

**House of Commons Select Standing Committee on
Citizenship and Immigration**

Public Hearings

Settlement and Integration

Submissions of MOSAIC

Submitted February 14, 2003

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Standing Committee's February Hearings on Citizenship Issues
Comments on Settlement and Integration
MOSAIC, Vancouver February 19 2003

Introduction:

MOSAIC is a non-profit organization dedicated to assist newcomers with their settlement and integration needs. Our goal is to support and guide immigrants and refugees through their integration process, assist them in achieving their potential and promote their full participation through their contributing and sharing in the social, political, economical and cultural life in Canadian society.

MOSAIC has provided settlement services, English language training, employment programs, family programs, and interpretation and translation programs in the BC Lower Mainland since 1976. MOSAIC has 100 staff, 500 volunteers, and 250 trained interpreters and certified translators, with an annual budget of \$11 million for the 2002/2003.

I. Pre-arrival, Pre-departure Orientation

MOSAIC has been in discussion with CIC on the issue of the pre-arrival and pre-departure settlement support for new immigrants for quite a long time. MOSAIC currently receives an average of more than 10 pre-departure inquires every day.

MOSAIC strongly believes in the importance of providing pre-arrival and pre-departure information to new immigrants, in particular the information on what to expect in Canada, labour market information, language requirements, how to start, and where to start in your designated community. Provision of reliable pre-arrival, pre-departure information will lessen the “culture shock” on arrival, and facilitate the early periods of settlement.

MOSAIC recommends that the pre-arrival counseling and orientation services:

- *Be consistent and closely coordinated with the settlement services provided in Canada.*
- *Be provided by language specific and culturally appropriate bilingual settlement practitioners aboard.*
- *Be operated by existing non-government settlement service agencies in Canada.*
- *Be complemented by a Pre-arrival Information Website. The Website will provide specific labour market and foreign trained professional information, and linkages with the communities where the new immigrants are destining for settlement.*

II. The Obstacles To Integration And Participation

Settlement is a process that may be divided into short-term (**initial orientation**), intermediate term (**adaptation**), and long-term (**integration**). The ultimate goal of settlement is for an immigrant to be able to participate fully in and contribute to the economic, social, cultural and political aspects of Canadian life.

There have been many discussions and documents about the obstacles of integration and participation for new immigrants, non-recognition of foreign experience and credentials, systemic discrimination, etc. We are not going to repeat them here. However, this submission will be specifically addressing the obstacles created by governments and public institutions, in the support of newcomers to integrate and participate fully in Canadian society.

Government programs are created to remove obstacles and support immigrants to contribute and participate fully in Canadian society. However, the lack of inter departmental coordination has resulted in inconsistency and gaps of services.

For example, with the Human Resources Development Canada's (HRDC) elimination of skill-based employment training programs specifically designed for immigrants, immigrants are not given the opportunity to address the issues of unemployment, under-employment, and specific skills and knowledge necessary to help them to become self reliant. The situations refugees and immigrants face are different than the average Canadian.

In British Columbia, the Immigration Division of the BC Ministry of Community, Aboriginal and Women's Services (MCAWS) is responsible for the management and implementation of settlement and integration programs through the Canada/BC Agreement for Cooperation on Immigration.

MOSAIC's experience with the CIC funding programs is limited to ISAP, LINC/ELSA, and Host Program/Volunteer.

At the moment, the Settlement Service Sector is engaging with CIC, through the Voluntary Sector Initiatives (VSI), to develop a settlement service framework and standards, and to establish strategies in maximizing settlement services. Recommendations and documents will be available at the October National Settlement Conference II in Calgary.

However, MOSAIC would like to stress that eligibility requirements for newcomers to access programs is a concern for MOSAIC. It has to be acknowledged that newcomers enter the settlement and integration services at different times in their life in Canada.

Currently, CIC funded settlement programs are available only for newly arrived immigrants and conventional refugees. The BC government contributes some dollars to settlement agencies for services for refugee claimants and naturalized citizens.

Immigrants and refugees should be able to access the services that they need, when and where they need them, regardless of status in Canada. MOSAIC shares the same concern as OCASI in Ontario that refugee claimants cannot access settlement and integration services while they await the Immigration and Refugee Board (IRB) decision on their claims. The time between making a claim and receiving a decision has increased up to 18 months. During this period, most refugees are issued a temporary work permit to enable them to find employment and begin supporting themselves. While we encourage refugees to begin being self sufficient through employment, yet we don't allow them to access settlement services. The majority of claimants are found to be genuine refugees according to CIC statistics.

The provision of LINC/ELSA programs in BC is only up to level three, which is not realistic to expect new newcomers to function sufficiently in daily life and in job retention. .

