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**Sharing the Wealth, Spreading the Burden? The Settlement of Kosovar  
Refugees in Small B.C. Cities**

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## **RIIM**

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**Sharing the Wealth, Spreading the Burden? The  
Settlement of Kosovar Refugees in Smaller B.C. Cities**

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**Abstract:**

Immigration to Canada has predominantly been an urban phenomenon since World War II. In the 1990s, 73% of all newcomers to Canada settled within three Census Metropolitan Areas (CMAs): Toronto, Montreal and Vancouver. The federal government is interested in spreading this immigrant population around to include smaller cities, potentially through policies of dispersed settlement, or regionalization. The research presented here examines the practice and outcomes of settling one group of government-assisted refugees in small and medium-sized cities in British Columbia. In May 1999, nine hundred and five Kosovar refugees arrived in British Columbia as part of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) humanitarian evacuation from camps Macedonia. The settlement of the Kosovars is an exceptional case in the context of British Columbia, as it was the first time a large number of government-assisted refugees had been 'dispersed' to cities outside the Lower Mainland. Drawing on forty-two individual interviews and seven focus groups conducted between May 2002 and March 2003, this research analyzes the significance and characteristics of location in the settlement of refugees in large and smaller B.C. cities. The findings highlight the importance of employment prospects and the presence of family as major factors influencing the success of settlement.

## Introduction

As Canada's largest cities grow, many small and medium-sized cities witness declining populations. The idea of immigrant settlement in such cities is alluring, yet certain conditions must be met if newcomers are to stay. "Glance in a mirror shocks Prairie city" read a recent *Globe and Mail* headline.<sup>1</sup> The story goes on to explain that Swift Current, Saskatchewan – a place that calls itself 'Open Door City' – has had fifteen years of zero population growth, and wants to attract newcomers, including immigrants, to rejuvenate the economy. An organization of local business owners in Swift Current was not happy, then, to hear that the city's population was anything but open to outsiders and tolerant of difference, when a Calgary communications company filed its final report based on local consultations. Without jobs to fill, attitudes of openness towards immigrants, and basic settlement services, any policy of regionalization, or immigrant 'dispersion' is seriously jeopardized.

In October 2001, Citizenship and Immigration Canada (CIC) reaffirmed its intention to pursue a long-term objective of increasing annual immigration levels to approximately one percent of Canada's population (CIC 2001a). In October 2002, then Minister of Citizenship and Immigration Denis Coderre met with provincial ministers for the first immigration conference to promote dispersed settlement, or regionalization.

To date, efforts to encourage immigrants to settle in smaller urban centres have met with limited success. It will be important to further explore how to attract immigrants to smaller centres and persuade them to stay there in order to reduce the pressures on Canada's largest centres (CIC 2001b, 10).<sup>2</sup>

In British Columbia, ten percent of all newcomers settle outside of Vancouver. Late in 2003, the Government of BC, in partnership with CIC, introduced a strategy to attract immigrants to smaller centres of British Columbia.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> "Glance in a mirror shocks Prairie city." *Globe and Mail*. December 12, 2003, p. A1.

<sup>2</sup> Walton-Roberts (2004) notes the argument that newcomers should be encouraged to settle and remain in smaller centres in order to reduce pressures on Canada's largest cities must be questioned, as it rests on the assumption that newcomers, rather than the settlement context is at fault. In so doing it fails to consider why Canadians are leaving smaller centres for larger cities.

<sup>3</sup> The provincial government noted that smaller centres are dealing with the effects of rural depopulation and a changing economy; there is increasing recognition that immigrants, particularly business class and skilled workers, can contribute much needed skills and capital to these communities. Although still in the development phase, potential components of the Regional Immigration Strategy include an emphasis on the facilitated entry and retention of skilled workers, business immigrants (through the BC Provincial Nomination Program), and foreign students, as well as reducing entrance barriers for temporary workers. In addition, other components include increasing the capacity of these regions to settle both private and government-assisted refugees (personal communication with M. Bearance, Victoria, BC, 2004).

Toronto, Vancouver, and Montréal are seen as Canada's economic engines of growth. Over 80% of the Canadian population lives in cities. While job growth continues to occur disproportionately in these urban centres, the paring back of the welfare state through neoliberal policies at the provincial and federal levels has reduced social and physical infrastructure in Canadian cities (Walton-Roberts 2004). Critics of federal immigration policy have even argued that immigrant concentration in Canadian cities will lead to social tensions or public outbreaks of violence (Collacott 2002), though these predictions have not been substantiated. While we do not subscribe to the idea that the concentration of immigrants in Canada's largest cities of settlement is a 'problem' in itself, the question of whether the settlement of more immigrants outside the largest cities is viable is an important one. Moreover, do they want to go?

This paper contributes to the debate on the viability of an immigrant regionalization policy in Canada by analyzing the settlement experiences of Kosovar refugees in four B.C. centres outside the Greater Vancouver area. We juxtapose the findings of interviews and focus groups in Vernon, Kelowna, Chilliwack, and Abbotsford with those from Kosovars in the municipalities of Surrey, Burnaby and Vancouver, all part of Greater Vancouver or the Lower Mainland. In examining a refugee group rather than a cohort of economic immigrants, we realize that our findings are partial in two senses. First, government-assisted refugees arrive in Canada with fewer financial resources and educational credentials, on average, than their economic counterparts. They normally do not bring significant investment capital or scarce skill sets with them. In the European context, where refugees constitute the mainstay of immigration, research discusses the question of 'burden-sharing' (Robinson, Andersson, and Musterd 2003). Second, the concept of 'refugee' can be stigmatized, especially in light of 9-11. In 1999, the Kosovars were a highly popular refugee movement to Canada, fleeing the atrocities of the Milosevic regime, whose efforts to ethnically cleanse Serbia of ethnic Albanians were widely represented in Western media for public consumption. They faced fewer problems of racism than other refugees to Canada. Compared with the Fujian refugee claimants who landed on Canadian shores the same year, they were literally welcomed with open arms.

This paper does not definitively "prove" or "disprove" the viability of 'regionalizing refugees.' Rather, it elucidates the key factors that have kept people in the communities in which they originally settled and those that have forced people to consider leaving. No one explanatory factor accounts for positive or negative settlement experiences, but one thing is certain: the vast majority of Kosovars who came to B.C. will be staying on, most of them in the original communities in which they were settled.

## Grounds for Asylum

In response to the displacement of Kosovars to Macedonia and Albania in 1999, Canada accepted 7,271 Kosovar refugees for immediate settlement (CRS & CERIS 2001; USCR 2000).<sup>4</sup> In the absence of a temporary protection framework, the Kosovars were brought to Canada on Minister's permits (Abu-Laban, Derwing, Mulder and Northcott 2001), which enabled them to "enter, work and study in Canada. Once settled, the evacuated refugees could apply for permanent residence, if they wished" (CRS & CERIS 2001, 10).

Although the Kosovars were sponsored under the Joint Assistance Sponsorship Program (JAS), the Federal Government elected to assume all financial responsibility for a period of two years (Abu-Laban et al. 2001, CIC 1999). Normally, living expenses, medical and dental expenses for government-assisted refugees (GARs) are a provincial responsibility for one year, funded through a cost-sharing agreement with the federal government, (Abu-Laban et al. 2001). For the Kosovars, provision was made for up to two years of income support, as well as coverage under the Interim Federal Health Plan (IFHP) (CIC 1999, Abu-Laban et al. 2001). Kosovars were also given a unique option: they had two years to determine if they would like to stay in Canada or return to Kosova/o; the Federal Government would assume full costs if they chose to repatriate (Tetrault & Tessier 1999, USCR 2000).

