REFUGEE RESETTLEMENT AND ECONOMIC INTEGRATION IN CANADA

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Aziz Rahman is a Research Fellow at CERC at the Toronto Metropolitan University. Drawing on interdisciplinary scholarship and perspectives, Aziz's research and publications have focused on sociological and criminological issues including refugee integration, public views of policing, ethnic violence, colonialism, terrorism, and gig work. Aziz's postdoctoral research examines the self-employment patterns of refugees resettled in Canada. His doctoral work examined the labour market outcomes of two groups of resettled refugees, Government Assisted Refugees (GARs) and Privately Sponsored Refugees (PSRs), using the 2016 Canadian census data. Aziz is the recipient of a number of scholarships including the SSHRC Joseph Bombardier Doctoral Scholarship and the SSHRC Postdoctoral Fellowship.

INTRODUCTION

Canada has a large refugee resettlement program among Western refugee-hosting countries and has become the top resettlement state during the Trump Administration (Labman, 2019; Labman & Pearlman, 2018; Wilkinson & Garcea, 2017). Resettlement is important for protecting international refugees who are unable to return home safely, as well there is a lack of viable local solutions in countries of asylum (Hagstrom, 2012; Hansen, 2018; UNHCR, 2022a). Canada has welcomed over a million refugees including refugee (asylum) claimants since the 1980s (UNHCR Canada, 2019), and plans to continue to do so in the future. The number of resettled refugees has fluctuated and source countries have changed from year to year with respect to the incidence of war, conflict, persecution, and human rights abuses.

However, there is a lack of evidence about how government-assisted refugees (GARs) and privately sponsored refugees (PSRs) vary by socio-demographics and fare economically in Canada. Using the 2016 Canadian census data, which is for the first time linked with administrative data on tax and immigration, this essay portrays the sociodemographic descriptors and a mixed (i.e., positive, and negative) picture of the labour market outcomes of resettled refugees aged

25-64 years who landed in Canada between 1980 and 2016, suggesting that refugees' labour market participation relates to social justice issues.

GLOBAL REFUGEE NEEDS

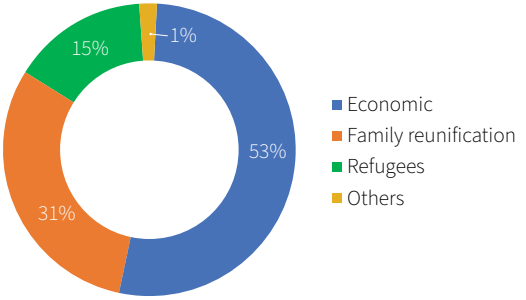
The world has witnessed a historically record number of (89 million) forced migrants including 27.1 million refugees, 53.2 million internally displaced persons (IDPs), and 4.6 million asylum seekers, resulting from persecution, armed conflict, and human rights violations in the Global South (UNHCR, 2022c). Over two-thirds of refugees stay in the Global South (UNHCR, 2022a), and only one percent of refugees can access third-country resettlement options (Hansen, 2018; Ott, 2013; UNHCR, 2019b). The global refugee resettlement needs for 2023 are over two million persons, which is 36 percent higher than the 2022 total resettlement needs (UNHCR, 2022a). Although Canada resettles a small number of refugees annually compared to UNHCH estimates, it is recognized globally for its unique refugee resettlement models and has been praised for its leadership in replicating the private/ community sponsorship program in other countries under the auspices of the United Nations and the European Union (Cameron & Labman, 2020; Hyndman et al., 2016; Labman, 2019; Morris et al., 2021).

REFUGEES TO CANADA

Canada has a long history of accepting refugees since 1776, and admitted refugees from each refugee movement in the post-World War II era (IRCC, 2020a; Picot et al., 2019). Although its contemporary approach is recognized as the 'gold standard', Canada's pre-War policies were characterized by 'exclusion, xenophobia, anti-Semitism, and racism' (Martani & Helly, 2022, p. 24). Canada's White Immigration Policy formally ended in 1967 with the introduction of the Points System and opened its border for immigrants from non-European countries. As per the *Immigration Act* of 1976, Canada has admitted refugees as one of three admission categories of immigrants alongside the economic class and family class addressing the key immigration policy objectives of humanitarian protection, economic needs, and family reunification since 1978 (Epp, 2017; IRCC, 2020a). Canada is the only country with an official Privately Sponsored Refugee (PSR) program since 1978 (Beiser, 2003; Hyndman et al., 2016; UNHCR Canada, 2019). In 2013, during the Syrian refugee crisis, the Government of Canada introduced the BVOR program jointly supported by government and private sponsors (Hyndman et al., 2014; IRCC, 2020b), while GARs are supported by the government and PSRs by private sponsors for one year upon landing. The Immigration and Refugee Protection Act (IRPA) of 2001 has governed the admission, (re)settlement, and integration of refugees in Canada since 2002. Quebec's independent refugee resettlement program differs from the federal government's resettlement that applies to other provincial/territorial jurisdictions. (See Figure 1)

