, the clinic deals with several challenges that they have to continually overcome to operate. Similar to ISANS, the majority of these challenges are a result of funding issues. As noted earlier, the Halifax Refugee Clinic is privately funded by the Law Society of Nova Scotia, and other private donors (HRC Interview 2, 2018). Therefore, the organization is always happy to receive financial donations, or enroll new volunteers to help relieve some of this burden.

#### ***6.4 YMCA YREACH Program***

Lastly, the third organization I examine is the YREACH program, offered through the YMCA community centers of Canada. In Nova Scotia, this program is available at nine YMCA locations and is accessible to immigrants, refugees who are newcomers to communities located outside of the Halifax metropolitan area. According to the webpage for the YMCA branch located in the Greater Halifax and Dartmouth Area, the goal of the YREACH program is to provide information, orientation, and settlement/integration support for vulnerable populations who have recently come to Canada (YMCA YREACH, 2017). In January of 2018, I was fortunate to conduct an interview with a representative of

the YREACH program. This person will be referred to as \*Jane throughout this section to maintain her anonymity.

Firstly, \*Jane stated during our interview that the YREACH program seeks to heighten inclusivity, diversity, and tolerance within Nova Scotian communities, as the mandate of the program is to raise awareness about the benefits of immigration in Nova Scotia and to work with local partners to create welcoming communities (Interview with \*Jane, 2018). To accomplish this, the YREACH program has three main priorities, including the wellbeing of children and youth, encouraging activity and building stronger communities (Interview with \*Jane, 2018). According to \*Jane, general YMCA resettlement services (of which YREACH is a sub-program) serve about 3000 people annually.

**a. Pre-Arrival Information Provided**

The YREACH program itself does not handle pre-arrival education or support. However, \*Jane noted that there are pre-arrival services sponsored by the YMCA, such as the Canadian Orientation Abroad program, which seeks to provide visa-ready refugees with integral information to help them make wise and informed resettlement choices (YMCA YREACH, 2017).

**b. Reception Conditions**

Fortunately, the YREACH program is able to support the initial reception of newcomers in communities throughout Nova Scotia. For example, upon the arrival of the newcomer, YMCA staff would work with them to complete a needs-based assessment that allows the employees to know which of the services offered by the program would be most beneficial. According to \*Jane, when a family or individual arrives, a member of the

YMCA staff would meet with them to start answering questions (Interview with \*Jane, 2018). It would be at this point that staff would also assist the newcomers to find a first home or apartment, a job or a school, or assist with getting the person a SIN number (Interview with \*Jane, 2018).

### **c. Orientation Services Available**

Some orientation services are available through the YREACH program; these opportunities are largely focused on enhancing the education and employment prospects of refugees. \*Jane noted that the program actively works to help newcomers in different communities settle into their new homes by creating individualized orientation plans, which are based off of the needs-based assessment completed upon the persons arrival (Interview with \*Jane, 2018). Some of the questions which would have been asked during this assessment that ultimately shape the orientation plan include:

- What has been your biggest challenge since arriving in Nova Scotia?
- Were there services ready to help you when you arrived?
- Did you have any moments of isolation? Describe what you did to get through them.
- Do you feel there is a need for more services in your area?
- What kind of services would you like to see?

For children, orientation is also provided for their schools and neighborhoods. \*Jane noted the staff at the YMCA centers often act as liaisons between the families and the schools to ensure a smooth transition for the students (Interview with \*Jane, 2018).

### **d. Resettlement Services Available**

According to the webpage, the YREACH program is pleased to offer in-person resettlement support that helps newcomers become more familiar with the societal institutions around them. Through this resettlement initiative, YREACH staff would be responsible for assisting their clients in the following areas (YMCA YREACH, 2017):

- group settlement support to build social networks;
- on-site school settlement;
- community collaborations;
- referrals to other services; and/or
- offering presentations related to cultural diversity and immigration barriers.

More generally, the YMCA centers offer other resettlement programs which are accessible to participants YREACH (Interview with \*Jane, 2018). For example, refugees would have access to school settlement programs, active living courses and youth outreach opportunities that are offered by other programs under the YMCA community centers (Interview with \*Jane, 2018). When asked about how newcomers can learn about these programs, \*Jane mentioned that information about opportunities is most frequently passed through word of mouth, and through old-fashioned mediums such as flyers. She also said they are now using social media (Interview with \*Jane, 2018).

#### **e. Private Sponsorship Opportunities**

At the time of the interview, private sponsorship was not available through the YREACH program, although it was disclosed that the YMCA is working to be able to offer this option in the future (Interview with \*Jane, 2018).

#### **f. Gender Based Programs**

The YREACH program offers several options for women who wish to partake in female-only programming. During our interview, \*Jane noted that these female-only courses are an important part of helping women to feel more comfortable during their resettlement process. \*Jane also mentioned that she believes that when girls and women are in an empowering environment, they ask more questions, participate more, and are able to express themselves openly (Interview with \*Jane, 2018). As such, \*Jane explained that the program, in collaboration with other initiatives of the YMCA, is happy to offer

women’s only swimming classes and writings classes. The program staff may also organize leadership training for female youth, or conversation groups for senior citizens. The centers also provide girls only fitness classes.

### **g. Challenges**

In terms of challenges that the YREACH program faces, \*Jane mentioned that there can sometimes be operational difficulties when implementing and organizing resettlement services in such a large number of centers. For example, since this program operates in nine different locations, it is difficult to have a “set curriculum”. \*Jane also stated that while the YMCA and YREACH programs have funding that comes from the Halifax Branch of the IRCC, the cost of running several centers across the province simultaneously can be staggering. \*Jane says there are often community fundraisers which are held to offset some of the costs (Interview with \*Jane, 2018).

### **6.5 Comparison Table**

To ensure that the differences between each organization are clear, I have created the following table which highlights the major functions and services of each.

	<b>Immigrant Services Association of Nova Scotia</b>	<b>Halifax Refugee Clinic</b>	<b>YMCA YREACH</b>
Pre-Arrival Information Provided	SOPA	N/A	N/A
Reception Conditions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Airport reception</li> <li>• Accommodation</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Accommodation</li> <li>• Pre-refugee claim consultation</li> <li>• Pro-bono legal aid</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Needs-based assessment</li> </ul>

Orientation Services Available	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Healthcare</li> <li>• Public transportation</li> <li>• Bank accounts</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Workplace rights</li> <li>• Financial literacy</li> <li>• Computer knowledge</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Orientation plans</li> </ul>
Resettlement Services Available	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Education</li> <li>• Language training</li> <li>• Job Training</li> <li>• Community supports</li> <li>• Stress management</li> <li>• Household tasks</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Job training</li> <li>• Language classes</li> <li>• Mental health counseling</li> <li>• Work/study permits</li> <li>• Income assistance</li> <li>• Housing support</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• School support</li> <li>• Community collaboration</li> <li>• Referrals</li> <li>• Cultural awareness</li> <li>• Active living</li> <li>• Youth outreach</li> </ul>
Private Sponsorship Opportunities	Identifies eligible private sponsors	N/A	N/A
Gender-Based Programs (female-only)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Entrepreneurial classes</li> <li>• Recreation sessions</li> <li>• Support groups</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sexual health</li> <li>• Financial literacy</li> <li>• Stress management</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Swimming classes</li> <li>• Writing classes</li> <li>• Leadership training</li> <li>• Conversation groups</li> </ul>
Challenges	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Funding</li> <li>• Staffing</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Funding</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Funding</li> <li>• No set curriculum</li> </ul>

## CHAPTER SEVEN: EXPLORING THE STRUCTURE OF THE GREEK REFUGEE INTEGRATION SYSTEM

### *7.1 Introduction*

As noted earlier in this work, Greece has had to single-handedly manage much of the refugee humanitarian crisis on its own, without enough international or EU support. In large part, this disproportionate and unfair burden that Greece has had to deal with is due to the country's geographical position at the southern tip of Europe. As a result of this, Greece has received massive numbers of asylum seekers who have crossed the Mediterranean Sea from Turkey in small boats, to reach the Greek islands. In comparison to a country such as Canada which is very northern and far more geographically isolated, Greece has faced the unique difficulty of absorbing the needs of asylum seekers who are looking to move further west into Europe.

Since 2013, there have been more than 1.3 million asylum seekers who have travelled to or through Greece in search of safety (International Rescue Committee: Greece, n.d.). Unfortunately, having such a large number of people entering the country unexpectedly has created a crisis situation, especially on the Greek islands where overcrowding and poor conditions have become rampant. As a result of this, the International Rescue Committee (IRC) estimates that there are presently more than 62,000 refugees stranded somewhere in the country (International Rescue Committee: Greece, n.d.). To manage the needs of these asylum seekers, Greece has worked toward delivering additional integration and support services, which can provide the required assistance to newcomers (The Greek Ombudsman, 2017).

In order to further explore this crisis, the contents of this chapter examine the critical aspects of the Greek integration system, from a both a legal and policy perspective. All of

the information in this chapter is broken down into the same categories which were used in chapter six, for the purpose of comparison: Pre-arrival information provided, reception conditions, orientation services available, integration services available, private sponsorship opportunities, gender-based programs and that the challenges that are faced. By exploring the characteristics of the integration system in this manner, I will be better able to identify the gaps in the framework. Most importantly, this will allow me to see how the Greek system compares to that being used in Canada.

### ***7.2 Pre-Arrival Information Provided***

As previously noted, the Canadian government works in collaboration with various NGOs and private organizations to ensure that Convention refugees receive as much information as possible about their new home, before they arrive. Unfortunately, given the nature of how asylum seekers arrive in Greece, it is not possible for the Greek government to provide any sort of similar service. This is simply due to the fact that Greek government cannot anticipate the arrival of these newcomers in advance, as this migration is “irregular” and not planned. Even if officials knew that these people were on their way, they would have no way of providing information to such a huge number of people, many of whom are living in refugee camps in Turkey and are without access to the internet or email.

### ***7.3 Reception Conditions***

Given what we know about how most asylum seekers arrive in Greece unexpectedly, the reception process for newcomers is stressful for all involved and is very slow. As is similar to how refugee claimants in Canada would begin their process, asylum seekers who come to Greece must first start by submitting an official application for asylum in order to stay in the country. According to the Ministry of Migration Policy for the Hellenic



Republic, there have been roughly 150,503 asylum applications made in Greece since 2013 (this is, evidently, a much larger amount than the number of refugee claims being made in Canada) (Hellenic Republic Ministry of Citizen Protection: Asylum and Immigration, n.d.).