Cities were chosen so that large numbers of Kosovars could be settled together, based on the idea that this strategy would facilitate mutual support and aid in settlement (CRS & CERIS 2001). In May 1999, 905 Kosovars arrived in British Columbia (Kyte and West 2000). The majority were settled in communities outside the Lower Mainland, which was also unique in that all other government-assisted refugees settled in British Columbia are normally sent to Vancouver where services specific to immigrants and refugees are concentrated (CIC Refugee Resettlement Division 2000).<sup>5</sup>

While our study cannot account for why more Kosovars stayed in BC than in any other province, Citizenship and Immigration Canada statistics that indicate British Columbia had the

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<sup>4</sup> Of the 7271 Kosovar refugees accepted for settlement in Canada: 5051 were accepted for immediate resettlement as part of Kosovar Refugees Emergency Evacuation (KOS) program, and 2200 Kosovars arrived as part of Canada's Kosovo Family Reunion (KOF) program (USCR 2000, CRS & CERIS 2001). KOF or fast track "refugees either had relatives in Canada or were defined as 'special needs,' highly traumatized individuals who were judged to be in need of immediate resettlement ... [While the KOS or] parasol group was brought to Canada via emergency air lifts and housed at military bases in eastern Canada for several weeks prior to moving to resettlement communities. While they were on the bases sponsors willing to help the refugees were located ... The refugees then traveled from the base to the communities" (Kyte and West 2000, 2)

highest retention rate for Kosovars in Canada.<sup>6</sup>One aim of this paper is to consider if and how location matters in the settlement of refugees in smaller BC centres. The research examines the settlement of Kosovars as well as the conditions in the host communities that received refugees. Two salient questions framed the research process:

- How well have Kosovars fared in obtaining housing, employment, and official language proficiency in each of the six communities (three metropolitan and four smaller centres)?
- What factors influence the decision of the refugees to stay or leave particular centres?

The paper begins with a brief review of relevant scholarship and an outline of research methods. Research findings are then presented in relation to the questions articulated above, and a concluding section raises policy implications.

### **Canadian Immigration and Regionalization**

In the post-war period, migration has predominantly been an urban phenomenon. Increasingly, migrants from both within and outside Canada have opted to settle in larger centres, rather than smaller towns and rural areas (Bourne and Rose 2001). Despite accounting for over fifty percent of Canada's population growth, immigration is geographically uneven, with newcomers settling in a few gateway cities. In the 1990s, 73% of newcomers to Canada settled in three Canadian Census Metropolitan Areas: Montréal, Vancouver, and Toronto (Statistics Canada 2003a). More and more newcomers are entering Canada as economic immigrants, which is reflected in the current immigration literature related to economic, and to some extent family class immigrants (Hiebert, Creese, Dyck, Hutton, Ley, McLaren and Pratt 1998, Hiebert 1999, 2000; Ley and Hiebert 2001, Ley 1999; Waters 2001). Since 1996, Canadian researchers have produced a wealth of research on immigrants, particularly through the Metropolis Project, including but not limited to, research on settlement experiences of children and youth (Waters 2001; Dyck and McLaren 2002; Fantino and Colak 2001; Moussa 1994), intergenerational relations during resettlement and second generation immigrant experiences (Pratt 2002, Dyck and McLaren 2002; Creese, Dyck and McLaren 1999; Barrenechea 1995), and the health of refugees during settlement (Kopinak 1999a, 1999b)

Despite a sizeable literature on Canadian immigration, the experiences of refugees remains understudied (Hiebert 2000; Joly 2000). One notable exception is the "The Settlement Experiences of Refugees in Alberta" by Abu-Laban, Derwing, Krahn, Mulder and Wilkinson (1999), which documents the settlement experiences and successive geographic mobility of refugees in seven

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<sup>5</sup> Personal communications with C. Friesen, Vancouver, December 2001, and T. Welsh, Vancouver, B.C., January 2002.

<sup>6</sup> "Fitting into Canada: Kosovars build new life." *Vancouver Sun*, July 17, 2000.



Alberta cities of varying sizes. Abu-Laban et al. (1999) make an important contribution to the Canadian literature on refugee settlement especially in the “absence of reliable information on the consequences of the practice of destining refugees to smaller urban centres” (1). A second paper, “The Retention of Newcomers in Second and Third Tier Cities in Canada” by Krahn, Derwing and Abu-Laban (2003) extends the analysis forwarded in the original study by placing it within the current context of debates around ‘regionalization’ and ‘dispersion,’ government terminology that describes the process by which refugees are assigned to particular places. In both of these papers the authors report a strong correlation between the size of a city and overall retention rates, by which larger cities have higher retention rates (Abu-Laban et al. 1999, Krahn et al. 2003). For those who have chosen to leave the settlement cities, the prospects of improved employment and education opportunities in another city are the most frequent reasons for leaving. In the context of current debates about regionalization, this research underscores the significance of social and economic conditions in the city of settlement.

Research on the settlement of Kosovars in Alberta and Ontario provide more specific insights and possibilities for comparison. *A report on the settlement experiences of Kosovar Refugees in Ontario* by the Centre for Refugee Studies and the Joint Centre of Excellence for Research on Immigration and Settlement analyzed data from 706 questionnaires from Kosovars living in Toronto, Ottawa, Hamilton, Windsor, London, Kitchener, St. Catharines, and Thunder Bay (CRS & CERIS 2001). The research identified a number of difficulties encountered by the refugees, including language acquisition, lack of appropriate housing, and insufficient income. At the time of the research few of the Kosovars had obtained meaningful employment, and many were experiencing difficulties with the English language (CRS & CERIS 2001).

*Lessons Learned: An Evaluation of Northern Alberta’s Experience with Kosovar Refugees*” documents the settlement of Kosovar refugees in a number of Albertan communities (Abu-Laban, Derwing, Mulder and Northcott 2001). The researchers interviewed 186 privately sponsored refugees settled in northern Alberta, 27 representatives from both governmental and non-governmental decision-makers, 119 sponsors, 15 service-providing organizations (and their 60 representatives), and a sample of Kosovars who had repatriated (Abu-Laban et al. 2001). The three-volume report examines experiences both on the Canadian military bases and in Alberta, with a primary focus on the policy implications of Canada’s response to the humanitarian evacuation.

Kyte and West (2000) prepared a report entitled, *Kosovar Settlement in British Columbia* in which they present findings based on 195 interviews of the 220 adult Kosovar refugees remaining in British Columbia approximately six months after their arrival, as well as 55 sponsors and 42 key

informants. The purpose of this study was to assess how well the Kosovars were establishing themselves; whether funding needed to continue for the full 24 month period; whether the Kosovars required additional services; and whether British Columbia's response to the Kosovar refugees was appropriate, given the possibility of future crises. The report identified several problem areas, including health issues, interpretation, child support, and employment.

Recent work by Walton-Roberts (2004) on immigrants in Squamish and Kelowna and Henin and Bennett (2002) on Latin American and African Immigrants in Victoria, B.C. addresses the settlement experiences of immigrants outside B.C.'s Lower Mainland. Walton-Roberts (2004) examines practices undertaken by regional governments in attracting and retaining immigrants. Her research underscores the importance of settlement context in facilitating negative or positive settlement experiences. Henin and Bennett (2002) identify several obstacles to inclusion, including obtaining meaningful employment that reflects the education and training of the immigrants, as well as finding adequate and affordable housing. The work by Walton-Roberts (2004) and Henin and Bennett (2002) provide important insights in the context of non-metropolitan settlement in B.C. However, little is known about the experiences of refugees in British Columbia.

### **Research Approach**

The research presented here is part of a collaboration with the Immigrant Services Society of British Columbia (ISS), the principal agency responsible for facilitating the settlement of government-assisted refugees. It was responsible for establishing contracts with service organizations in smaller B.C. communities and preparing them to provide appropriate settlement services. Working with and through the settlement counsellor at ISS, immigrants and refugees were identified. Before undertaking primary research a collaborative partnership was established with the Immigrant Services Society of British Columbia (ISS). The collaborative relationship established with ISSBC has been constructive in facilitating access to and rapport with the Kosovars, and in enabling us to build upon the knowledge and strengths of all parties involved.

