

**Global Human Migration, Health Equity and Innovation:  
A Joint DLSPH/IGHEI Strategy**

Draft 4 – 151207

A significant number of local initiatives have sprung up, at the University of Toronto and beyond, as a response to the Syrian refugee crisis (SRC). Roundtables, fundraising campaigns - see, for example, the Scholars at Risk campaign ([www.masseycollege.ca/fellowships-and-programs/scholars-at-risk](http://www.masseycollege.ca/fellowships-and-programs/scholars-at-risk)), conferences and panels have been organized to discuss the roots, dimensions and consequences of this crisis, raise awareness on the devastating impact it is having on the population involved, and gather resources that could ameliorate the living conditions of millions of displaced people.

At the DLSPH, a response to the crisis could include two different but complementary elements: an academic response promoted by a community of public health researchers, practitioners and advocates (including faculty, students and community based organizations); and a humanitarian response sponsored by a multicultural community of individuals many of whom are themselves migrants, children of migrants, or refugees, with roots in more than a hundred countries.

**A. Responding as an Academic Community**

The School can leverage a number of important *resources*, including:

- The Institute for Global Health Equity and Innovation (IGHEI), which acts as a bridge between the School, the broader university community and, beyond academia, local and global institutions interested in working at the intersection of health, equity and social innovation;
- A significant number of faculty members, both core and adjunct, who work on issues related to im/migrant and refugee health;
- The work currently developed by a small research/social innovation/advocacy team, known as "Global Migration & Health" which includes faculty and students at the School, and related activities, such as the one promoted in the context of the course CHL5113 – Migration and Health: the 11 students enrolled in this course are currently working on a collective op-ed on the topic of the SRC to be submitted for publication in a national newspaper by early November; and,
- The ongoing fundraising campaign, which involves donors who are themselves immigrants or children of immigrants, some of whom might have roots in the countries and regions currently suffering from refugee crises.

The initiative should reflect a *set of basic principles* by being:

- **Meaningful** – We should avoid any shallow duplications of initiatives already under way as well as anything that could be perceived as either a 'reaction for the sake of reacting' or

an attempt to 'jump on the bandwagon'; instead, the response of the School should be purposeful and carefully designed and implemented to be a thoughtful academic endeavor aiming at real world impact;

- **Powerful** – By creating an ongoing series of 'conversations that matter', the School response should emphasize those aspects of the SRC, other refugee crises around the world, and global human migration in general that are controversial in nature, uncomfortable to debate and therefore rarely addressed;
- **Rooted in research and education** – As an academic community, our response should be based on a systematic and in-depth analysis of the fundamental causes producing contemporary refugee crises, in Syria and beyond, and the consequences that global human movements, whether forced or not, have on health; the research work should be accompanied and complemented by a portfolio of educational activities which could engage students from the undergraduate to the post-doctoral levels in collaboration with community based organizations (local and global) working at the forefront of human migration initiatives;
- **Long term and developed with full institutional support** – Ephemeral responses to the media frenzy created by the dramatic pictures of the little Kurdish victim of the ongoing crisis should be avoided; instead, the School has the opportunity to react to the SRC by launching a long-term, applied research initiative that could become part of the strategic priorities of the School in collaboration with the School deep investment in the IGHEI (particularly as it relates to health equity for marginalized populations), a profoundly meaningful choice given the highly multicultural environment in which the School operates and the increasing significance of global human movements and their public health implications.

We suggest *the DLSPH/IGHEI respond* to the SRC by proposing the inclusion of a 'global human migration and health' stream in the portfolio of activities promoted by IGHEI, and actively supporting it. This would represent a meaningful, deeply rooted and long-term response to the changing nature of the global landscape and an opportunity to shift our attention from a specific if particularly dramatic crisis, to a problem that has much broader significance and impacts the health and hopes of survival of large populations who are, currently, virtually ignored by mainstream media.

The new stream could:

- Build on the work already done by many of our colleagues, promoting synergistic opportunities and increasing the visibility of their efforts;
- Respond to the three University of Toronto priorities recently identified by President Gertler<sup>1</sup> by:

---

<sup>1</sup> Gertler, M.S. (2015) Three Priorities: A Discussion Paper. <http://threepriorities.utoronto.ca/wp-content/uploads/2015/10/Three-Priorities-Discussion-Paper.pdf>

- Leveraging the opportunities created by being located at the heart of one of the most multicultural urban areas in the world, a city that is home to recent and first generation immigrants from more than a hundred countries around the world;
- Becoming a strong hub of activities of international relevance within the School and IGHEI based on ongoing, organic international partnerships with academic and non academic institutions around the world; and,
- Involving students at all levels, with a particular emphasis on the new undergraduate students who will soon join the first global public health majors developed by the School, to prepare them, through research-based, experience-based, and internationalized learning experiences, to live and work in a world where migration is an increasingly significant determinant of health;
- Include a strong social innovation component that could leverage both the many diasporas existing in Toronto and the half a million-strong community of University of Toronto alumni; and,
- Leverage the network of donors currently supporting the DLSPH fundraising campaign, by emphasizing the importance of work done in support of migrant and refugee populations not only in Canada, but globally, including countries and geopolitical regions that might have special significance for some of these donors.

## **B. Responding as a Community of Global Citizens**

With respect, specifically, to the SRC, the School/IGHEI could develop a plan to create a team or teams of faculty, staff, students and alumni that would be part of the University of Toronto Lifeline Syria Challenge <http://www.ryerson.ca/lifelinesyria/uoft/index.html>, to sponsor refugee families to come to Canada.

Each team should include a core group of 5-10 people to take on liabilities and responsibilities associated with sponsorship. Additional team members can take on various roles associated with settlement. A team can only sponsor a family once it has raised at least 75% of the money required to support the family for their first year in Canada, or around \$30,000, depending on family size.

At the same time, the School/IGHEI could invite their members to propose initiatives aimed to:

- Advocate for family reunification, increased access to health (including mental health) services, and appropriate job skills training and placement;
- Educate the general public on the root causes of migrant/refugee movements and their health consequences (in the broadest definition of health) and highlight the need for comprehensive efforts to ensure appropriate support for successful resettlement of refugees in Canada.

This version of the document has been developed thanks to the contributions of:

Geoff Anderson  
Lisa Forman  
France Gagnon

Alex Jadad  
Rani Kotha  
Dan Sellen

For more information on part A, please contact Andrea Cortinois ([a.cortinois@utoronto.ca](mailto:a.cortinois@utoronto.ca)).

For more information on part B, please contact Geoff Anderson ([geoff.anderson@utoronto.ca](mailto:geoff.anderson@utoronto.ca)).