In Greece, the asylum application procedure has been based on the Common European Asylum System since 2011, which was when the original First Reception Service (FRS) office opened (Papademetriou, 2016). Under the supervision of the Ministry of Public Order and Citizen Protection Established, the FRS was established as part of national legislation entitled the *Greek Action Plan*, which was created to help identify strategies and solutions for managing incoming refugees. This meant finding ways to more efficiently process new arrivals, and to help newcomers through the challenging process of claiming asylum (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, 2014).

Through the FRS process, the first step in seeking asylum is to make a claim and submit an application in person at a Regional Asylum Office (RAO). At the RAO, the claimant would need to provide details and evidence which support their case and would present their travel documents (Hellenic Republic Ministry of Citizen Protection: Asylum Procedure, n.d.). If officials at the RAO are satisfied with the account given, the person's claim would be registered and they would be provided with a legal permit card to carry with them until they have had their case heard, which would likely take place roughly four to six months later.

While waiting for their interview date, asylum seekers are free to travel throughout Greece, so long as they are carrying their legal permit card on them (European Council on Refugees and Exiles: Freedom of Movement, n.d.). Although asylum seekers are legally allowed to secure their own housing during the claim process, many cannot afford this luxury and end up living in camps while they wait for their interview with the RAO

(European Council on Refugees and Exiles: Freedom of Movement, n.d.). As explored in the previous chapter, a refugee claimant in Canada would receive help upon their arrival to find subsidized housing; this makes the reception experience of asylum seekers in the two countries very different. However, it is important to acknowledge that the process of receiving refugees is much easier for the Canadian government and their service providers to facilitate, given the much smaller number of claimants that they work with. For example, because aid organizations can often work with the newcomer directly in Canada, and without the crisis element at play, staff can help arrange for the immediate needs of refugee claimants to be met with limited challenges.

Once the day of the asylum seekers interview arrives, officials at the RAO would examine the claimant's personal situation and the reasons why they have applied for asylum in Greece. Officials would also research the situation in the claimant's home country to ensure that there are reasonable grounds for them to be seeking protection (European Council on Refugees and Exiles: Regular Procedure, n.d). For this interview, the Greek Ministry for Citizen Protection acknowledges that asylum seekers have the right to legally request an interpreter if necessary; they are also be welcome to bring legal counsel to their status interview if that is possible for them (Hellenic Republic Ministry of Citizen Protection: Asylum Procedure, n.d.). Upon completion of the interview, officials would put together a report that outlines all of information gathered, and would either accept or deny the claim (Hellenic Republic Ministry of Citizen Protection: Asylum Procedure, n.d.). If the claim is denied, asylum seekers have the right to appeal the decision within 30 days; otherwise, they risk being deported from the country. If an appeal is filed, a new decision should be granted within three months (European Council on Refugees and Exiles: Regular Procedure, n.d). Alternatively, if the claimant's application is successful, they are either

granted full Convention refugee status or subsidiary protection and would be issued a residence permit. These permits signify that the person is legally in the country, where they will either permanently resettle or wait for family reunification in another country. For asylum seekers who have had their applications approved and are still on the islands, they would likely remain there until transfer to the mainland can be arranged.

However, as previously mentioned in this work, many newcomers do not arrive to Greece with the intention of staying there long-term, and are often unaware that they need to apply for asylum in Greece if they have only planned to travel through. For people who are in this situation, there are two other European resettlement programs which could be beneficial to them, to which Greece is a signatory: The EU Relocation Programme, and the exception-based Dublin Regime. To be considered for one of these programs, a person would need to file an application at the same time they file their asylum claim in Greece.

Firstly, the EU Relocation Programme was originally established to support more permanent accommodation options for asylum seekers and to encourage family reunification. Ultimately, this program matches asylum seekers with other EU nations that are prepared to take in new refugees and support their integration. Funded by the European Commission's Asylum, Migration and Immigration Fund (AMIF), this program allows the International Organization for Migration (IOM) to work in Greece and assist the government in relocating asylum seekers as a way to alleviate some of the pressure on the country (International Organization for Migration, 2018b). To be eligible for relocation under this program, a refugee would have needed to arrive in Greece between September 9, 2015, and March 20, 2016. Once a list of potential candidates has been compiled, Greece would then inform other participating EU countries of those who can be transferred for resettlement. As of April 4, 2018, more than 22,005 asylum seekers in Greece had been

resettled in other EU countries including France, Germany, Sweden, Spain, Finland, Ireland, the Netherlands and Portugal (International Organization for Migration, 2018b).

Secondly, Greece is also a signatory to the exception-based Dublin Convention, of which there have been three versions; the first signed in 1990, the second signed in 2003 and the most recent version, known as Dublin III which was signed in July 2013 and officially adopted in January 2014 (European Commission Migration and Home Affairs, 2019). The Dublin Convention, which is European Union law, is meant to identify the EU nation that should ultimately be responsible for examining an asylum seeker's claim. The law is also responsible for ensuring that only one EU country is processing each asylum application (European Commission Migration and Home Affairs, 2019). Normally under this protocol, the state responsible for managing a person's claim is the country in which the person first arrived. However, if a person meets specific criteria (outlined below), they may be allowed to have their asylum application reviewed by another EU state (European Commission Migration and Home Affairs, 2019).

1. The asylum seeker has a close family member who already holds refugee status in another EU member state;
2. The asylum seeker already has a valid residence permit for a particular EU member state;
3. The asylum seeker already has a visa for a particular member state;
4. The asylum seeker has a long-expired visa for a member state; and/or
5. If a person makes an asylum application while passing through a second EU member state, the first country shall be responsible.

#### ***7.4 Orientation Services Available***

In terms of orientation services, refugees who come to Canada have access to basic orientation services following their arrival, that are meant to help introduce the newcomer to their community. Generally, these services are structured to provide assistance to refugees after they have settled in to their new home. However, given that the situation in

Canada is much more stable, it is far easier to provide such support to newcomers whose arrival was scheduled, and even to refugee claimants who arrive in much smaller groups at controlled borders. As such, it is important to explore what kinds of opportunities for orientation assistance are available in Greece, so that we may identify where there are gaps in the system.

Generally, structured orientation services, such as those offered in Canada, are extremely limited in Greece, given that the Greek integration system is unable to offer this kind of support on such a large scale. This is especially true on the islands, where there is an extreme volume of people living in RICs, who all need help to adjust. Simply put, offering valuable orientation services in such conditions is very difficult to manage, and hard to oversee. Aggravating this problem is the fact that there are few NGOs left on the islands, which has caused a major shortage of aid resources. To help bridge this gap, the FRS has attempted to cover the immediate needs of asylum seekers after they officially register their claim, by helping them to navigate various procedures including providing identification, undergoing medical screening and accessing socio-psychological support (Hellenic Republic Ministry of Citizen Protection: Asylum and Immigration, n.d.).

Given the lack of orientation services, the UN recommended in 2017 that Greece begin implementing more orientation courses which would help newcomers to understand their environment and social climates (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees: Bureau for Europe, 2017). However, to implement such an orientation framework is not that simple; any action taken by the Greek government would be contingent on the cooperation of other EU nations, who all need to step up and provide more support to their neighbor in need. If this were a realistic suggestion, such orientation services could be

modelled after what is available in Canada, where many organizations are able to offer simple workshops and classes to teach people the skills that they will need.

### ***7.5 Integration Services Available***

At this point, it is also important to acknowledge that the actual integration process can be a challenging time for newcomers as well. For example, once the asylum claim has been approved, refugees then face a whole new set of challenges, which include finding long-term housing, securing access to funds, navigating the employment and education market, and accessing medical care. Although Greece should be applauded for its previous efforts to organize different integration support programs, mostly on the mainland, it is clear that there needs to be more holistic approach taken in order to manage the thousands of refugees who are currently stranded in RICs and in other refugee hotspots. Moreover, this problem administering integration support is further compounded by the fact the Greek government has no realistic way of knowing how many of the new arrivals to Greece will stay in the country long-term.

Ultimately, this is a drastically different reality from Canada, where resettlement initiatives are highly supported through government assistance and local organizations. To understand what resettlement opportunities are actually available in Greece (and to understand how they compare to Canadian services), this section of the chapter will explore the various parts of the integration support system in Greece. For the purpose of this work, I have explored the integration framework from the vantage point of both asylum seekers and refugees, as many asylum seekers stay in the country for long periods of time while waiting for their RAO interview. During this time, they need to be able to survive and

contribute to society as best as possible, alongside those who have had their refugee claims approved.

#### **a. Accommodation During and After the Asylum Process**

After a person has arrived and has made their asylum claim, they need to find shelter that is safe for their family to live in. However, the Greek framework for refugee integration states that it is the responsibility of the newcomer to locate their own suitable accommodations. If they are unable to do so, whether it be because of a language barrier or a geographical issue, the person would need to make contact with a representative of an NGO or government office where staff may be able to offer them some suggestions (European Council for Refugees and Exiles: Accommodation, n.d.).

#### **I. Reception and Identification Centers on the Greek Islands**

Unfortunately, given the reality of the financial and legal situations of many asylum seekers, their only accommodation options are the RICs on the island, which are refugee camps run by the Hellenic military (European Council for Refugees and Exiles: Accommodation, n.d.). Overall, the conditions in these camps are very poor and basic humanitarian standards are not always met. According to the UN, the situation in these camps has reached a boiling point in recent months, with many locations very overcrowded (United Nations News, 2018). As of August 2018, there were over 19,000 people living in refugee camps on the Greek islands (United Nations News, 2018).

While fewer in location and smaller in population size, there are also refugee camps on the mainland; unfortunately, the conditions there are not much better. One example of such a camp is Ellinikon, which is located at the site of an old airport on the outskirts of Athens. This camp, which has housed more than 2,600 people since 2016, is occupied by refugees

from Afghanistan, Iran, Pakistan and Syria and is divided into three different sites where people reside: the baseball field, the hockey stadium, and the domestic arrivals port. According to Robert Strickland, a reporter with Al Jazeera who has visited the site, the camp first opened in November 2015 after the closing of the Western Balkan route (Strickland, 2017). Like other refugee camps around the nation, the conditions here have deteriorated over time. This deterioration is a direct result of the growing population inside of the camp borders, which has also put a strain on the already-minimal resources available. While some aid organizations have arrived to help deliver food and medical supplies, most of the camps residents do not have access to education, mental health care, or safe child play spaces (Strickland, 2017). In 2016, there was the talk of the camp being evacuated due to the deplorable conditions, but as of 2018, this still had not happened in any official capacity.