The research itself included five focus groups and thirty-five individual interviews with Kosovars, as well as two focus groups and five individual interviews with representatives from immigrant and refugee-serving agencies and sponsors. The Kosovars interviewed included approximately equal numbers of women and men, aged 21 to 78, from both rural and urban backgrounds. The English language ability of the Kosovar participants varied from those with little ability to speak English to those who claim fluency. Interpreters were provided during focus groups and individual interviews to ensure people could respond in the language with which they felt the

most comfortable. These interviews and focus groups were conducted between May 2002 and March 2003 in seven B.C. cities: Chilliwack, Abbotsford, Kelowna, Vernon, Vancouver, Burnaby and Surrey. These cities were selected as sites of study on the basis of the known presence of Kosovar refugees, and subsequently on the ability to establish rapport with one of the contacts who aided in setting up focus groups and interviews.<sup>7</sup> As part of the Lower Mainland, the largest urban area in B.C., Vancouver, Burnaby and Surrey have been included to allow for comparisons of the settlement of Kosovars with smaller urban centres.

The Kosovars who participated in this project, either in interviews or focus groups, represent approximately five percent of the Kosovars who settled in B.C. in the summer of 1999. As such, the results are not necessarily generalizable to all Kosovars nor to the wider immigrant and refugee populations. These findings are significant, however, in that they examine settlement processes occurring in the immigrant-receiving cities and offer insights on both current and future policy.

#### *Location matters*

In seeking to consider if and how location matters in the settlement of refugees this section examines how settlement outcomes vary across cities. After examining how Kosovars have fared in obtaining housing, employment and official language proficiency in each of the seven communities, this section concludes with a discussion of what factors influence the decision of refugees to stay or leave particular centres.

Three years after their arrival, the vast majority of the Kosovars interviewed (29 of 34) intend to settle permanently in Canada, with most people remaining in their original host city.<sup>8</sup> This finding is consistent with research on Kosovars in both Alberta and Ontario (Abu-Laban et al. 2001; CRS & CERIS 2001), as well as with the Longitudinal Survey of Immigrants to Canada which found that 91% of newcomers to Canada intend to settle here permanently and obtain Canadian citizenship (Statistics Canada 2003b).<sup>9</sup> Although there is some evidence of secondary migration both to and from B.C., a significant majority of Kosovars (24 of 34) are living in their original host city three years after their arrival. With the exception of one person who was originally settled in the US, all the Kosovars who have moved, have done so within the Lower Mainland. Their continued presence in

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<sup>7</sup> It should be noted that there is no Kosovar association in B.C. to which Kosovars from the 1999 exodus might belong.

<sup>8</sup> While we recognize our numbers are not statistically significant, some percentages have been included to provide a general portrait of patterns.

<sup>9</sup> The Longitudinal Survey of Immigrants to Canada surveyed approximately 12,000 of the 164,000 newcomers to Canada (age 15 and over) who arrived in the period between October 2000 and September 2001, within a six-month period of their arrival (Statistics Canada 2003b).

these cities, however, may relate as much to a lack of financial resources to move as to satisfaction with their host city. Our study could not definitively prove either case.

Early in the research process one participant explained that “it’s not in our nature to move” (Focus Group 301, Kosovar, Vancouver). While this is a sentiment expressed by only some of the Kosovars canvassed, a pattern of families’ long-standing attachments to place became apparent.

People in Gjakova have been there for 200-300 years. I met farmers that were on the farm and they trace their ownership of that farm for 10-12 generations. And 305 years one man was telling me, and he was very proud of it (Focus Group 301, Service Provider, Vancouver).

Focus groups and interview findings point to older people as the most likely to have repatriated as they were unable or unwilling to adjust to new circumstances.

They’d rather go back to a land that... wasn’t in harmony at that point rather than go through with the new culture... In [their] wildest dreams [they] never thought [they’d] be coming to another land, and then suddenly [they’re] here. There’s a real culture shock... The older people really had a hard time with it... they just couldn’t adjust to the changes (Interview 206, Service Provider, Kelowna).

This rare opportunity – to have one’s way paid to return home – made the difficulties of resettlement a choice not taken for those who chose to go back to Kosovo/a.<sup>10</sup>

Reasons given for repatriation involved a desire or need to return home, rather than a dislike of Canada. The primary reasons for leaving that were cited related to factors in Kosovo/a (i.e. family obligations; the search for loved ones; homesickness; and the need to rebuild) as opposed to factors in the host city (Abu-Laban et al. 2001).

[Older people] had houses they had built with their own hands, farms they had tended and had been in the family for a long time and so they just felt like they couldn’t live apart from their land. So if it was possible they went back (Interview 207, Sponsor, Surrey).

In some cases, exigency made repatriation the only option.

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<sup>10</sup> In Kosovo/a, “political identities and territorial claims are contested between two cultures with very different languages” (Buckley 2000, 469). Kosovars and Serbians have different names for some places, and different spellings for others. These differences speak to different representations and understandings of these places. While this research focuses on people’s settlement in Canada, these differing representations of place have implications for the research here. When talking to people, the names and spellings that are employed reinscribe particular histories, understandings and ways of knowing, and ultimately affect the information that is obtained. During an interview one Kosovar asserted “I thought you were saying Kosovo. Kosovo is more Serbian and Kosova or Kosove is okay” (Interview 103, Kosovar, Vancouver). Others, however, felt our use of Kosova was unnecessary as the province is internationally recognized as Kosovo. During the interview process Kosovars were asked to use whichever name they preferred. In our writing we have elected to use Kosovo/a, so as not to privilege either representation or way of knowing these places.

[My cousin] didn't want to go [back to Kosovo/a]. But... he had to go back to take care of [his parents]... He had five children... [and they were] doing a really [well in] school... but he had to go back. I know they're missing here (Interview 132, Kosovar, Chilliwack).

For those who have left Canada, many wish to come back.

Every one of them would want to return to Canada. Every one of the ones who I know anyhow (Interview 201, Service provider, Vancouver).

According to our interviewees, all of the people who returned to Kosovo/a did so within the two-year window in which the Government of Canada would finance the costs of repatriation. Many, we heard second-hand, regret this decision.

*A strategy that could: Grouping families in smaller centres*

When the Kosovars settled in Canada, they benefited from an expanded definition of family that included parents, adult children and siblings, as compared to other Government Assisted Refugees. A decision was made to settle extended families in the same city in an effort to enhance settlement and reduce secondary migration (CRS & CERIS 2001). Eight of the ten families that settled in Vernon, for example, are related. This settlement strategy has been beneficial as it has enabled family members to support one another during the transition. In Kelowna, one couple spoke of their reliance on their grown children as well as a granddaughter to interpret for them and to accompany them on errands. The presence of family members, as well as other Kosovars, reduces feelings of isolation and begins to rebuild networks that have been disrupted during flight (Interview 102, Kosovar, Surrey; Interview 113, Kosovar, Surrey). A report of the Longitudinal Survey of Immigrants to Canada corroborates the finding that the presence of family and friends significantly shapes immigrants' destination upon arrival in Canada.

Of immigrants who settle outside Montréal, Toronto, and Vancouver, 35.6% choose their destination based on the presence of family or friends; another 32.3% picked their destination based on job prospects, and 5.5% based on business prospects. In Vancouver, a whopping 41.3% chose the city because of family or friends residing there; in contrast, only 6% selected the city on the basis of job prospects (Statistics Canada 2003b). In light of our findings and the statistically significant results of the Survey, the strategy of settling extended families together is an important one that may well shape the likelihood of staying in a small or medium-sized city. Family and friends provide networks of support during the initial stages of settlement and on-going contacts and resources, at least in principle, thereafter.