MOSAIC recommends that:

- ***Inter-departmental (HRDC, CIC, Industry Canada, Canadian Heritage), provincial government, municipal governments, accreditation and professional bodies should coordinate efforts to provide unified information, financial resources and support for new immigrants. HRDC and CIC should take the lead in demonstrating their responsibility for integration through interdepartmental and stakeholder coordination.***
- ***A change of eligibility criteria so that refugee claimants are supported from the start in settlement and integration.***
- ***The government to make additional resources available to provide post level three English language training that will prepare new immigrants and refugees for a meaningful participation including labour market integration***

IV. Canada/BC Agreement for the Cooperation on Immigration

The Provincial Role in Settlement

Responsibility for immigration is shared between the federal and provincial governments. CIC maintains overall authority for the selection and admission of immigrants to Canada, including setting settlement standards. The province is managing and implementing the settlement services through contracted service providers. The province is also injecting limited resources to provide service for refugee claimants and services in combating racism and discrimination.

MOSAIC recommends through the Agreement, the provincial government continue their independence to design settlement programs which are appropriate for new comers to BC. Federal government's (CIC) role is to continue working with the settlement service sector and provincial governments through Voluntary Sector Initiatives (VSI) to establish settlement service framework, minimum service standards and strategies to maximize settlement services.

V. Funding Formula

It is a known fact that BC has not been happy with the funding formula. While BC continues to receive more immigrants, it gets less share of the settlement dollar because of the decrease in the overall percentage of immigrant destined to BC. As a result, settlement agencies are receiving less federal transfer money and are consistently reducing our service to new immigrants and refugees, even though the number of landings and secondary migration to BC is rising. The issue of inter-provincial migration has never been considered in formulating the settlement budget.

MOSAIC recommends that the funding formula be reviewed to reflect on the actual numbers of landings and secondary migration, and that settlement dollar allocations should be per actual body, instead of percentage. CIC's role in the settlement agreement should continue to be on the establishment of the settlement service framework, determining minimum service standards, developing strategies to maximize settlement services, and should hold provinces accountable to the use of settlement dollars to direct settlement services.

MOSAIC further recommends that the government of Canada allocate additional financial resources in supporting settlement and integration services to reflect the increasing numbers of immigrants and refugees being accepted to Canada. While the number of new immigrants has been increasing and will continue to increase, the settlement service budget allocation in the past years did not reflect the increase in numbers.

VI. Administrative issues

At the moment, the Settlement Service Sector is engaged with CIC, through the Voluntary Sector Initiatives (VSI), to develop a settlement service framework and standards, and to establish strategies in maximizing settlement services. Recommendations and documents will be available at the October National Settlement Conference II in Calgary.

MOSAIC requests that the recommendations and action plans that come out from the Conference would be followed up and supported with sufficient human and financial resources.

VII. The Geographic Dispersion of Immigrants

Immigrants and refugees settle where there is employment, education, and better social support. Living in small cities or centers may not provide the necessary resources for them to establish a new life.

In order to encourage newcomers to settle more widely, employment availability and social support network are critical. Welcoming local initiatives and enhanced partnerships with municipal governments and local community organizations will help newcomers to stay and establish themselves. Provincial Nominees Program can also help in selecting the appropriate newcomers to settlement in communities where job availability and social support system are meeting the mutual expectations of newcomers and the host society.

VIII. Problems of Public Perception

MOSAIC has done a substantial amount of work in the areas of cross-cultural understanding, anti-racism and combating discrimination. For example, MOSAIC is currently working on a Cultural Diversity Project with the RCMP National Head Quarters. Through funding from Canadian Heritage we are engaged in two projects “Dialogues on Organizational Change,” and “Community Meeting Space: A Study on Current Availability and Perceived Need for the Ethnocultural Minority Communities.” All our endeavors through such projects are to broaden the sense of inclusion and participation of new communities.

Throughout MOSAIC’s work with the community, we have seen emerging concerns that need immediate attention and actions.

Post September 11, public support and empathy toward immigrants and refugees are dropping. Racial profiling has changed the public perception of certain ethnic groups and regional groups. The most affected and marginalized are Muslims in general and people of Middle Eastern ancestry in particular.

MOSAIC recommends that the Federal government put a concerted effort towards public education to create awareness among the public about facts and myth of refugees, contribution of immigrants to Canadian society, the facts on aging population in Canada, etc. We believe that Canadian Heritage can play a lead role in these social development issues.

IX. Broad Indicators of immigrant and refugee health

MOSAIC has been involved in many issues affecting immigrant health issues. Last year, with funding support from HRDC SPCI Homelessness Research Committee, we have done a Survey on the Substandard Housing Issues Faced by Immigrants and Refugees in the BC Lower Mainland. The followings are some of our observations that require attention and follow-up actions.

Immigrants and refugees are second to the aboriginal communities facing the problem of sub-standards housing and homelessness. Researches show homelessness and at risk of homelessness have profound impact on people's mental state and mental well-being. However, immigrant agencies in BC are not able to provide housing and mental health services, and mainstream agencies have not been able, due to resource issue, to develop the cultural and linguistic competency to support immigrants and refugees.

Moreover, our practical experience working with the immigrant and refugee communities tell us that failed expectations and refugee traumatic experience are among the main sources for mental health illness among the newcomer communities.

We recommend that the Federal government play a lead role, through Health Canada to coordinate responses with the different provincial and municipal authorities.