## **II. Emergency Support to Integration and Accommodation Programme (ESTIA)**

Another major aid program which works to create accommodation prospects for newcomers in Greece is the ESTIA program, which stands for “Emergency Support to Integration and Accommodation”. This program, run in partnership with the UNHCR, is funded by European Union Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid (ESTIA, 2017). Launched in July 2017, ESTIA is among the biggest EU aid organizations working in Greece. Through this program, the UNHCR works with the Greek government and local authorities to provide urban accommodation options to asylum seekers who would otherwise be living in a camp (ESTIA, 2017). According to ESTIA organizers, being able to live in urban accommodation can provide normalcy and allow a person to have better access to resettlement services (ESTIA, 2017). Moreover, ESTIA officials also work with



staff from other NGOs to create accommodation options. An example of one of these partners is the organization Solidarity Now, which is also funded by European Union Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid, and operates two centers: one in Athens and one in Thessaloniki. Ultimately, both of these centers support and uphold the ESTIA's vision of accommodation for all newcomers, no matter their race, ethnicity or status.

As of April 2018, the UNHCR had created over 23,919 accommodation spots that were being used by the ESTIA program, with over 44,918 individuals having benefited from this (ESTIA, 2017). On April 4<sup>th</sup>, 2018, the European Commission announced that an extra 180 million Euros would be allotted to aid projects in Greece; as a direct result of this, the ESTIA program will be receiving increased funding to expand the program.

#### **b. Access to Employment and Educational Opportunities**

Another key element of the integration process is to help people become self-sufficient. Therefore, it is very important that there are integration services which help asylum seekers access the labor market and educational system. Fortunately, as long as a person has their permit card (which they received upon submitting their asylum application), they are eligible to join the labor market and obtain a working permit. This also means that they would have access to any programs that are offered to the general public by the Greek government (Papademetriou, 2016). However, despite the fact that it is fully legal for newcomers to work in Greece, the European Parliament's Employment and Social Affairs states that it is very difficult to find out how many refugees are actually working. This is because asylum seekers are not distinguished from other immigrants in labor market data. (Kondle-Seidl and Bolits, 2016).

In Canada, refugees also have the right to work. Here, however, many service providers offer targeted employment training to help refugees develop their skills and find meaningful job opportunities. While there are some organizations on the Greek mainland that can provide basic training on job searching and resume writing, there is still a great need for programs which directly work with people to help them understand their potential to support themselves and their families.

In terms of education, refugee children have the right to attend school free of charge, alongside native Greek children. Despite this, several NGOs have documented that many children are unable to fully profit from school because of the language barriers. For adults, there are some NGO's on the Greek mainland, including the Mercy Corps, the Danish Council for Refugees and Solidarity Now, which work in collaboration with local volunteers to provide educational workshops and language courses. For many, these language classes are an integral part of their overall settlement experience, given that the ability to communicate with those around them can create new opportunities.

### **c. Medical Assistance**

For many, accessing medical care upon their arrival in Greece is a top priority. According to an analysis from the World Health Organization (WHO), many refugees arrive to Greece in poor health, often as a result of the treacherous journey they have had to undertake. To assist those who have fallen ill, the Hellenic Centre for Disease Control and Prevention has taken the lead on collaborating with NGOs to ensure accessible healthcare for asylum seekers who arrive each day on the islands (Azevedo Soares and Tzafalias, 2015). Theoretically, all newcomers have the same basic health care rights as Greek nationals. However, it can be difficult for these people to access such services if

there is a language barrier, or if their physical location poses a problem (for example, if they are still on one of the Greek islands) (Papademetriou, 2016).

For those who arrive and require immediate medical attention, they are transferred to the mainland where they are admitted to a general hospital to receive treatment. Despite this practice, a bulletin published by WHO in 2015 suggests that many people refuse to be transferred to the hospital because they want to leave Greece as soon as possible, and believe this will hold them up (Azevedo Soares and Tzafalias, 2015). For less urgent situations, asylum seekers who arrive in Greece are, hypothetically, supposed to be able to access free medical advice, medication and receive health information from any public hospital. This has been common practice since the enactment of national legislation in 2016, which stated that members of vulnerable population groups, including refugees, needed to have access to free or affordable healthcare regularly (European Council on Refugees and Exiles: Healthcare, n.d.). While this may sound comparable to Canada, there are certain restrictions placed on a refugee's access to the Greek health care system which do not exist in Canada (European Council on Refugees and Exiles: Healthcare, n.d.). Some of the stipulations include that:

- The patient must be able to prove that they have no health insurance;
- The patient must be able to prove they have no financial means with which to pay for the appropriate treatment;
- The patient must be able to present all the legal documentation necessary to receive aid; and
- In certain circumstances, the person may need to receive approval for medical treatment from a Committee.

For those in desperate need of medical care, there are some NGOs that operate near refugee hotspots to provide the assistance they can. For example, Doctors without Borders (MSF) has three clinics in Athens: one in Victoria Square, one at the Babel Day Center and one at Ellinikon. These clinics are able to provide the following:

- primary health care;
- mental health assistance;
- private psychiatric assistance;
- Arabic and Farsi speaking staff who are able to facilitate discussion between the patient and the medical personnel; and/or
- sexual and reproductive health care.

Lastly, refugees with disabilities are entitled to a small, monthly allowance that is meant to help them with their medical expenses. However, this allowance is less than a Greek national would receive for the same health condition (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, 2015).

#### **d. Financial Assistance**

Lastly, the integration process can be very difficult for those who are struggling but financially. For stranded refugees, being able to afford basic necessities can be a major challenge. To improve the financial situations of those who are already living in very vulnerable situations, the ESTIA program has been offering cash assistance to people with approved refugee status since April 2017 (ESTIA, 2017). Under this program, refugees would be provided with a Greek cash assistance card (GCA). These cards function at all Automatic Transaction Machines (ATMs) and Point of Sale (POS) machines throughout Greece. When someone receives a GCA card, they are provided with the following information (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, 2018b):

- information on the amount of cash assistance they will receive;
- PIN number needed to withdraw cash at the ATM;
- instructions on how to use an ATM in Greece;
- a helpline number to call in the event that they require assistance; and
- a receipt (signed by the recipient) which indicates the UNHCR system registration number.

Generally, the amount of cash that is provided depends on the household and the size of the family. For example, cash assistance can range from 90 Euros a month for a

single person who is living in organized accommodation, all the way up to 550 Euros a month for a family of seven or more who are living in their own accommodations (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, 2018b). Ultimately, the goal of this cash assistance is to provide a person with funding to secure basic needs for the next 30 days. It is, however, important to note that there is no guarantee that the funding will be continued after each round is distributed (this would depend on individual circumstances) (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, 2018b).

As of February 2018, there have been approximately 41,387 recipients of ESTIA cash assistance in Greece. Of these recipients, 84% were either Syrian, Iraqi, Afghan, Iranian or Palestinian (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, 2016). Overall, this system of financial assistance is somewhat similar to how government assisted refugees in Canada would receive their monthly allowance, which is also meant to provide people with autonomy and security.

In addition to this program, the International Rescue Committee may provide monthly, emergency relief to the most vulnerable of all newcomers in the form of pre-paid debit cards. This sort of financial assistance is offered with the intention of allowing newcomers to purchase basic items from local shop owners (International Rescue Committee: Refugees in Limbo, n.d.). According to the IRC, having access to this cash assistance can help refugees to regain some autonomy in their lives, and also provides a boost to local economies.

### ***7.6 Private Sponsorship Opportunities***

Currently, there is no private sponsorship program in Greece.

### ***7.7 Gender-Based Programs***

As explored previously in this work, it is clear that women face a number of risks during the forced migration process. In light of the experiences that women have, it is critical to examine the gender-based support options that exist for female asylum seekers in Greece. Fortunately, while limited, there are a few private organizations that operate on the mainland to provide resources to women who have experienced trauma. For example, the International Rescue Committee is present in six different refugee camps throughout Greece, where they focus on providing safe spaces for women. At each of these locations, more than 170 women visit daily to partake in recreational activities, meant to help them through trauma or pain they may be experiencing (International Rescue Committee: Refugees in Limbo, n.d.).

According to Amnesty International, the Greek government signed a protocol in 2017 which was meant to protect asylum seekers who have been victims of gender-based violence, by creating 40 women's counselling centers and 21 state-run shelters across the country. Unfortunately, while Amnesty International notes that this was certainly a step in the right direction, the organization states that they have seen very little impact from the creation of this protocol (Costa Riba, 2018).

### ***7.8 Challenges***

At this point, it is clear that there are gaps in the Greek integration system, which make it difficult for newcomers to access the resources they require in order to successfully settle. While these challenges are as a result of several different factors, there are some common themes, which include the following:

- there is difficulty in navigating the asylum process;
- there is an accommodation shortage;
- there is a lack of orientation and integration services; and

- there is difficulty in securing education or employment.

#### **a. Problems with Asylum Procedure**

As previously outlined, the first step in applying for asylum in Greece is to file a claim at an RAO. However, there are numerous challenges affiliated with this process. According to the UNHCR, one of the most common problems reported is that the services of the RAOs are inaccessible to a large portion of the people who actually want to file an asylum claim, or who require assistance. Below is an exploration of the systematic difficulties that are faced by asylum seekers when trying to file a claim, and during the time in which they wait for a decision.

##### **I. Physical Access to Asylum Offices**

Firstly, it can be difficult for asylum seekers to physically reach the asylum offices, given the lack of transportation available and the rural locations where some people are living (European Council on Refugees and Exiles: Access to the Territory and Pushbacks, n.d.). Moreover, the asylum service in Greece reported in December 2013 that not all of the RAO locations had been active due to a shortage in staff. If the office located nearest an asylum seeker is not operational, it may be difficult for them to get to another location (European Council on Refugees and Exiles: Access to the Territory and Pushbacks, n.d.). According to the Greek government, several RAOs on the islands have stopped operating as a result of widespread violence and sexual harassment (Aitima, 2017).