The desire to house many of these extended families together has created a multitude of housing arrangements. Not all are adequate, as Canadian housing norms do not necessarily correspond to Kosovars' more extended definitions of 'family.' One household has multiple generations living together so that ten people live in a four-bedroom townhouse. In another family, nine members are split between two units in one apartment building. In the first case, the family is content with the arrangements, while a respondent in the second household dreams of the day when the family can buy a house and reunite all of its members. Settling refugees with the very modest shelter allowance provided makes obtaining adequate housing difficult.

Deciding to stay or leave particular places is a process of negotiating the multiple needs of different family members. This process is analogous to the economic process of 'locational rationalization' advanced by Taylor and Thrift (1986). Locational rationalization is the decision-making process by which corporations consider relevant characteristics of place in determining the optimal location.

In my situation now I have to compromise between [the] wishes [of my parents and my own]... My parents need a sense of community because they are old and they don't speak the language. So that is where they are now – with friends (Interview 102, Kosovar, Surrey).

A sense of community and affordable rent appear to drive choices of residential location. The concentration of Kosovars appears to have gained some momentum in Surrey and Vernon, and was also used in Abbotsford on a short-term basis during the initial settlement period. In Abbotsford, a number of families lived together in an apartment building in part because of the affordable rents, but also to lend support to one another during the initial settlement period. Once they began establishing themselves in jobs, however, these families dispersed to other areas of Abbotsford. In Vernon six parts of an extended family live in one apartment building, while in Surrey, fifteen families live in one complex. Anecdotal evidence indicates some families have chosen to move out of these buildings already. Living in such a concentrated fashion has enabled respondents in Surrey to develop a "small Kosovar community" (Interview 301, Kosovar, Vancouver) that has assisted in reducing feelings of isolation for at least some of the respondents. For some, however, these newly formed connections do not necessarily replace the networks that had existed in Kosovo/a. One Kosovar, who moved to Surrey for the sake of his parents stated

They've lived with other [Kosovar families] in this complex but still you don't... really get what you had. Especially the extent of the friends... but it's better (Focus Group 301, Kosovar, Surrey).

Nevertheless, concentration may increase the level of comfort and encourage people to depend on one another for social support. In Surrey, being known and knowing your neighbours has facilitated a sense of safety for at least one Kosovar.

I know where we live is not a good neighbourhood, but it feels like home. We have lived here three years and now I feel like I know everybody and I am more safe (Interview 114, Kosovar, Surrey).

This sense of safety and security was enhanced by the presence of familiar people. The settlement of larger groups of Kosovars, particularly extended family groupings, has been beneficial in that people have the support of each other during settlement. Despite the concentration of Kosovars in one apartment building in Vernon, one participant spoke of the need to move to a community with a larger Albanian-speaking community for the sake of marriage for his children.

Affordable housing, or ‘cheap rent’ was mentioned as a reason for moving/staying in a number of interviews, but particularly in relation to Surrey. Some people spoke of having moved to Surrey because of the less expensive rent, while others indicated that this was the only reason for remaining there.

I think people would move if they could afford it, but the reason they stay here is it’s cheaper (Interview 112, Kosovar, Surrey).

For others it was proximity to family that was salient, despite the availability of more affordable housing elsewhere in the Lower Mainland.

I told them Vancouver is very expensive with your government assistance. At least in the first year, until you get jobs you should go to Surrey. But nope. They like to stay close... They feel more secure (Focus Group 301h, Service provider, Vancouver).

The proximity of family or other Kosovars appears to be a significant factor in determining where people live. According to the Longitudinal Survey of Immigrants to Canada, 63% of newcomers indicated “all or most of their new friends were from the same ethnic group” (Statistics Canada 2003b).

#### *Livelihoods: official language acquisition and employment prospects*

For me it’s not just lack of income but it’s lack of self-respect (Interview 108, Kosovar, Kelowna).

The inability to speak English presents a significant barrier to obtaining employment for Kosovars and other immigrant groups. Barriers to participation in language classes need to be examined and addressed as English language ability is intimately related to the ability to obtain high

quality employment opportunities (Creese and Kamberre 2002). Consequently, immigrant and refugee-serving agencies voiced a need for increased access to English language classes.

They must let us provide language training to a higher level... Level 3... doesn't give anyone enough English to even get a job... I think they should go to level 6 and that still isn't fluent, but [it] is [enough]... to be able to get... an entry level job (Focus Group 204, Service Providers, Kamloops).

Manitoba provides English Language Services for Adults (ELSA) funding to level 8, which is university-ready, and Ontario provides funding to level 6 (BC Coalition for Immigrant Integration 2002, Hyndman and Friesen 2002). Results from the “Inter-Provincial Report Card on Immigrant Settlement and Labour Market Integration Services” (BC Coalition for Immigrant Integration 2002) indicate that British Columbia lags behind all of Canada (including the Yukon) in relation to the provision of English Language Services for Adults. Immigrant and refugee-serving agencies in Vancouver, note that BC has long waiting lists, a lack of childcare spaces for parents seeking language training, and has recently been subjected to sector-wide cuts and increased emphasis on accountability. As such, some suggest there is a need for increased capacity for English language instruction. One service provider noted that in the Lower Mainland it can take upwards of a year to get an assessment, and then the person must wait for a spot to become available (Interview 203, Service Provider, Vancouver). Further, the service provider stated that waiting lists for daycare (so that parents may attend school) is even longer. Reducing barriers to language acquisition may facilitate access to employment. Increased provision and capacity would ensure more timely completion of English language training to a level that would enable newcomers to enter the competitive job market.

The majority of Kosovars interviewed (29 of 34 or 85%) have received English language training since their arrival. Of the Kosovars who have taken language classes, two have completed English Language Services for Adults (ELSA) level one; one has completed up to level two; nine have completed level three; nine more have received language training but are not sure to which level; and eight have taken advanced English training through adult learning centres and local colleges. In British Columbia, ELSA 3 is the highest level funded by the Provincial Government. Many of the Kosovars seeking advanced language training are professionals who believe better language skills will facilitate access to employment in their previous occupations. Of the five Kosovars who did not receive English language training, three claimed fluency in English, and two cited [old] age as the reason for not participating.

The degree to which Kosovars have obtained employment and acquired English language has not been consistent either within or between the centres. For the purposes of this paper, ‘integration’



denotes official language acquisition and employment status.<sup>11</sup> Although other indicators of integration include political participation in Canadian society, the Kosovars are a relatively recent groups of newcomers for whom livelihood and employment prospects are salient. One sponsor noted a correlation between geography, education and success in settling:

Those that were educated, were from the big cities like Pristina... have done much better. Those that come with little education... from the village have a much tougher time (Interview 207, Sponsor, Surrey).

Kosovars in Kelowna and Vernon, many of whom are from smaller villages in Kosovo/a, have experienced significant difficulties obtaining employment, while those in Chilliwack, Abbotsford, Vancouver and Surrey have, on average, experienced more success. Significant variations exist between Kosovars interviewed in terms of education and profession. Sixteen of the twenty-eight participants in Vancouver, Surrey, Chilliwack and Abbotsford were university students in Kosovo/a or hold university degrees or professional diplomas, compared to two of the eight participants in Kelowna and Vernon.

Three years after settlement 43% (15 of 35) of the Kosovars interviewed were employed on either a full-time or a part time basis, 11% (4 of 35) were full-time post-secondary students (none of whom are employed), and 46% (16 of 35) were unemployed. A larger proportion of Kosovars had obtained employment than in the study done much earlier by CRS & CERIS (2001), a finding that is not surprising given the different time periods when the studies were conducted. Significant geographic variations exist among centres in relation to both unemployment and the degree to which Kosovars have obtained Canadian work experience. In Chilliwack and Abbotsford, for example, one of the nine Kosovars interviewed is unemployed, compared with eight of the eighteen participants in Vancouver and Surrey, and seven of the eight participants in Kelowna and Vernon. Some Kosovars, particularly in the Lower Mainland spoke of fairly constant attachment to the labour force, albeit in a variety of jobs, while those in Kelowna and Vernon spoke of a more transient or fleeting attachment.

