

# invisible WOMEN + CONCRETE BARRIERS

INVISIBLE WOMEN, CONCRETE BARRIERS has a mandate to increase awareness about refugee issues and to highlight the specific challenges experienced by women affected by conflict. The project engages Nova Scotians on issues of poverty, alleviation, social isolation, and cultural diversity. This is accomplished through an extensive public awareness campaign, which includes public outreach around refugee issues.

The most vulnerable refugees are women and children. Some of the concerns and barriers voiced by female refugee applicants are the following:

- lack of access to and availability of temporary shelter;
- lack of access to more permanent housing, complicated by inability to provide Canadian based references and Canadian identification documents;
- language barriers. There are no longer any English as a Second Language (ESL) classes for refugee claimants in Halifax;
- access to employment is difficult due to the lack of recognition of foreign credentials and foreign work experience;
- low levels of income assistance impose restrictions on family reunification due to the high processing fees for immigration applications;
- lack of appropriate counselling services for female victims of war rape, torture, trauma, and sexual violence;
- unofficial policy changes that restrict medical coverage for refugee applicants;
- general misconceptions and lack of information about refugee applicants, which leads to lack of services.



## KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Ensure that all babies born in Canada receive immediate health coverage.
2. Educate Nova Scotia's health professionals on the services guaranteed to refugee claimants by the Federal Health Papers.
3. Provide refugee claimants with information about and access to affordable housing.
4. Provide free, province-wide ESL classes for refugee claimants.
5. Create a provincially-funded support centre to provide legal aid and informational resources for refugee claimants.
6. Work to build programs and services for refugee claimants through the Nova Scotia Department of Community Services, and provide funding for a refugee survival guide.
7. Ensure access to culturally appropriate mental health services for refugee claimants.
8. Create partnerships among government departments to make policy changes that will help refugee women.

## PROJECT OBJECTIVES

1. To increase the capacity of women refugees to share their perspectives.
2. To facilitate dialogue between and among refugees in Nova Scotia and members of government, employers, employment support agencies, institutions of higher learning, and anti-poverty groups.

## RESEARCH ACTIVITIES

### Focus Groups

Invisible Women, Concrete Barriers was formed by focus groups to study the needs of refugee women from different marital status, family structures, educational levels, and cultural backgrounds in Nova Scotia.

### Policy Roundtables

Two policy roundtables were held:

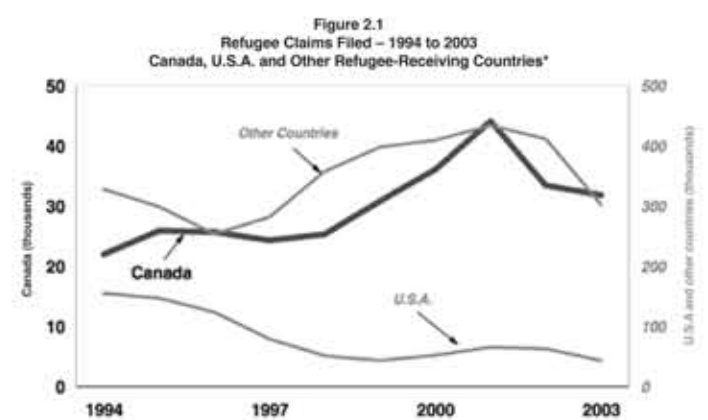
**March 6, 2008** – Roundtable participants identified priority issues related to breaking down barriers for refugee women.

**June 20, 2008** – Roundtable participants reconnected with policy makers and community members to create action plans to improve the experience of refugee women in Nova Scotia.

There is a commitment from all participants to meet on an annual basis to report on progress.

Barriers experienced by refugee women are related to:

medical and healthcare    education and employment    settlement and support    rural perspective



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