##### **II. Registration Pushback**

Furthermore, Greek NGO Aitima noted in an April 2017 report on the asylum procedure that many asylum seekers are often turned away from offices when attempting to submit their claims. In some cases, asylum seekers are told to wait in line to receive

information on a Skype appointment (Aitima, 2017). This means that instead of actually being able to submit a claim, people can wait for up to ten months for a Skype appointment, just to complete their claim registration (this does not include any application processing time) (Aitima, 2017).

### **III. Lack of Legal Assistance**

Furthermore, Aitima noted in their report that the lack of pro-bono legal aid available in refugee hotspots is a big problem for people who are submitting claims. Because there is virtually no legal help available for those navigating the asylum process, people have to try and understand the different aspects of the system without representation. Only complicating this situation is the reality that many applicants are unable to read and write, which makes succeeding in the already-difficult process nearly impossible. As a result of this, there is evidence to suggest that some asylum seekers are taken advantage of. For example, the Aitima report states that there have been circumstances where RAO staff have shown preference to applicants of certain nationalities or ethnicities. Unfortunately, when legal aid is unavailable, there is little a claimant can do to advocate for themselves in situations like this (Aitima, 2017).

Although staff at the operating RAOs do what they can to provide clarity and relevant information, it is clear that a combination of insufficient training, ever-changing regulations, and ongoing structural deficiencies have make it hard for staff to keep up with the legal needs of their clients (Aitima, 2017).

### **IV. March 2016 EU-Turkey Statement**

Lastly, it is necessary to mention the impact of the EU-Turkey deal, a piece of legislation that was enacted to decrease the flow of newcomers entering Greece from



Turkey. This law, officially adopted on March 18, 2016, states that Greek officials can legally return asylum-seekers to Turkey if they have entered Greece. In exchange for Turkey agreeing to take these people back, the EU declared that they would offer increased financial support for the resettlement of Syrian refugees in Turkey, and would relax visa requirements for Turkish citizens entering the EU (Szymańska and Wasilewski, 2018).

However, the consequences of this new law have been far reaching. For example, all newcomers who arrived in Greece after March 2016, via a route from Turkey, are now at risk of being returned there as the government has concluded that Turkey is a safe place for asylum seekers to seek asylum first. Overall, despite the fact that that the European Union implemented this policy to help decrease the flow of newcomers entering Europe through Greece, the deal has significantly slowed down the asylum process because the already-over burden asylum system now needs to screen for newcomers who could have claimed asylum in Turkey first, but did not.

#### **b. Lack of Suitable, Long-term Accommodation Solutions**

Another serious problem which plagues the Greek reintegration system is that finding suitable accommodation is a challenge that many asylum seekers are unprepared to deal with. According to the European Council on Refugees and Exiles, Greece has been criticized for being largely unable to provide asylum seekers and refugees with suitable living options (European Council for Refugees and Exiles: Accommodation, n.d.). Although there are different organizations that have created programs to help deal with this situation, it is clear that this is not a sufficient solution. While less urgent now than two years ago, the main issue with the accommodation process is the lack of actual options where refugees can be housed, especially on the islands.

Ultimately, Greece has been criticized by the international community for responding to this problem by housing newcomers in unstable refugee camps, where asylum seekers wait until a housing option becomes available. By housing vulnerable people in sites that were never intended for human habitation, especially long-term, awful living conditions have resulted. According to John Wain, author of *Shelter in Displacement*, these sites have been ravaged by overcrowding and unsanitary and dangerous conditions. Sexual violence is widespread, and there is little to no support provided to assist refugees through the resettlement process (Wain, 2017).

In December 2018, a joint agency report from Oxfam International, entitled “*Transitioning to a Government Run Refugee and Migrant Response in Greece: A Joint NGO Roadmap for More Fair and Humane Policies*”, suggested that the Greek Ministry of Migration Policy claims to have evacuated several unsuitable sites on the mainland, where refugees were living as of mid-November 2017 (Oxfam International, 2017). According to the report, the sites were evacuated in favor of creating more sustainable and safe options for refugees and their families. However, the report goes on to state that, of the five sites they investigated, all of them are still operational because the refugees who are living there have no other alternative (Oxfam International, 2017). Yet, the Greek government now considers these sites to have been “evacuated”, meaning that there are no governing bodies overseeing the day-to-day operations of the camp (Oxfam International, 2017).

For asylum seekers who have been fortunate enough to have secured subsidized housing, the short-term nature of this accommodation assistance can also create major anxiety. Although temporary accommodations with low rent can be useful to help refugees get on their feet, many people have to deal with worrying about what will happen to them

after their rent assistance has ended. Because of these worries, many people choose to remain in the camps (Oxfam International, 2017).

### **c. Absence of Orientation and Integration Services**

After examining the problems related to the asylum application process and the availability of suitable accommodations, it is now important to review the inaccessibility of orientation and integration services. In order for newcomers to be successfully settled into their new society, having access to such services is crucial. As seen in the previous chapter in which examples of Canadian resettlement organizations were explored, orientation and integration support can provide refugees with the critical skills they need to be able to advocate for themselves in a foreign society.

Firstly, it is important to note that Greece has enacted different legislation to ensure that refugees have access to orientation and integration services that are meant to help them work through their trauma and improve their living situation. However, there is little evidence to suggest that any official measures are being taken to ensure the enforcement of such services. In April 2014, Greece adopted Law 4251, *Immigration and Social Integration Code and Other Provisions* (Kontorizou, 2018). This legislation includes a clause called *The National Strategy for the Integration of Third-Country Nationals and the Integrated Action Plan*, which suggests that the following opportunities should be available to all third-country nationals who come to Greece, regardless of legal status (Kontorizou, 2018):

- assistance learning the Greek language, history, and culture;
- access to information campaigns addressing third-country nationals in relation to health, social security, and work; and
- opportunities for intercultural mediation.

Although this legislation, theoretically, could be an excellent starting point for orientation programs and integration assistance services, there are no governing bodies which will agree to oversee such policies (Kontorizou, 2018). In part, this lack of interest in the maintenance of such programs is due to the fact that, before the enactment of the 2016 EU-Turkey deal, Greece was mainly regarded as a transitory country for third-country nationals who were looking to relocate elsewhere in Europe (Kontorizou, 2018). Essentially, this means that the government was uninterested in providing services aimed at orientating new asylum seekers into Greek society because they did not believe that they would stay in the country long term (Kontorizou, 2018).

#### **d. Lack of Educational and Employment Opportunities**

Lastly, it is important to acknowledge the challenges that exist in accessing educational and employment opportunities. For example, accessing appropriate education for school-age children has proven to be very difficult for many refugee families. Although the Greek government has taken steps to provide more class options for children of asylum seekers who are living on the islands, the hundreds of children who reside in the refugee camps are unable to attend as they cannot provide the proof of address that is required to enroll in school (Rau, 2017). While children on the mainland have better access to educational programs, they are often very limited in the quality of education they receive, given the language barriers and challenges associated with a life that is constantly being uprooted.

According to Asylum Information Data, a 2017 study conducted by the Greek Education Sector Working Group (ESWG) on children's access and participation rates in informal and formal education classes found that 41% of all children sampled did not attend any type of education. Among the children attending any type of education activities, only

22% were attending formal education (European Council on Refugees and Exiles: Access to Education, n.d.). For many asylum seekers trying to secure employment, many of the same challenges apply; while they have the same right as Greek nationals to apply for jobs and be hired, many people have difficulty finding potential employers due to their physical location on an island, or due to the general lack of jobs available in the country after the recent economic crisis. Moreover, for any opportunities that are available, refugees are required to compete with locals who are often the preferred employees due to their ability to speak Greek.

## CHAPTER EIGHT: EXPLORING GREEK INTEGRATION COLLABORATIVELY WITH THE MELISSA NETWORK FOR MIGRANT WOMEN

### ***8.1 Introduction***

In January and February of 2018, I travelled to Athens, Greece to gather original data about the gendered integration process that female asylum seekers experience. To do this, I formed a partnership with the Melissa Network for Migrant Women, a grassroots organization that provides resettlement assistance through empowerment, communication and active citizenship. Briefly, this partnership allowed me to better learn the details of the integration process in Greece, and to understand how the system compares to the refugee resettlement system in Canada, by collaboratively exploring and discussing the unique experiences of women with staff and clients of the organization.

Throughout the first two weeks of my time at the Melissa Network, I was fortunate to be able to volunteer, teaching English classes to students. While doing this, I was able to engage in informal, non-participant observation from which I gained an excellent idea of how the center works and what its goals are. In the weeks that followed, I held two workshop and focus group sessions, where I worked alongside the volunteer participants to explore both the Canadian and Greek resettlement structures, and where I collected feedback on anonymous personal experiences from asylum-seeking women themselves. Below, I explore the inner workings of the Melissa Network; following this, I present the key findings from the collaborative research period.

### ***8.2 The Role of the Melissa Network for Migrant Women***

As noted above, the Melissa Network is an organization for asylum-seeking women in Athens, Greece. At the Melissa Network, dedicated staff prepare women for integration into a new society by promoting active participation in a wide range of classes, workshops

and activities. This organization is an exceptional example of a service which is available to vulnerable women in Athens, who require support. The Melissa Network has improved the lives of many female newcomers in Athens, as they promote a healthy, educational, and safe atmosphere for all. Without a doubt, there is a feeling of freedom and comradery within the walls of the building, and the women are able to be themselves. They are encouraged by each other and staff alike to participate in all opportunities that are offered. After spending a period of time at this organization, I believe that this warm, open and accepting environment is an initiative of the women themselves, who recognize the value in providing support and love to those around them.

Through my informal observation, one of the most interesting things I noted was that the staff work hard to fill the student's schedule with courses that are most appropriate and beneficial to them. For example, not all of the women who come to the Melissa Network each day will stay in Greece; many of them are waiting for family reunification and will be relocated to another EU country. Because of this, some schedules include lessons on German, Spanish or English depending on which country the woman is ultimately headed to. Furthermore, these language classes are offered at different levels, depending on the proficiency and previous experience of the student. During my time with the organization, I attended a number of these language classes. Immediately, it became evident that these sessions are designed in a way that is conducive to learning, while respecting the cultural and educational differences in the room. Notably, the women were very comfortable in the educational setting provided by the Melissa Network; I believe that this can be attributed to the valiant efforts of the staff and the drive to succeed that all of the women held.