In Vancouver, Surrey, Chilliwack and Abbotsford the majority of Kosovars interviewed had at least some Canadian work experience. Many of these jobs, however, are part-time or temporary, particularly in service industries, such as tourism. A number of the women and one of the men in Surrey and Abbotsford reported having been employed either as interpreters for Citizenship and Immigration Canada or as Kosovar settlement counsellors at various settlement service organizations. While these jobs provide much-needed Canadian experience, they were tied to the immediate

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<sup>11</sup> For a more detailed discussion of Integration see Frith (2003).

settlement of the Kosovars and the two-year federal funding window. As such, many of these jobs no longer exist.

Gender differences in employment have emerged in Surrey, where all but one of the women are unemployed, while the majority of men are employed. Many of these women, however, reported having worked in a number of jobs (e.g. packer in a bakery warehouse, interpreters for CIC, settlement counsellor) that were characterized as part-time or temporary. Other reasons given for quitting work were childcare responsibilities or the desire to return to school.

In Kelowna and Vernon, the majority of participants reported having worked for as little as one or two months since coming to Canada, with many of them reporting no Canadian work experience. Anecdotal evidence of six women (five in Vernon and one in Kelowna) and one other man in Kelowna indicates that only one was working at the time of the interviews.

[It is] very difficult to work ... I asked a lot of people ... but there is no work. Even the ... the local people have lost their jobs here (Interview 106 (through interpreter), Kosovar, Vernon).

Immigrant and refugee-serving agencies in Vernon, however, indicated that some of the Kosovars have obtained stable, and in at least one case full-time, employment. One person is upgrading her credentials.

The high unemployment levels among Kosovars in Kelowna and Vernon also reflect wider unemployment trends in the region. During the period in which the Kosovars were settled in the Okanagan, the jobless rate in the Thompson-Okanagan was two percent above the provincial average, a statistic that remains largely unchanged.<sup>12</sup> According to the 2001 Census both Kelowna and Vernon had unemployment rates significantly above the provincial average, while all of the other areas studied had unemployment rates that were slightly below the provincial average. According to the 2001 Census, the unemployment rates for the total population 15 years and over were: Canada 7.4%, B.C. 8.5%, Chilliwack 8.3%, Abbotsford 8.2%, Surrey 7.4%, Vancouver 8.3%, Burnaby 8.3%, Kelowna 9.1% and Vernon 10.7% (Statistics Canada 2003c). The unemployment of Kosovars in these centres may well reflect wider economic issues in the region. Research by Walton-Roberts (2004) reaffirms the difficulties faced by newcomers in obtaining employment in Kelowna. Although the unemployment rate in Vernon declined from 12.1% to 10.2% between 1996 and 2001, the labour force growth rate (or the number of people who have become employed) and employment growth rate (or the number of jobs that have been created) actually declined by 6% and 4% respectively. These

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<sup>12</sup> "Valley jobs scarce: Finding work harder than elsewhere in B.C." *Okanagan Saturday*, July 10, 1999. Page A3.

findings are contrasted with Abbotsford, which experienced labour force growth rates and employment growth rates of 11% and 13% respectively.

The majority of Kosovars who have obtained jobs are employed in lower-paying jobs that do not necessarily reflect their educational background, credentials, experience or skills, a finding consistent with those of Kosovars in Northern Alberta (Abu-Laban et al. 2001). Sixty percent of the newcomers surveyed in the Longitudinal Survey of Immigrants to Canada are working in an occupational field that is different from before coming to Canada (Statistics Canada 2003b).

The Kosovars who participated in our study echoed a number of all-too-familiar barriers to obtaining meaningful employment (Abu-Laban et al., 2001; Abu-Laban et al., 1999; CRS & CERIS, 2001). These include lack of English language ability; unfamiliarity with Canadian job-finding skills; the absence of networks in obtaining employment; lack of Canadian experience; and in some cases no recognition of credentials (Ryan and Woodill 2000; Ferris 2001; Waxman 2001; Lo, Preston, Want, Reil, Harvey and Siu 2001; Bai 1991; Preston and Man 1999). These factors all contribute to un(der)employment and downward occupational mobility (Abu-Laban et al., 1999).

No one is accepting experience from back home ... I know it is not the case only with us it's with all immigrants. Especially if you don't know [the] language (Focus Group 301, Kosovar, Vancouver).

Looking for work in Canada and Kosovo/a differs. One Kosovar, for example, talked about his unfamiliarity with resumes and the need to learn to 'sell' yourself in Canada. Similar findings were reported by Bauder and Cameron (2002) who noted immigrants from the Former Yugoslavia (although not necessarily from Kosovo/a) had differing assumptions about hiring practices that were acquired in the country of origin but did not necessarily work in Canada.

For some newcomers, ageism was also believed to be a factor in their failure to obtain employment.

When it comes time to hire someone to work it's not only language, but also age. They hire someone younger (Interview 117, Kosovar, Surrey).

For people with professional or technical skills the difficulties of obtaining employment are amplified by professional licensing bodies that do not recognize foreign credentials (Abu-Laban et al. 1999). For the purpose of this research, professional occupations are those that require post-secondary education and include teachers, doctors, nurses, engineers, architects, and people involved in information technology and high tech sectors. The majority of professionals in this sample have not obtained employment in their previous field: of the eleven professionals interviewed, two are employed in their previous field but at a much lower level, three are employed in an occupation at a

lower level, two are upgrading their qualifications, and four are unemployed. Since the interviews two people have obtained employment in their field at a level that is comparable to their previous employment.

Professionals in Kelowna have expressed the greatest difficulties in obtaining employment. They were the most likely to speak of moving to a larger centre where they believed meaningful employment could be obtained, and had resisted coming to Kelowna in the first place.

Some of them say that you are over qualified, some of them don't like me because they know that if I find better job I will leave (Interview 109, Kosovar, Kelowna).

Despite their inability to obtain employment in their own fields, two professionals talked about the reluctance on the part of employers to hire them because they are overqualified. Another Kosovar talked about the difficulties of obtaining recognition for her medical credentials, despite having passed the evaluation exams that recognize her medical knowledge and training as being equivalent to that of Canadian graduates. When applying for residency, which is the next step in becoming a Canadian doctor, foreign-trained doctors have the lowest priority. Further, the requirements state that:

advantage is given to... physicians who are practicing or [have] recently [practiced]. But [the] longer it takes to get into a residency, [we] are losing these advantages. Over four years I have been out of practice now (Interview 150, Kosovar, Burnaby).

Thus, multiple barriers exist to credential recognition. Canada is seen by some Kosovars as having systemic barriers that limit the opportunities for immigrants and newcomers to obtain meaningful employment.

Like you need to do like elementary jobs. They don't give you chance to do... business or to have good job in government position... You need to... really develop your stuff or... have [good] luck. (Interview 101, Kosovar, Vancouver).

For one Kosovar, the 'luck factor,' or recognition of his 'foreign' work experience was important in gaining meaningful employment in his previous field.

I went to apply... as a production labour... and I was just lucky enough to hand off my resume to a factory manager... When he saw my resume... he said why don't you apply for IT manager position? They called my counter-part from US to interview me... and I got the job. (Interview 120, Kosovar, Abbotsford).

Without such recognition, or being in the right place at the right time, these Kosovars felt it was difficult to obtain 'good jobs.' Language barriers, the lack of credential recognition and age compound the difficulties of finding employment. The inability to obtain employment may have ramifications that extend beyond the economic impacts.