According to the 2016 Census, Canada welcomed 858,850 refugees, which comprised about 15 percent of the 7.5 million immigrants that landed in Canada during 1980-2016 (Figure 1). Over 62 percent of refugees came under the refugee resettlement program (297,100 GARs, 233,340 PSRs, and 3,060 BVORs), and the remaining 38.88 percent (325,345) were admitted under the in-Canada asylum system (Statistics Canada, 2017b).

FIGURE 1. THE SHARE OF REFUGEES IN THE CANADIAN IMMIGRANT POPULATION.



Source: Adapted from 2016 Census of Population (Statistics Canada 017a)

Three-fourths of the refugee claimants were admitted as protected persons in Canada, and the remaining 25 percent of asylum claimants were admitted as dependents abroad of a protected person in Canada.

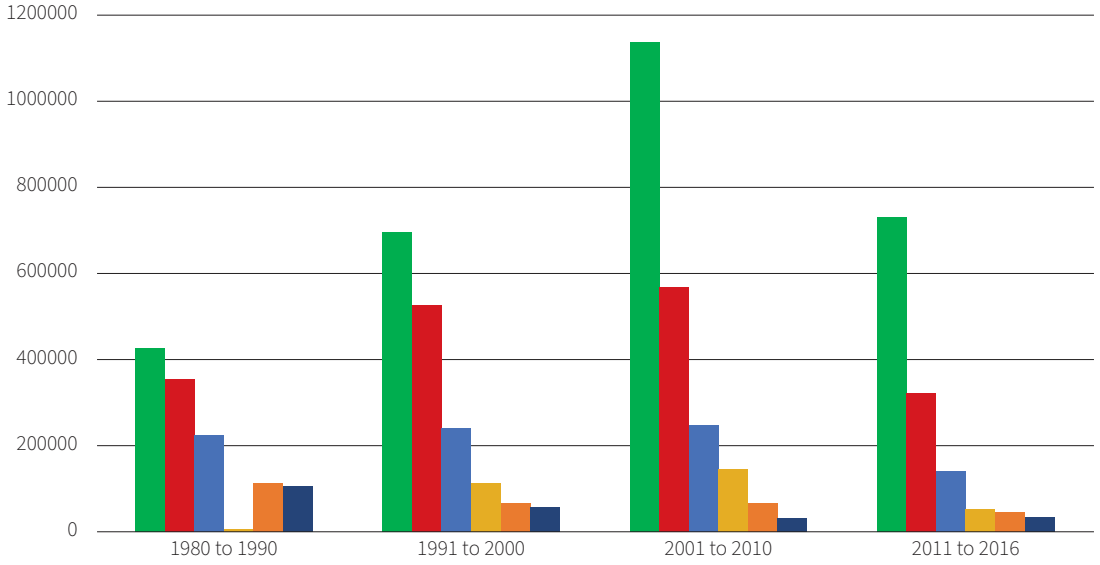
SOCIODEMOGRAPHIC PROFILE OF RESETTLED REFUGEES

My analysis of 397,635 resettled refugees (215,440 males and 192,185 females, and 214,740 GARs and 182,895 PSRs) aged 25–64 who landed in Canada between 1980 and 2016 includes several socio-demographic, immigration, and labour characteristics that are important to understand the economic integration of refugees into Canada. The 2016 Census Data includes refugees resettled under Canada's formalized refugee resettlement program that started with the Indochinese intake in the 1980s, which was also its test case for the private sponsorship program, up until the most recent large-scale Syrian refugee inflows in the 2010s. As evident from Figure 2, a higher proportion of GARs compared to PSRs is anticipated since PSRs are resettled in addition to GARs, which is the principle of additionality as outlined in the IRPA (IRCC, 2016). The PSR program has exceeded the GAR program in 2013 during Stephen Harper's government, and the principle of additionality seems to be continuously aberrated (Hyndman et al., 2016; Labman, 2019).

Data reveal that the mean age of arrival of resettled refugees in Canada was 21.70 years (SD = 11.27 years) and females' mean age of arrival in Canada was two years higher than that of males. GARs and PSRs did now show much difference except in the 25-34 age of arrival category where PSRs were about 3.5 percent higher than GARs. Given that the majority of resettled refugees with youth inflows (before their 29th birthday) indicates their longer employment potentials before the age of retirement as well as their ability to pay more taxes compared to what is invested in their settlement and integration services (UNHCR Canada, 2019; Wilkinson et al., 2019; Wilkinson & Garcea, 2017). Childhood refugees (aged 0–14) or refugee youth or younger adult refugees (aged 15–24) tend to more easily integrate as they have access to local education, host country language proficiency, and work experience (Boyd & Tian, 2016; Rumbaut, 2004).