Moreover, some of the other sessions I sat in on included a computer skills workshop, and art, music and poetry classes. Throughout these classes, community volunteers and professionals alike taught the women new skills with patience. I feel that it is important to note that many of the women who come to the Melissa Network are very educated. In light of this, some women attended class simply for the company it provided them, while others were learning to read and write for the first time. Ultimately, it was very clear that the opportunities offered at the Melissa Network played a huge role in the lives of the women.

At the organization, I secondly noted that there is an excellent accessibility policy which is enforced, which ensures that all women can participate in the opportunities that are offered, no matter what personal circumstances they are dealing with. It is important to recognize that although the women were, at the point of this research, safe at the Melissa Network, many of them had recently undertaken excruciating journeys to reach Europe. For example, some of the women at the organization had been separated from their families, and were alone in Greece (including young teenagers). Other women had been victims of GBV, or were pregnant with little family support. Additionally, some women were struggling with fitting into a new society that they knew nothing about, and with processing the trauma that they experienced. Yet, despite all of these challenges the women were dealing with, the staff worked tirelessly to ensure that no-one was left behind, and that every effort was made to accommodate all women. To be accessible to mothers with young children, the Melissa Network houses a child care center on site, so that a lack of childcare would not hold the women back from attending lessons or events.



In addition, translators were also available to assist when needed. It is worth noting that the importance of these translators went beyond simply passing a message; these translators allowed the women to connect with each other and to develop friendships.

At the Melissa Network, a wide range of integration assistance services are also available. To help the women form an integration plan, psychologists and a lawyer were on staff daily. These specialized staff were prepared to work with the women on a number of topics, including family violence, family reunification, legal status and health problems. In the event that the Melissa Network is unable to support a woman in the way that is most beneficial to her, the staff are prepared to direct the person to other programs in Athens that could be useful to them. To do this, the Melissa Network has partnered with various organizations throughout Athens.

For example, one such partnership is with the Athens Humanity Crew, an organization that connects mental health professionals to refugee assistance organizations in Athens. Through the Humanity Crew, additional psychologists, psychiatrists, and qualified volunteers can come to Melissa to treat women who are victims of trauma and conflict. The Melissa Network has also partnered with the Home Project, which is an organization that builds shelters for unaccompanied refugee minors in Greece. One such shelter, known as the “hive”, is located very close to the Melissa Network and allows unaccompanied female minors to access its services.

Throughout my time informally observing the inner workings of this organization, I witnessed firsthand how a successful program for asylum seekers is run, under the umbrella of a government system with little structure, and gaps in the policy meant to address the plight of refugees.

### ***8.3 Undertaking Feminist Action Research at the Melissa Network***

At the Melissa Network for Migrant Women, I was also given the opportunity to hold two workshop and focus group sessions, from which I collected data on the gendered integration experience of female asylum seekers in Greece. Ultimately, the goal of these sessions was to learn about how Canadian resettlement techniques could be could be selectively adapted to the Greek integration system.

The first session was held with seven staff practitioners of the Melissa Network, including anthropologists, translators, physiologists, and lawyers. The second session included 13 female clients of the organization itself, the majority of whom were from Syria, Iraq and Afghanistan. Due to the multiplicity of languages in the room, a translator was used during the second workshop and focus group session, to ensure the accuracy of information. Overall, the data collected during these workshops and focus groups sessions was used to create two recommendations for a hypothetical model of integration in Greece. It should be noted that all references to specific staff members and participants have been eliminated from this work in order to preserve the privacy of the person.

Overall, both of these sessions followed a similar pattern: they began with the workshop portion, which was followed by the focus group, and lasted roughly 90 minutes. More specifically, the workshop portion of this session began with a PowerPoint presentation on the details of the Canadian refugee resettlement system, provided to participants as a one-pager so that they could follow along (see Appendix B). Generally, the goal of this brief presentation was to give the participants a sense of the policies and programs which exist as part of the Canadian refugee resettlement system. It was also meant to allow the participants to reflect on how these processes may have differed from those that they personally experienced. This presentation featured explanations of the three

examples of Canadian resettlement organizations in Nova Scotia, which were previously explored in this work: ISANS, the Halifax Refugee Clinic and the YMCA YREACH program.

During the presentation, there was a back-and-forth element that allowed participants to ask questions. For some participants, they were learning about the Canadian resettlement system for the first time, while others, specifically staff members, were well-versed on this topic. Despite the different backgrounds and experiences of all participants, several similar questions were asked throughout both sessions, including:

1. How do refugees legally get to Canada from war zones?
2. How can I help someone I know go to Canada legally from Greece?
3. Once a refugee gets to Canada, how do they find out about the services that these organizations offer?
4. Does the government pay for refugees to use these services?
5. Is there a limit to the number of services a refugee can use during their resettlement process?
6. Are asylum seekers permitted to work and attend school while waiting on a legal decision?

After responding to these questions, the focus group which followed was then an opportunity for myself, as the researcher, to ask some questions (see Appendix A) meant to stimulate reaction and reflection amongst the participants. These specific questions were also asked to ensure that I collected the proper data. These discussion-guiding questions included the following:

1. What are your initial reactions to what you have heard about the Canadian refugee resettlement system?
2. Did anything you learn about refugees in Canada surprise you?
3. Do you think that any of the services offered by resettlement organizations in Nova Scotia could have been useful to you throughout your migration experiences?
4. Could the Canadian system be beneficial to other female asylum seekers in Athens in the future?
5. If so, do you think any of these policies, procedures or services could be adapted into Greek policies?

Overall, the discussion in the focus groups flowed very naturally. Throughout the session, the space remained open for any commentary, feelings, or ideas to be expressed, including reactions to the presentation material and the sharing of participants' own experiences or opinions on the integration of asylum-seeking women in Greece. Almost immediately, it became evident that the participants were intrigued by the information being presented, and that they could recognize the potential value in learning about the details of the resettlement system in Canada. Specifically, one participant in the staff focus group acknowledged that it was important for integration practitioners to learn about the various resettlement models used around the world. Another participant noted that it was integral to learn about potentially successful techniques to best help the women who came to them for help in their most vulnerable states, and to adopt strategies from countries where they have been able to successfully reintegrate refugees.

Ultimately, these focus group discussions not only provided me with an opportunity to gather both professional and personal input about the state of the integration framework in Greece, but it also allowed me to better understand where there are policy and logistical gaps that need to be filled. The positive themes of the discussion indicated that an overwhelming number of the staff participants expressed interest in the services and programs which are offered under the Canadian refugee resettlement system, and supported the idea of adapting various Canadian policies in order to improve the current Greek resettlement system for female asylum seekers, requiring assistance for reintegration. Below, the key findings of these workshop and focus group sessions are examined in detail.

#### ***8.4 Key findings of the Collaborative Research Project with the Melissa Network***

After having analyzed the data collected from both of the workshop and focus group sessions, I have outlined my four key findings, which ultimately relate to the experiences of female asylum seekers in Greece. These findings, which I have found to be in accordance with the major themes of the gender and forced migration theory, are detailed below:

**a. The Provision of Information on the Asylum Procedure Needs to be More Effective**

The first major finding I gathered from the two workshop and focus group sessions, held at the Melissa Network, is that the current provision of information to newcomers about the asylum procedure is neither sufficient nor effective. In general, I found that there is a lack of readily available information to newcomers, which would inform them of the steps they must take to successfully register their asylum claim to stay in the country.

As noted earlier in this work, the process of submitting an asylum claim in Greece is very confusing. Throughout this process, there is minimal information provided to newcomer women to help them navigate the challenges that they may face. This can be especially difficult in circumstances where a newcomer may have been unaware that they had to claim asylum in the first place. Unfortunately, many asylum seekers travel across the Mediterranean Sea to Greece with false expectations, believing that they can transit through the country to resettle elsewhere in Europe. Ultimately, this is a major issue, as many of the asylum-seeking women who have entered Greece have had to leave their homelands as a result of armed conflict, and are in need of stability. In order to begin the process of integration as successfully as possible, it is imperative that information on the requirements and process of the asylum procedure be significantly more accessible, so that those who have already undergone traumatic experiences, as a result of the forced migration process, can still navigate the system and have a chance at a new life.

During the first workshop and focus group held with staff practitioners of the Melissa Network, participants acknowledged that accessing relevant information and understanding the asylum process can be very tough for anyone, but that this is especially difficult for women who, in addition to having undergone a forced migration, are also facing a language barrier. As a result, initiating this process without the having a basic understanding of the system can be intimidating for a female asylum seeker if they do not know where to begin, or who to turn to for help. During the session, staff also noted that the asylum-seeking process, and the lack of information about it, has been a great source of anxiety and trouble for many of the women who come to the Melissa Network. In light of this, the staff participants were very interested to learn about how the asylum-seeking process in Canada worked and what rights asylum seekers in Canada had once they entered the country.

Interestingly, one staff participant also noted that eventually, the Melissa Network would like to transition from a first reception service that deals with asylum to an organization that focuses primarily with the resettlement of women who will stay in Greece. However, the participant also noted that this could be a difficult change to make. This is because many women come to the center from one of the islands, meaning that some may still need help adjusting to their new environments, and to process the experiences they may have had during their migration. This was evident in the client workshop and focus group session, when a number of the participants noted that they had no idea what they were getting into when they arrived in Greece, and only got through the process with the help of the Melissa Network.

**b. The Current Availability and Accessibility of Integration Services is Inadequate**

The second key finding I gathered from my data collection at the Melissa Network is that there is currently a major lack of available and accessible integration resources and services, which aim to address the transition that the women are making from having migrated to resettling. This is a major shortcoming of the Greek integration system, as without adequate access to basic support services which will promote the healthy integration of women, these individuals will remain victims of forced migration, who are stuck in limbo in an unfamiliar country. Ultimately, I came to this conclusion as, throughout both workshops and focus group sessions at the Melissa Network, participants noted that easy access to integration and support resources is an extremely important factor in the overall integration experience for women and girls of all ages.

Specifically, during the staff session, some participants suggested that since women face unique migration challenges that do not affect men proportionately, as noted by major theorists of the gender and forced migration approach, they require additional support services to be able to navigate the resettlement process, as a result of the experiences they have had. Unfortunately, staff noted that while there are some programs in place that are meant to support women, the Greek government is simply unable to provide these services en masse given the extremely large number of women to assist. During the session with the newcomer women themselves, a similar sentiment was echoed. When asked what aspects of the Canadian resettlement system they felt could be beneficial to newcomer women in Greece, all participants were in agreement that there was a need for psychological and informational support resources which would help women to know what to do upon their arrival in Greece, and which would provide direction to the appropriate assistance providers.