I was disappointed with finding jobs... sometimes I blame myself [because] I don't know how to find them... It is kind of frustrating for us... I thought I would do better... I'm not satisfied with part-time jobs and [jobs that last for] two months... [At] first I [thought I would be] working in my field, but since I am here it is not possible without training (Interview 115, Kosovar, Surrey).

The emotional distress that results from prolonged unemployment may have repercussions for the entire family.

Right now we are in a big problem about [work]... My [partner] is in stress, and it affects the family (Interview 109, Kosovar, Kelowna),

Recent provincial cuts that limit welfare to two out of five years and reduce monthly support may make settlement and integration more tenuous for those who are still unable to obtain stable employment. In one city, the immigrant and refugee-serving agency related the difficulties of settling two different people who are unable to obtain employment due to medical problems, yet do not qualify for disability under government regulations. Simich, Beiser, Mawani and O'Hare (2001) caution:

“For refugees,... [the] social support of friends and relatives may be necessary but insufficient for successful resettlement if the means to become self-sufficient, such as employment, are not also present” (5).

*Mismatching skills: manufacturing experience versus service jobs*

One theme that has emerged in the interviews is a spatial mismatch between the jobs available in a city, and the job experience and skills of the refugees. A lack of factory jobs was mentioned in a number of interviews, suggesting a mismatch between the job skills of some of the refugees (e.g. in manufacturing) and the types of jobs available (e.g. in service industries such as tourism).

[In] Gjakova we had... seven or eight [factories]. It was a very industrial town... there were big factories: 5000 people in one [factory] (Interview 101, Kosovar, Vancouver).

These factories were an important source of employment. This mismatch has been most evident in Kelowna and Vernon, where the economies are predominantly based in forestry and agriculture, with a large service sector, including tourism (Economic Development Commission 2002). Clearly, front-line jobs in tourism are out of reach for those without fluent official language skills. In Vernon, one Kosovar reported:

[I]t's hard to find jobs. There are not a lot of jobs and the town is small. There are no factories. People just come here for tourism (Interview 107, Kosovar, Vernon).

Another lamented that:

Kelowna is tourist place, it is not for engineers (Interview 109, Kosovar, Kelowna).

While this mismatch certainly exists in many cities as a result of the rise of the service economy, the predominant economic base as well as the size of the city may exacerbate the dislocation of Kosovars with factory experience.

This spatial mismatch was also evident in relation to hi-tech and information technology sectors. In Kelowna, for example, hi-tech companies have been diversifying the traditional agricultural base prompting the local Economic Development Commission to promote the region as the Silicon Vineyard (Walton-Roberts 2004). One respondent, however, suggested:

the promotion of Kelowna like ‘Silicon Vineyard’ is highly exaggerated. Hi-tech companies usually are small. Very small. And they are able to employ up to ten people. And no industry, no big manufacturing companies... Here, generally, I believe it’s mainly hospitality industry... [The] highly promoted bridges.com... does do very well, but still not big enough to be big employer. Only manufacturer is Sunrype, food processing kind of company. But I’m afraid they don’t need any high tech personnel so far (Interview 108, Kosovar, Kelowna).

Similar concerns arose in Abbotsford:

[Information technology] is considered more of a service industry and those industries in Abbotsford are rather small, therefore they don’t hire a lot of people in IT. In Vancouver for example, on the other hand is bigger market for those type of jobs. (Interview 120, Kosovar, Abbotsford).

Employment has understandably emerged as a major concern for Kosovars during settlement. Of those who have obtained employment, many of these jobs are in occupations unrelated to their training or experience. Others report little, if any, work experience. One Kosovar suggested that people with:

higher education... lack opportunities, but others with low education may... find better opportunities in Canada in comparison to Kosovo/a (Interview 109, Kosovar, Kelowna).

The ability to obtain employment is influenced by *age* (with older people citing more difficulty), *educational background* (professionals have little success in obtaining employment based on previous credentials), and *location* (people settled in Kelowna and Vernon have had the least success in obtaining employment, a pattern potentially related to weak economic trends in the region).

*Give us a job, not a cheque: the search for employment*

While Kosovars appreciated the assistance that was provided by the Government of Canada, some expressed their frustration with the method of assistance.

[The] government of Canada didn't need to support us with money, they [should have] support[ed] us to find some kind of... jobs (Interview 101, Kosovar, Vancouver).

The biggest demand was for employment placement services. Sponsors, key informants and Kosovars all identified a need for employment training and job services. Although Kyte and West (2000) identified a similar need among Kosovars in BC, access to health care was a primary concern in that study. Unlike Abu-Laban et al. (1999) who spoke to Kosovar respondents requesting more ESL instruction and Abu-Laban et al. (2001) who canvassed Kosovars expressing a need for psychological testing, respondents in this study were uniform in their desire for improved employment training and job finding services. The increased focus on employment may well reflect the later stage of settlement (year four in Canada for most respondents), with initial supports already in place.

One recurring theme was a desire for job placement programs similar to those operating in the U.S. and New Zealand that, according to respondents, match refugees with specific jobs. One respondent, who was originally settled in New York state, said that Canada should follow the US practice of placing refugees in jobs. Relating her experiences with the International Rescue Committee in the U.S., she noted that:

When we came they [found] us a job, like for my family. If you don't like that job they find you another one (Focus Group 301d, Kosovar, Vancouver).

Another Kosovar talked about a similar program in New Zealand where the government finds three jobs for immigrants.

If you immigrate... the government... [will] find you three jobs... [if you] love the first one... you can stay in that. But if you not happy or you not good in that you can try a second one. After third one the government don't care (Interview 101, Kosovar, Vancouver).

Despite our inability to corroborate the existence this program in New Zealand, the informal 'knowledge' is important as it speaks to the perceived need for job finding programs, as well as the existence of informal networks for information transfer. Often participants expressed a desire for jobs or job placement programs, as the practical, hands-on assistance of job placement programs was seen to be much more beneficial than courses related to resume-writing. Working with employers is an important part of job placement.

We do a lot of work with employers too... so, employers in [this community] are getting a little better... They have hired some of our clients and now they actually call us when they have an opening (Focus Group 204, Service providers, Kamloops).

Once again the preparation of a host city and its employers emerges as crucial to attracting and keeping newcomers. Job finding services need to be flexible and geared to meet the various skills levels and background of individuals. A number of Kosovars spoke of a need for expanded job services geared to meeting the needs of refugees and professionals.

I believe that the critical point is WHO is your client for agency? ... People who looked for general labour are different from people who are professional employment... Government funds they usually oriented towards, towards labour and not towards professional. Or they... label you: [you] are [a] newcomer, you are an immigrant,... you're English is second language - so let's put you with all [the other] immigrants ... It doesn't mean that if the only common thing we have is immigration, new country. It still can be ... the only similarity between us. We are different ...Canadian newcomers can be considered with more specificity... In term[s] of the background, education, circumstances under which this newcomer came to Canada. And motives, reasons why they came to Canada (Interview 108, Kosovar, Kelowna).

Employment and job-finding courses have to be tailored to immigrants, but they should also recognize the differing needs of professionals. One service provider related a story about two engineers he had met at a job-search meeting.

One... would shovel coal... He liked working with his buddies in the yard. And the other fellow, he was an executive and he had this persona that he must be a professional and there was no way that he could change to go take another job that had menial work involved in it. Yet these fellows worked side by side, in the same job. They were both professional engineers, but you couldn't find the same jobs for them. One of them was prepared to take any job. (Interview 201, Service provider, Vancouver).

While some people are willing to take any job in order to obtain Canadian experience, others retain their identity as professionals. One Kosovar related how becoming a refugee meant losing her home and country. In being offered a job at Tim Hortons or McDonalds, she was asked to give up the only thing she had left – her identity as a professional.

#### *Settlement services and sponsors: Making integration happen*

Both immigrant and refugee-serving agencies and private sponsors have played an important part in the settlement of the Kosovars. Most understand that the government was [and is] responsible for funding, while the immigrant and refugee-serving agencies and sponsors were responsible for settlement-related services and daily assistance. For several Kosovars, the Immigrant Services Society of B.C. (ISSBC),



...helped us to adjust, to find school, or give information to help us find jobs... and gives you information about what kind of opportunities you have about schooling and education (Interview 111, Kosovar, Vancouver).

Many of the Kosovars came to ISSBC's Welcome House facility, where temporary accommodation, orientation rooms, and offices for settlement counsellors are all located in one place.

In Vernon the immigrant and refugee-serving agency adapted to the needs of Kosovars. English language classes for women were relocated to an apartment after their families prohibited the women from attending language classes at the service agency. Adapting services to meet culturally-specific gender norms enabled the women to continue classes in a venue deemed appropriate by the women's families. When funding ended, Vernon District Immigrant Services Society (VDISS) arranged sewing classes with basic ESL instruction so the women could continue to receive 'basic' English instruction while also learning a job skill. While the intention behind offering sewing classes as a means of providing English language classes is admirable, one must question the relevance of these skills to the marketplace and the value of perpetuating these gender stereotypes.

The settlement of the Kosovars can be distinguished from other government-assisted refugees in that all Kosovars were given the option of having a local sponsor, or host. Sponsors were normally persons associated with churches, social justice groups and other civic organizations. As sponsors these groups or individuals agree to provide settlement assistance for a period of one year from the date of arrival for the refugee. Unlike privately sponsored refugees, whose sponsors are financially responsible for them, sponsors of the Kosovars were not required to provide financial support. As such, they acted more as hosts than as sponsors. In addition to assisting with the day-to-day issues of settlement, hosts provided ongoing contact with Canadian citizens from the host society.

We contact the people or they contact me after they arrive in Canada and we just help them with practical details of life: ... providing food clothes and furniture, helping solve issues of... how to get medical coverage, how to get kids in school, what if there are problems in school. Just kind of how to access the various public entities that, that are out there. Pointing people the direction of job help, ESL help and all that kind of stuff. (Interview 207, Sponsor, Surrey).

While still acknowledging the role of immigrant and refugee-serving agencies, some Kosovars felt that their specific sponsors had been integral to helping settle people into their new lives, by familiarizing them with the area and enrolling children in schools.

ISS partially [helped], but it was everything through our friends actually who help us settle and they showed us for example city, shopping malls, emergency, then ambulance, and whatever, hospitals and schools. (Interview 103, Kosovar, Vancouver).

The relationships formed with sponsors vary significantly among the three centres. For some, the assistance of sponsors in their day-to-day lives continues, while for others it has matured into a social relationship. In Vernon, one Kosovar stated:

We had the sponsors here. There is one who still visits us... they still help us because we still have problems with the language. We need help... When we came here everything had been prepared for us. Our house was full of furniture... and plates and spoons and everything had been prepared by the sponsors ...One of the sponsors always comes and takes my wife to the doctor... She takes care of her like... if she was her sister (Interview 106 (through interpreter), Kosovar, Vernon).

One family in Abbotsford who didn't really feel they needed daily intervention preferred a more distant relationship with sponsors in which they would ask for help when needed, an arrangement that was not necessarily satisfactory to the sponsors.

[Our sponsors] wanted to help us lots. There was no need for their help... because both of us speak English ... They were very good people on suggesting what to do... But we were doing fine (Focus Group 303, Kosovar, Abbotsford).

Two Kosovars talked about never having developed a relationship with sponsors at all. One Kosovar characterized the relationship with his sponsors as being sporadic despite his desire for a closer, more helpful relationship.

I think I was unlucky... I think every family that came should have sponsors,... but only one came to visit me sometimes and I never knew anyone else... Actually in the beginning it was hard... but I [had] to [settle] on my own (Focus Group 303, Kosovar, Chilliwack).

One family in Abbotsford lives and works on the farm owned by its sponsors. While this arrangement is working very well according to this couple, similar arrangements could prove problematic in other situations. The relationships developed between Kosovars and sponsors differed significantly in ways that did not always meet the needs or desires of either group.

For some Kosovars, random acts of kindness from members of the host society were important during the initial settlement period. One Canadian woman negotiated a group rental rate with the manager of an apartment complex in Surrey, obtaining a reduced rent in exchange for a large number of families moving in. Fifteen families now live in a five building complex in Surrey. For another family, a chance encounter with a stranger precipitated an outpouring of assistance.

We... told him what we experienced during the war... He told his friends and they all decided to help us. So we got that house in East-Vancouver for rent and they came and they brought us so many things that were donated by all their friends, like tables for living room, chairs, and so many clothes for me and they were really good because we didn't have any clothes when we came (Interview 141 (through interpreter), Kosovar, Surrey).

Numerous accounts from immigrant and refugee-serving agencies and sponsors generally echo this positive reception on the part of the ‘host society,’ however, we were unable to measure whether there was any geographical difference in the welcome given Kosovars in Vancouver as compared to, for example, Vernon. The results of such research are an important consideration before any policy of regionalization is implemented.

Tensions between sponsors and settlement organizations also emerged from the findings. Immigrant and refugee-serving agencies expressed a number of difficulties that emerged in relation to the training of new sponsors and the lack of clearly defined roles between immigrant and refugee-serving agencies and sponsors. The speed with which the Kosovars were removed from Macedonia and brought to Canada, left little time for educating new sponsors about the needs of the Kosovars and what they could expect, in terms of support and resources, as sponsors.

These well-meaning people... didn’t have a clue what they were getting into... [The] few groups who had already sponsored before and were going in eyes wide open... also had big challenges with this group... [The Kosovars were] coming straight out of a... war... whereas most sponsored refugees have been in refugee camps in a safe third country for a number of years before coming and have normalized (Interview 202, Service provider, Vancouver).

Immigrant and refugee-serving agencies noted there had been breakdowns on both sides of the sponsorship arrangements. The lack of clearly defined roles for sponsors and immigrant and refugee-serving agencies was a major concern for immigrant and refugee-serving agencies.

The intention of having community sponsors... was really good. But I don’t think there was any savings in that. Because you still require settlement services. If you haven’t had any training, or if you don’t know how to do that, it ended up falling on settlement services (Interview 206, Service provider, Kelowna).

Immigrant and refugee-serving agencies do not want to see their professional services taken over by volunteers, of course, so patrolling the boundaries between sponsors and immigrant and refugee-serving agencies is somewhat political. Although sponsors and immigrant and refugee-serving agencies generally worked well together, some service providers expressed frustration with the overlap and confusion that existed in the arrangements.

One service provider suggested the relationship between sponsors and immigrant and refugee-serving agencies should be formalized into

...partnerships between the immigrant serving agency and the sponsorship [group], because they’re not replacing one another. They’re playing very different roles. ISS can’t be an intimate community support and network, but immigrants, sponsor groups don’t know about the full terms, about medical issues, about PTSD and cultural adaptation and all of those things. Most of them don’t know that. So it could be a

very, a very mutually supportive relationship (Interview 202, Service provider, Vancouver).

A sponsor in Surrey echoes this sentiment of a mutually supportive relationship:

The Canadian government was good at bringing them in and giving them funds. ISS was good at kind of helping them get located in an appropriate area, but then both of those organizations would back [out] and there was a need for... people who could walk with these guys on a more daily basis, with the issues of... how to live in this society and culture. So that's where we came in... we weren't so much involved in the settlement as we were in the integration into Canadian culture (Interview 207, Sponsor, Surrey).

Given the importance placed on the efforts of both sponsors and service providing organizations in facilitating settlement by the Kosovars, more work must be done in relation to

...developing systems and also getting the right partnerships and other community services in place (Interview 202, Service provider, Vancouver).