The following is a quote from one client participant, which exemplifies the need for such services:

*“When I came to the islands, there was no direction. The only thing I was told was to go to the camp by the scary police. Once I got there, I didn’t know what to do...it feels like just waiting and waiting for nothing. I thought it would be better here in Greece.”* – Anonymous, Melissa Network 2018.

The other participants in the client session expressed sympathy with this statement, and many indicated that they would have felt less intimidated and distressed if there had been someone to direct their concerns to and a support organization to work with on their settlement needs.

### **c. Access to Psychological Services that Address Trauma from Gender-Based Violence**

Furthermore, I concluded as a third finding from my workshop and focus group sessions that many asylum-seeking women have experienced significant adversity and negative psychological effects as a result of the gender-based violence that they experienced during the forced migration process. As a result of such experiences, these women require reliable access to targeted psychological support services. While this is not a finding unique to this work, it is important to acknowledge these issues of violence, sexual assault and gender bias that women face, as they represent challenges explored by scholars of the gender and migration theory, who recognize the importance of analyzing the migration experience from a female lens.

Overall, this problem of migration-induced trauma and how it affects a woman’s ability to integrate was noted in both workshop and focus group sessions at the Melissa Network. During the staff session, a number of participants suggested that, given the precarious situations of many refugee women, it would be ideal to have lawyers, psychologists and



translators available in refugee hotspots, where women could be assisted with processing trauma they may have endured throughout their migration process. Participants of this same session also noted that by helping the women overcome these migration traumas, it allows them to realize that they *can* be successful in a society that is very different from the one they are used to, and in spite of challenges they may have dealt with in the past.

To further the point that negative gender-based experiences impact integration, a number of the female asylum-seeking women who are clients of the organization shared with me that they are fearful of the police due to past violence they have endured at the hands of men. The women noted that the police presence in the camps was intimidating, and that the police rarely did anything to stop the violence which was taking place. One woman noted that she struggles to trust anyone anymore, especially authorities, because of the negative experiences she has had with men and police. As a result, she fears that the police are not there to help her, but to harm her. She thanks the Melissa Network for helping her regain her confidence and trust in others, and stated that she “didn’t know where she would be today without their love and support”.

The discussion in the staff workshop and focus group session produced possible solutions. For example, the staff practitioners noted that one way of handling the trauma crisis was to potentially implement a culture-based newcomer mentoring program at the organization. This program could be similar to the one used at ISANS, in Nova Scotia, Canada, which voluntarily connects newcomers with someone who shares the same cultural background or native language. The participants suggested that this type of organized program could be highly useful for the women, as this would provide a person with some familiarity and an alternative support system during their initial integration. While this person would likely not be a professional in any way, a friend in a new place could

potentially make a big impact on the life of somebody who is alone in a new place. The following is a powerful quote from one of the staff participants on this topic, which highlights the need for appropriate, culturally-sensitive supports:

*“The women who come to Greece...they do not want to be Greek. They want to keep their culture and their identity while living in a safe place.”* – Anonymous Staff Member, Melissa Network, 2018

#### **d. Need for Culturally-Sensitive and Gender-Based Services**

The fourth and final conclusion that I came to was simple: There is an overwhelming need for culturally-sensitive, gender-based resettlement services which aim to address the unique challenges that women face both during the forced migration experience and throughout their integration process. This need for such targeted services was evident given the large number of women that attended the Melissa Network for classes, lunch and activities daily with dedication. I also noted the long waiting list of people who were hoping for a spot. Ultimately, integration support services and resources which are culturally-sensitive and female-based need to be more prevalent and accessible, both on the islands and on the mainland, and should be promoted to those who require the services the most.

As women who had experienced a forced migration first hand, the need for such services was one of the main topics during the session with newcomer women themselves. During this session, all of the participants felt there were numerous benefits to helping women successfully integrate into a new society through female-only programming, which left space for women to feel comfortable with themselves, and their culture. In the staff workshop and focus group session, one participant specifically noted that a major benefit of female-only support initiatives and environments is that they encourage a higher rate of participation. According to the staff member, this relates back to the fact that many women

have experienced violence by men, and can be uncomfortable around them as a result. When the women feel that they can be themselves by engaging in classes and actively participating at their own level without judgement, they are able to more fully take advantage of the opportunities being offered to them.

The women in the client workshop and focus group all confirmed this thinking, noting that they felt safe and secure at the Melissa Network because they knew they would be free from gender-based discrimination. The women also demonstrated strong relationships with each other, because they have all come from similar backgrounds and experienced similar hardships. Although the particulars of their circumstances may be different, the women sought strength in each other and leaned on one another for support, friendship and love.

Although there were no minors which participated in the workshop and focus group sessions, there were a group of unaccompanied minor girls who were present at the center each day; it was evident that these young women relied on the elder women for support and guidance, and even the staff members, in the absence of their own families. During my observation period at the Melissa Network, I noticed several occasions where the younger and older generations interacted and taught each other new skills or things about their own cultures. The younger girls could be seen showing the older women how to use cell phones and laptops; I also witnessed the elder women teaching the younger how to do everyday tasks, such as cooking lunch and taking care of the children.

### ***8.5 Recognizing the Importance of Learning about Integration from Different Perspectives***

In conclusion, I learned an invaluable amount the gendered migration experiences of women who have come to Greece in search of safety. The Melissa Network is a prime example of how organizations should seek to treat the newcomers who arrive in Greece,

given that many have had to suffer through horrendous journeys in search of safety and livelihoods. Overall, what makes Melissa special is that it is a feminist inspired network that encourages a celebration of womanhood and acknowledges the unique contributions that women bring to society. With this sort of approach, it is clear why all of the women in the client session wanted to profoundly thank the organization for inspiring them to learn to thrive in their new environment.

Overall, it was evident that both the staff and clients of the Melissa Network were very eager to learn about the Canadian refugee resettlement system, and the sorts of resources which are offered in Nova Scotia to help newcomers. While there is a major difference between the refugee situations and Canada and Greece, such as the number of incoming asylum seekers, how newcomers are handled upon their arrival, and how they reintegrate into society, all participants of the research were, nonetheless, interested to learn about how other women in precarious situations move on with their lives. Therefore, the findings I took away from both the informal observation period and the workshop and focus group sessions have allowed me to develop recommendations for action to create a hypothetical model of Greek integration, by using the structure of the Canadian resettlement system as a point of departure.

## CHAPTER NINE: RECOMMENDATIONS FOR A HYPOTHETICAL MODEL OF INTEGRATION IN GREECE

### ***9.1 Introduction: Recommendations for a Hypothetical Model of Greek Integration***

As has been explored throughout this work, female asylum seekers face a vast array of challenges when navigating the Greek integration system. For example, many women who come to Greece have recently undertaken a very dangerous journey of forced migration, and therefore arrive to Greece with unique issues that require immediate intervention. To improve the overall experience of this population, it is necessary that the Greek government work in collaboration with the European Union to develop a plan that will better manage the needs of female newcomers. If the specific circumstances of vulnerable women were more closely monitored and acted upon, female asylums seekers would be better able to access both the physical and psychological supports they need in order to eventually resettle, either in Greece or elsewhere in Europe, as successfully as possible.

Therefore, I propose two recommendations for action by both political and social players, using my research on the practices of the Canadian refugee resettlement as a point of departure, and after careful review of all data collected. Given that the Greek system is currently dealing with a number of people who are at different stages of integration, including irregularly arriving individuals who have not applied for asylum, asylum seekers waiting for a decision on their application, and Convention refugees, the first recommendation will be a proposal for improving the asylum process, while the second will be a call to action for the integration system.

### ***9.2 Recommendation One: Improving Access to Information about the Asylum Process***

At this point, it is clear that there are several factors which are aggravating the efficiency of the asylum procedure in Greece. These factors include, but are not limited to, a lack of staffing resources at the First Reception Service and serious overcrowding at the reception centers on the Greek islands. Ultimately, both of these problems have contributed to the backlog of asylum applications, which has left many vulnerable asylum seekers with a lengthy wait to find out what will happen to them. In light of these conditions, it is crucial that the Greek Government work directly in collaboration with the European Union to identify the major areas of concern with the asylum procedure and develop solutions for them.

Specifically, I believe that one of the most pressing problems which needs to be addressed is the lack of access to information. In light of the current conditions at the island reception centers, many people arrive with little information on the process of seeking asylum. Although, as noted earlier in this work, the FRS does what it can with its limited resources to guide asylum seekers through the process, it has become evident that it simply is not possible to reach all newcomers in need without adequate staffing or operational locations which are geographically accessible.

During the focus group and workshop session with female asylum seekers at the Melissa Network, a number of the participants confirmed my thinking that access to information on the asylum procedure is integral, through acknowledgement that many of them struggled greatly during their first days and weeks in Greece. In large part, the women stated that they did not understand the steps which needed to be taken in order to submit an application for asylum, and that no one was available to provide this information to them. Many of the women noted that they were too intimidated by the lack of protection in the camp to try and seek out information on their own, and were simply more concerned with

finding food and shelter for themselves and their family. Given the traumatic journeys that these women likely faced to get to Greece in the first place, it is very concerning that they would then be subjected to further difficulty, in which they are forced to live in squalid, unsanitary conditions without knowing how they can save themselves from this new reality.

Therefore, there is no question that access to information is a crucial aspect of the asylum-seeking process. However, it should also be noted that effectuating large-scale change to the asylum procedure would mean that the authorities overseeing the reception and identification centers on the islands would need to better coordinate relief efforts with both the Greek government and the EU. At the same time, officials could examine the ways in which the Canadian asylum system provides information to refugee claimants who show up at the border, unannounced. Although the magnitude of refugee claimants entering Canada cannot be compared to Greece in anyway, I believe that certain information-providing practices could be adopted, if it were done through genuine collaboration with all involved parties who each need to pull their weight.

For example, when a claimant arrives to Canada between designated ports of entry, as many asylum seekers do in Greece, the RCMP or local law enforcement would be responsible for conducting an immigration exam, to make an initial decision about whether or not the person in question is eligible to make an asylum claim. If the claim is determined to be eligible, refugee claimants would then be provided with information on how to access social assistance, education, health services, emergency housing and legal aid, and would be free to enter the country to receive such services. Contrastingly, in Greece, many people who seek information about the asylum process cannot get it, as they are confined to the overcrowded reception facilities on the islands where there are few resources to provide this sort of support. If there were a more practical way for new arrivals to triaged for asylum

eligibility and registered upon their arrival, newcomers could move on to the mainland Greece where they would have better access to assistance with the rest of the asylum process. However, as noted above, this is an ideal circumstance which would be dependent on national collaboration with international partners and a significant increase in staff who would be solely responsible for the intake of new arrivals. If a plan were developed to ensure a more informative, faster asylum service, this could also potentially reduce the overcrowding issue on the islands.

Moreover, the development of partnerships with additional NGOs (or deepening relationships with existing ones on the ground) could significantly help existing support services to meet the immediate needs of asylum seekers once they arrive. This could, to some extent, be modelled after the work of the Halifax Refugee Clinic, which relies on volunteers to help assist refugee claimants who do not know how to navigate the claim process. Even if the government were able to form partnerships with organizations which allowed staffing resources to work with only the most vulnerable asylum seekers in need of assistance, this would be a step forward. Enacting these measures would also allow for more professionals to identify the negative effects that the slow and confusing asylum process has on newcomers. This information could be provided back to governmental authorities, to be used toward creating realistic solutions. Ultimately, this work is important, because saving people from misery and a slow death is a worthwhile cause which should be contributed to by all political partners, at the local, national and international levels.

### ***9.3 Recommendation Two: Minimize Barriers to Accessing Support Services***



Following the completion of the asylum process, female refugees in Greece continue to require support to successfully integrate into their new community if they plan on remaining in Greece long-term. As explored in chapter seven of this work, such integration services for female refugees could include assistance with accommodation, education and employment training, along with financial aid and psychological support. As was demonstrated by the excellent work being done by the Melissa Network, there is no question that being able to access these services benefits asylum-seeking women long term, by helping them learn the skills and gain the confidence they need to be successful in their new environment.

However, despite the important role of such support initiatives, many women face obstacles that prevent them from accessing them. During the workshop and focus group session with the asylum-seeking women at the Melissa Network, several participants stated that, although they were aware there was help available for them, there were two major obstacles that stood in their way of being able to take advantage of these opportunities: geographical location and the language barrier.

For example, in terms of geographical location, some of the participants noted that before they were permanently moved to Athens or other locations on the mainland, many of the organizations which offered support services were simply out of reach. While many of the women did not plan on remaining in Greece long-term, they were acutely aware that they would need support in order to integrate into society while they were there. Unfortunately, given that many of them had small children and no transportation, they did not know where to start in order to get to the location of the support programs.

Secondly, in terms of interpretation, the women who *were* physically able to access integration resources said they felt isolated when attending, given the language barrier.

While many organizations employ interpreters and translations to help convey information to refugees, there must be a larger number of programs offered in languages that are common to newcomers.

Based on my discussion with the women at the Melissa Network, and in light of the information collected through my research into the Greek integration system, it is clear that support resources are in high demand, as they are extremely beneficial to women who have recent become refugees in Greece. Therefore, my second recommendation is that the Greek government rework the existing integration framework to minimize obstacles which prevent women from accessing support services. This would mean that authorities who oversee the implementation of these services need to firstly identify the factors which create access barriers, and would then need to develop a realistic strategy to ensure better accessibility. For example, adequate support services, including trained translators and crisis workers, need to be available in refugee hotspots. Ideally, having services available more centrally to those who need them could eliminate the obstacle of travelling for many women.

It should be noted that in Canada, it is much easier for newcomers to access the sort of integration support. Ultimately, this is due to the fact that, again, the Canadian government is aware in advance of the arrival of refugees, and are dealing with a much smaller number of newcomers. That being said, I feel that the practices of small-scale resettlement programs like the YMCA YREACH could serve as a point of a departure for similar programs in Greece, if authorities were more committed to bringing integration resources outside of urban areas. If a similar program were to be adapted in Greece, volunteers and employees of local aid organizations could work with refugees in rural areas

to develop similar relationships with local institutions which would not only be beneficial to the newcomer, but also to the local economy and population.

Ultimately, such a program could mirror what the YREACH program is doing. In addition to being more accessible to those located outside of urban Athens, this program could also offer educational and employment training, including language classes which can help asylum seekers connect with local institutions, and help them to begin building relationships in the community.

#### ***9.4 Conclusion***

In conclusion, I have created the above recommendations in collaboration with the women service providers and clients of the Melissa Network for Migrant Women in Athens. While these recommendations would likely be hard to implement in real life on the ground, it is vital to continue thinking, pushing conceptual boundaries and imagining collaboratively (and even collectively at the national and international levels) how the current problems can be addressed, the gaps in the reintegration system filled, the human rights of everyone respected and the human and gender needs of asylum-seeking women and men met.

## CHAPTER TEN: FINAL THESIS CONCLUSION

***10.1 Acknowledging the Importance of Refugee Integration Studies***

In January of 2018, I began research to explore, in collaboration with the Melissa Network, whether and how it might be possible to develop recommendations for practical action that could be applied toward a hypothetical model of Greek integration, using Canadian resettlement policies as a point of departure. To do this, upon completing my secondary data collection on resettlement and integration in Canada and Greece, I undertook two distinct phases of primary data collection. The first took place in Halifax, Nova Scotia, Canada, where I conducted three semi-structured interviews with employee and volunteer representatives of resettlement organizations that carry out Canada's refugee resettlement mandate. The second phase of data collection took place at the Melissa Network for Migrant women in Athens, Greece, where I held two workshop and focus groups sessions: one with staff practitioners, and one with asylum-seeking women who have experienced the Greek reintegration system themselves.

Ultimately, undertaking research on refugee resettlement strategies is a crucial step toward improving the lives of the world's most vulnerable people, many of whom have been forcibly displaced due to violent conflict. As stated in the *1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees*, and in section 14 of the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*, it is a basic and inalienable human right to seek asylum from persecution in other countries. Yet, despite the fact that both Greece and Canada are signatories to the Convention and *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*, the integration experience that female asylum seekers face in these two countries is vastly different. This difference is primarily due to the fact that, while Canada is often praised internationally for its efforts to effectively

support the resettlement of refugees, Canada has never faced a major humanitarian crisis in the way that Greece has. This is because of Canada's northern geographical position and the fact that the majority of newcomers are Convention refugees. Despite the differences between these two countries, this was a project worth undertaking, as it was an eye-opening, hugely inspiring and deep learning experience for me and, hopefully, a useful, information-rich, affirming and empowering experience for the women clients at the Melissa Network.

### ***10.2 Summary of Key Findings***

Based on the information collected from the workshop and focus group sessions at the Melissa Network for Migrant Women, I have identified four key findings regarding the integration experience of female asylum seekers in Greece:

1. The provision of information on the asylum procedure needs to be more effective;
2. The current availability and accessibility of integration services is inadequate;
3. Female asylum seekers require access to psychological services that address trauma from gender-based violence; and
4. More culturally-sensitive and gender-based services for women asylum seekers are needed.

Using these key findings from the workshop and focus group sessions at the Melissa Network, in addition to information from the interviews held with representatives of resettlement organizations in Halifax, I was then able to develop two recommendations for action, which, theoretically, could contribute to a hypothetical model of Greek integration:

1. Recommendation One: Greece must work in collaboration with other EU states and local NGOs to deploy additional resources to the reception centers on the Islands, to help improve access to information on the asylum process.
2. Recommendation Two: The government must revisit the frameworks of existing integration strategies to identify the barriers preventing female refugees from accessing crucial integration services, including support for accommodation, education, employment, and medical and psychological care.

### ***10.3 Final Thoughts: The Way Forward for Reintegration in Greece***

Since the beginning of the Syrian refugee crisis in 2011, Greece has faced a disproportionate and unfair burden in caring for thousands of newcomers, many of whom have arrived in the country after fleeing violence and armed conflict in Northern Africa and the Middle East. Given the scope of this humanitarian crisis, Greek authorities have been overwhelmed with these continual arrivals and the long-term needs that come with women who have undertaken forced migrations.

To relieve the country of this incredible situation, the international community of states, and, in particular, all member states of the European Union need to work on deepening political collaboration with the Greek government to develop a common position on how to handle this crisis, both economically and morally. This means that other nations need to be more cooperative, receptive of change and willing to contribute to the development and funding of effective integration policies that will help distribute the responsibility for refugees more equally among partners. Ultimately, supporting people from the start of the asylum process through to the end of the resettlement stage has to be a shared project by the international community. There should never be an expectation for one nation to manage such a challenging situation, with only minimal support from international partners.

To this end, although Canada does not deal with refugee resettlement on the same scale that Greece has been forced to in recent years, I believe that the Canadian refugee resettlement system, due exactly to the “luxury” of low numbers and hence opportunity for a thoughtful and measured response, can provide a number of useful suggestions for improving the system in Greece. Based upon the relative successes of the Canadian system, there are some useful strategies and techniques which could be adapted to specific

situations, which would help to solve issues of access to information, and to provide more effectively orientation and integration services. Ultimately, understanding how we can potentially improve the Greek asylum seeker integration system is a worthy cause, because saving people from misery and death represents ultimately a global moral imperative.