Although none of the Kosovars mentioned any conflicts between immigrant and refugee-serving agencies and sponsors, this was clearly a concern for immigrant and refugee-serving agencies. Clarifying roles and responsibilities would aid in the delivery of these services where both are employed or used in the future.

### **Will they stay or will they go?**

During the initial resettlement of Kosovars from Macedonia to Canada, a decision was made not to settle Kosovars in Toronto due to the perception that settlement services were saturated by the demands placed on them by the increasing concentration of immigrants and refugees in that region (Ley and Hiebert 2001).

When we decided to come [to Vancouver] we should like to be in Toronto because it's a little bit more near our uh Kosovo. And another thing it's more keep like more industrial place, probably more easy for jobs. And it's more big community with Kosovars, where... we can adjust more easy (Interview 101, Kosovar, Vancouver).

Although the majority of Kosovars plan to stay in their original host cities, those who intend to move speak of leaving for larger centers in B.C., Alberta and Ontario, echoing findings of Abu-Laban et al. (1999, 2001). When asked if they would consider leaving their host city, one said,

Maybe Edmonton or Toronto ... It is a central location, it is closer to go back to Kosovo from Toronto and there is more work there... And there is more of our people. They have Albanian clubs, they have Albanian activities, schools, music. Children can go two days a week to Albanian classes (Interview 107, Kosovar, Vernon).

Toronto, in particular is identified as being very well suited for Kosovars given the perception it has a more industrial economic base and larger Albanian-speaking community.

This experiment in regionalizing refugee settlement to smaller centers has met with mixed results. On the one hand, Kosovars in Kelowna and Vernon were more likely to talk about moving to larger centres across Canada than were Kosovars settled elsewhere. On the other hand, they liked the communities in which they found themselves, but lacked sufficient employment prospects or family and friends to keep them there (Abu-Laban et al. 1999). With the exception of a number of young single women from Surrey who spoke of moving to Toronto and Ottawa in pursuit of education and careers, the majority of people in the centres in and around the Lower Mainland (including Chilliwack and Abbotsford) were content to stay in B.C., whether in the initial host city or by moving to the Lower Mainland. Unlike Abu-Laban et al. (1999), however, none of the respondents spoke of moving because they were dissatisfied with the services being received in the host city.

It's all because of work. Like this we can not continue. We must have something. [We are] looking at... [a] bigger city where we can find work, where there are factories or something (Interview 106 (through interpreter), Kosovar, Vernon).

Bigger centres like Edmonton, Calgary, Ottawa and Toronto are imagined as offering higher-paying jobs in industries, such as manufacturing, that are better suited to the employment experiences and skills of the Kosovars.

The settlement of Kosovars in British Columbia can be regarded as a qualified success. This is borne out by the fact that the vast majority of Kosovars to B.C. communities have stayed. Integration, assessed as language acquisition and employment in Canada, has been mixed within and among host cities. Geographic differences emerge: Kosovars who settled farthest from Greater Vancouver are experiencing the most difficulties in acquiring official language skills and obtaining employment. Kosovars with professional backgrounds in all centres are least likely to stay put, particularly those in Kelowna who feel their skills are unrelated to employment demands.

Finding meaningful employment is central to the decision to stay or leave particular centres. For the most part, people are satisfied with their host cities; they appreciate the amenities such as schools, parks and recreation centres, but without jobs, they cannot fully settle. Larger centres offer a wider range of services and co-ethnic communities. Smaller centres, however, may force immigrants and refugees to integrate faster in a 'sink or swim' environment (Interview 201, Service Provider, Vancouver; Focus Group 205, Service Providers, Kamloops).

Do smaller centers facilitate faster integration? While we certainly heard this argument made, we did not find evidence to support it in this study. Kosovars interviewed in Vernon, for example, have experienced significant difficulties in obtaining official language learning and employment,

while those in Abbotsford have met with far more success. Their sponsors aside, Kosovars in all centres talked about friendships almost exclusively with other Kosovars or other immigrants.

Reflecting on the future of refugee settlement in B.C., one service provider noted

So much of the receptiveness has to do with factors related to our economy, or our job market, media, and the communities they are destined to ...I think that [given] the cuts in Provincial income support, welfare and so forth I think its going to be increasingly challenged to retain refugees in B.C. regardless of which community which they are initially are settled in... Unless they are able to find work, unless the wait list for ESL classes drops, unless they have the best opportunity to and support to attach themselves to the labour market it is going to impact their success and retention (Interview 203, Service provider, Vancouver).

These insights reflect the difficulties Kosovars face, particularly in Vernon. If government interest in regionalization continues, research is needed to ensure adequate supports exist to facilitate settlement outside of the large cities where services are concentrated.

[Agencies in smaller centres] did make it through the Kosovar [settlement]... but they're not ready for an ongoing system... unless very low numbers [are sent] to those communities. (Interview 202, Service provider, Vancouver).

Those who come to Canada as refugees may require services that other immigrants do not need, i.e. trauma and torture-related counselling. Currently immigrant and refugee-serving agencies in Vancouver are funded to provide these services. Spreading these services across B.C. would certainly cost more money than providing them in one place.

Another service provider added:

There might be some communities that would be ready to receive refugees, but I think that there would have to be some more mapping and inventory of capacity within those communities... to deal with some of the needs that arise,... [such as] medical trauma, [and] issues in the school system... that are... currently handled in the various degrees within the Lower Mainland... Also, the provincial government over the course of the last year and a bit has cut funding to the... immigrant serving sector overall so I think that a number of communities have lost their capacity, and continue to lose their capacity to work with immigrants and refugees (Interview 203, Service provider, Vancouver).

Assessing the capacity of small and medium-sized cities to settle immigrants will require a comprehensive approach, not limited to but including measurement of people's attitudes towards newcomers, and refugees specifically; an inventory of immigrant and refugee-specific services (not all immigrant classes will utilize such services equally); and an evaluation of employment prospects for prospective arrivals. Housing, education, and other considerations would follow. Firm offers of employment and open minds may prove to be the winning combination in making one place more

desirable than another, as smaller cities in BC and those like Swift Current seek to attract more people. The success of these municipalities will be measured not only by their ability to attract immigrants from various backgrounds, but also by their skill in keeping them and assisting in their transition to becoming full participants in Canadian society.

### **Summary of Related Findings**

1. Employment and the presence of family are the major factors influencing settlement.
2. Obtaining meaningful employment necessitates English language proficiency. Immigrant and refugee-serving agencies voiced a need for increased access to English language classes from the current level of 3 to level 6, which is comparable with that in Ontario, but still below Manitoba (which provides funding to level 8, or university-ready). Immigrant and refugee-serving agencies in Vancouver note that BC has long waiting lists, a lack of childcare spaces for parents seeking language training, and has recently been subjected to sector-wide cuts and increased emphasis on accountability. There is a need for increased capacity for English language instruction.
3. In addition to employment preparation training and job-finding clubs, paid internship initiatives and wage-subsidy models could be explored as a means of providing newcomers with Canadian job experience; employment networks; and much needed income in the first three years after their arrival.<sup>13</sup>
4. The strategy of settling extended families together is an important one that may well shape the likelihood of staying in a small or medium-sized city. Family and friends provide networks of support during the initial stages of settlement and on-going contacts and resources, at least in principle, thereafter.
5. Assessing the capacity of small and medium-sized cities to settle immigrants will require a comprehensive approach, not limited to but including measurement of people's attitudes towards newcomers, and refugees specifically; an inventory of immigrant and refugee-specific services (not all immigrant classes will utilize such services equally); and an evaluation of employment prospects for prospective arrivals.

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<sup>13</sup> This suggestion arose from policy makers at the Immigration Policy workshop held August 13, 2003.





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