## APPENDIX A

OUTLINE OF WORKSHOP AND FOCUS GROUP  
HELD AT THE MELISSA NETWORK FOR MIGRANT WOMEN

- **Introduction**
  - Explanation that this is a research focus group for Brittany's MA thesis on a hypothetical model of Greek integration based upon successful Canadian resettlement practises
  - Explanation that all participation is voluntary and confidential to the maximum extent in the given context
  - Signing of consent forms
  
- **Outline of what it means to be a “refugee” versus a “refugee claimant” in Canada**
  - Explanation of how a refugee is someone who would be facing persecution (for a number of reasons including race, religion or political beliefs) in their home country and would need to leave in order to find safety, and who has been identified by the UNHCR as meeting this criterion
  - Explanation of how a refugee claimant is someone who wishes to be considered for refugee status from within Canada
  
- **Brief introduction on how the Canadian refugee intake system works**
  - Government Assisted Refugees
  - Privately Sponsored Refugees
  - Blended Visa Office Referrals
  
- **Brief presentation on the practises and policies of selected NGOs which deal with refugee resettlement in Nova Scotia, Canada**
  - Pre-Arrival
  - Reception
  - Orientation
  - Resettlement services
  - Gender-Based Policies
  - Private Sponsorship
  
- **Group discussion on how these policies could be useful to refugees who may come to Greece in the future, and the differences between the Canadian and Greek refugee resettlement processes**
  - Overall opinion that having someone to assist you with immediate needs upon arrival in Greece would be beneficial (housing, employment, health care)
  - Expression that pre-arrival information on what to expect when they reach Greece would be helpful, as many felt they did not know what to do once they actually arrived in Greece and in many cases were unable to find someone who could provide them with accurate information before they arrived at Melissa



- Overall opinion that the Melissa Network and the services offered there have been crucial their personal success and that without Melissa Network it would have been very hard to learn how to live successfully in Greece or to prepare to move to another country
- Questions on the specifics of living as a refugee in Canada
- **Closing**
  - Thank you's
  - How to contact Brittany if you would like to withdraw your participation

## APPENDIX B

POWERPOINT USED IN WORKSHOP AND FOCUS GROUP SESSIONS AT THE  
MELSISSA NETWORK FOR MIGRANT WOMEN

## Workshop on Refugee Resettlement Policies in Nova Scotia, Canada



Melissa Network for Migrant Women  
February 2018

2018-12-17

### Definition of a Refugee in Canada

According to the **Government of Canada**, a “refugee is a person who is outside their home country or the country they normally live in. They are not able to return because of a well-founded fear of persecution based on”:

- race
- religion
- political opinion
- nationality
- membership in a social group, such as women or people of a particular sexual orientation



2018-12-17

### Definition of a Refugee Claimant in Canada

- According to the **Government of Canada**, a refugee claimant is someone who:
  - Makes an asylum claim at a Canadian border (land, sea, air)
  - Applies for refugee protection at an Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada office (IRCC) or at the border
- Immigration and Refugee Board (IRB) considers whether the claimant meets the United Nations (UN) definition of a Convention refugee
- If the person is eligible, they would be given a date for an IRB hearing, where they would find out if they have been accepted



2018-12-17

## Resettlement in Canada

- **Refugee and Humanitarian Resettlement Program**
  - UNHCR and private sponsors identify eligible individuals who are outside of their home country (for a specific list of reasons), and refer them for refugee protection
  - Once referred, a person would submit an application for processing to be relocated to Canada as a refugee
  - Once approved, a person can be sponsored to come to Canada by either the government or a private group (sometimes a mix)
- **In-Canada Asylum Program**
  - Individuals can make an asylum claim in Canada at a port of entry
  - Would be assigned a date for a refugee claim hearing
  - Not everyone is eligible to seek asylum



2018-12-17

## Researched Organizations

1. **Immigrant Services Association of Nova Scotia**
  - Halifax, Nova Scotia
2. **Halifax Refugee Clinic**
  - Halifax, Nova Scotia
3. **YMCA of Canada**
  - Throughout Nova Scotia



2018-12-17

## Workshop Material

The following policies of each organization will be reviewed:

- Introduction
- Pre-Arrival Information
- Reception
- Orientation
- Settlement Services
- Private Sponsorship
- Gender-Based Opportunities



2018-12-17

## Introduction to ISANS

- Focuses on assisting government sponsored refugees with all needs related to the integration process
- Specifically offers four main streams of assistance and support: resettlement, orientation, health and life skills
- Largest refugee resettlement organization in Nova Scotia
- Served approximately 1500 refugees in 2016 due to the Syrian Crisis



2018-12-17

## ISANS Pre-Arrival Information

- Settlement Online Pre-Arrival (SOPA)
  - Run by the Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada and operates in six provinces
  - Open to any refugee who lives outside of the country, who has an acceptable level of English, and who has access to a computer and high-speed internet
  - Registration
  - Intake and Orientation session designed to connect the refugee with a SOPA counsellor
  - Free online courses which are designed in order to help then newcomer find employment upon arrival



2018-12-17

## ISANS Reception

- Greeted at the airport by a settlement counsellor at ISANS
  - Beginning of the Resettlement Assistance Program (RAP)
- Immediate needs would be met with the assistance of the settlement counsellor
  - Finding appropriate accommodations
  - Introducing critical health care (911, local hospitals)
  - Opening a bank account



2018-12-17

## ISANS Orientation

- Orientation services consist series of group information sessions which are aimed at providing refugees and migrants with information on the different services available to them
- “Introduction to Nova Scotia” program
  - Family life and parenting
  - Housing and apartment living
  - Health care
  - Public transportation
  - Education and training
  - Banking and managing finances



2018-12-17

## ISANS Settlement Services

- Settlement focus on providing information about employment training, government programs, rights and responsibilities, and business programs that are available. This includes:
  - Identifying community supports
  - Identifying federal and provincial services and programs
  - Working through stress and culture shock
  - Assisting in household tasks and grocery shopping
  - Introducing access to health care
- Life Skills Link
- Youth Life Skills

2018-12-17

## ISANS Private Sponsorship

- Refugee Sponsorship Program at ISANS
  - Providing information and resources to sponsorship groups across Nova Scotia
  - Supporting Sponsorship Agreement Holders in Nova Scotia in the application process and settlement of refugees
  - Working with relatives and groups living in Nova Scotia in the sponsorship and settlement of refugees
- Provides a list of responsibilities for individuals or groups wishing to become private sponsors
  - Fundraising
  - Supporting a family long-term

2018-12-17

## ISANS Gender-Based Opportunities

- ISANS offers several programs and classes which are solely available to female refugees, including:
  - Women's Entrepreneurial Program
  - Recreation classes
  - Volunteer opportunities



2018-12-17

## Introduction to Halifax Refugee Clinic

- Has a goal to provide free legal and settlement services to refugee claimants who have arrived in Nova Scotia, who are unable to afford the use of private legal services
- Originally founded because of a big gap for the legal aid of refugee claimants
- NGO supported by the community and run by volunteers primarily
- Serves approximately 100 clients each year



2018-12-17

## HRC Pre-Arrival Information

- Pre-Arrival services are not available at the Halifax Refugee Clinic
- This organization primarily deals with asylum seekers who have already arrived in Nova Scotia and wish to make a refugee claim



2018-12-17

## HRC Reception

- Upon arrival at the clinic, the team helps refugee claimants to learn how to access and secure basic needs such as shelter and food
- HRC provides the following pro-bono assistance to refugee claimants when they come to the clinic:
  - Representation and assistance throughout the claimant process
  - Volunteer counsel
  - Assistance filling out Permanent Residence applications
  - Assistance for refugee claimants who have been detained
  - Assistance preparing work/study/health coverage applications.

2018-12-17

## HRC Orientation

- HRC offers basic orientation services, which help refugee claimants find accommodation, secure bank accounts and find access to health care
- Classes are provided in many disciplines, including:
  - Stress management
  - Financial literacy
  - Computer knowledge
- English language learning services are offered by volunteers and community partners

2018-12-17

## HRC Settlement Services

- Some of these settlement services that Halifax Refugee Clinic offers to those who are seeking legal assistance would include the following:
  - Employment counselling
  - English language learning support
  - Mental health counselling
  - Assistance applying for work/study permits
  - Help accessing income assistance
  - Long-term housing support
- Needs-based model
- Holistic approach by staff



2018-12-17

## HRC Private Sponsorship

- Private Sponsorship is not available at the Halifax Refugee Clinic as of 2018

2018-12-17

## HRC Gender-Based Opportunities

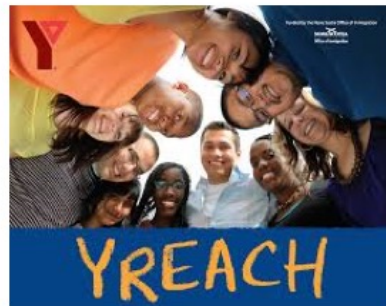
- Resettlement opportunities at HRC are largely needs-based, so when there is a necessity to have female-only programs, they can be arranged by the staff at the organization
- In the past, the following female-only programs have been arranged:
  - Sexual health courses
  - Stress management
  - Female counsellor/lawyers advice



2018-12-17

## YREACH Introduction

- A service for immigrants, refugees and their families who are newcomers to communities in the province outside of the Halifax
- Able to provide information, orientation, and settlement support
- Three main priorities for YREACH:
  - Children and youth
  - Activity
  - Stronger Communities



2018-12-17



## YREACH Pre-Arrival Information

- YREACH works primarily with arrived refugees, migrants and temporary foreign workers
- Participates in Canadian Orientation Abroad
  - Seeks to provide visa-ready migrants and refugees with integral information in order for them to make wise and informed resettlement choices



Canadian Orientation Abroad  
Orientation canadienne à l'étranger

2018-12-17

## YREACH Reception

- YREACH program conducts complete needs-based assessments when newcomers arrive
  - Centers are able to understand which of the services they offer could potentially benefit the people they are working directly with
- YMCA staff would then meet with the newcomer in order to start providing services, including the following:
  - finding a home or apartment
  - Finding a job or a school
  - Getting a SIN number assigned to them



2018-12-17

## YREACH Orientation

- Seeks to help newcomers settle by creating orientation plans which suit the needs of different families or individuals
- Focused on education and employment
- “Newcomers Needs Assessment”
  - What has been your biggest challenge since coming to (town in Nova Scotia)?
  - Were there services ready to help you when you arrived?
  - Did you have any moments of isolation? Describe what you did to get through them.
  - Is there a need for immigrant services in your area?
  - If so, what kind of services would you like to see?

2018-12-17

## YREACH Resettlement Services

- The YREACH program is designed to provide settlement support, by connecting the newcomer to different resources which can be useful to them specifically and has been designed to support the following services:
  - Group Settlement Support to build social networks
  - On-site School Settlement
  - Community Collaborations
  - Referrals
  - Awareness Raising Presentations related to cultural diversity and immigration barriers and challenges

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## YREACH Private Sponsorship

- Private Sponsorship is not available through the YMCA or YREACH as of 2018

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## YREACH Gender-Based Opportunities

- YREACH, in association with YMCA, offers several different opportunities for girls and women to flourish once they arrived in Canada, including:
  - Leadership training for female youth
  - Conversation groups for senior citizens
  - Girls only fitness classes
- These programs are based on availability
- YREACH believes there is a higher rate of female participation in all female programs and classes



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