About half of the resettled refugees completed a postsecondary certificate, diploma, or degree, with females having higher completion rates than males (about 45 percent versus about 30.5 percent). A higher proportion of refugee men had a high school diploma compared to their counterparts, and a higher proportion of refugee women had less than a high school education compared to refugee

FIGURE 2. REFUGEES AND IMMIGRANTS TO CANADA (1980-2016).



	1980 to 1990	1991 to 2000	2001 to 2010	2011 to 2016
Economic 2994130	428360	698040	1136615	731115
Family 1782485	355340	529845	572705	324595
Refugees 858850	229115	242275	246945	140515
Asylum claimants 325345	7600	115220	147180	55335
GARs 297100	115130	68685	66805	46480
PSRs 233340	106380	58370	32955	35635

Source: Adapted from 2016 Census of Population (Statistics Canada, 2017a)

men. Over 65 percent of postsecondary graduates received their highest education in Canada. Among foreign postsecondary graduates, refugee men were slightly higher than refugee women. Yet the proportion of Canadian postsecondary graduates was higher among refugee women than refugee men, and the reverse was evident with respect to those who had had foreign postsecondary education.

The gender difference in post-migration education implies that refugee male breadwinners had to start working immediately upon landing while their spouses might have had the opportunity to upgrade their educational credentials understanding the importance of Canadian education for better labour market outcomes. PSRs tend to have foreign postgraduate education while GARs tend to have Canadian education, which suggests that

PSRs do not tend to invest in postmigration education. Earlier studies suggest that PSRs quickly enter the labour market with the help of private sponsors (IRCC, 2016; Kantor & Einhorn, 2017). GARs may spend the early years upgrading their skills and acquiring job training (Hiebert, 2009a). It appears that resettled refugees tend to complete a trades or college diploma rather than a university degree upon arrival in Canada. This might be due to the costs of university education in terms of tuition fees and the time requirement needed to graduate, foreign educational credential issues, and/or the high demand for skilled trades in the Canadian economy. However, many refugees' high levels of human capital and postmigration education in Canada suggest that refugees wanted to restart their Canadian lives despite their past unique experiences of war, violence, persecution, and trauma.

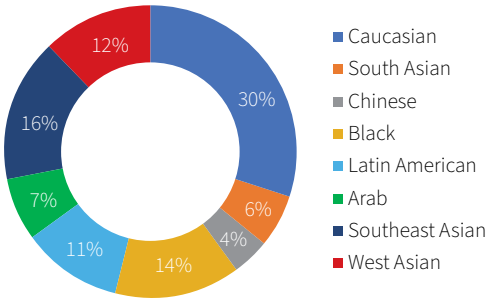
My analysis shows that about 87 percent of refugees knew English, with women reporting not knowing one of Canada's official languages. PSRs tend to be more knowledgeable in English compared to GARs, which is consistent with PSRs' higher educational levels compared with GARs.

Racialized (visible) minority refugees made up the majority of the resettled refugee population (about 71 percent), with Southeast Asians, Blacks, West Asian, Latin American, Arabs, South Asian, and Chinese (Figure 3). Although there was no remarkable difference between male and female refugees' racialized minority status, PSRs were more non-racialized (Caucasian) than GARs.

Most refugees in 2016 lived in 35 Census Metropolitan Areas (CMAs) including gateway, larger, and mid-sized cities), with few outside. Three gateway CMAs (Montreal, Toronto, and Vancouver), as often abbreviated as MTV) hosted over half of all resettled refugees, followed by three larger CMAs (Edmonton, Calgary, and Ottawa-Gatineau) with about 18 percent, and mid-sized CMAs (Quebec City, Hamilton, Kitchener—Cambridge—Waterloo, London, Windsor, and Winnipeg) with about 16.5 percent, while small CMAs/non-CMAs had about 13 percent. Male and female refugees did not differ much in terms of their place of residence. PSRs had a higher presence in gateway cities compared to GARs. Over half of the refugees were resettled in four provinces—Ontario followed by Alberta, Quebec, and British Columbia (Figure 3).

Over 80 percent of refugees (both male and female) were established immigrants (living in Canada for over 10 years), and as expected 85 percent of the resettled refugees were naturalized citizens, which is close to the proportion of immigrants (85.8 percent) as of 2016 (Statistics Canada, 2017a). More

FIGURE 3. MAJOR RACIALIZED (VISIBLE) MINORITY GROUPS OF RESETTLED REFUGEES (N = 382,660).



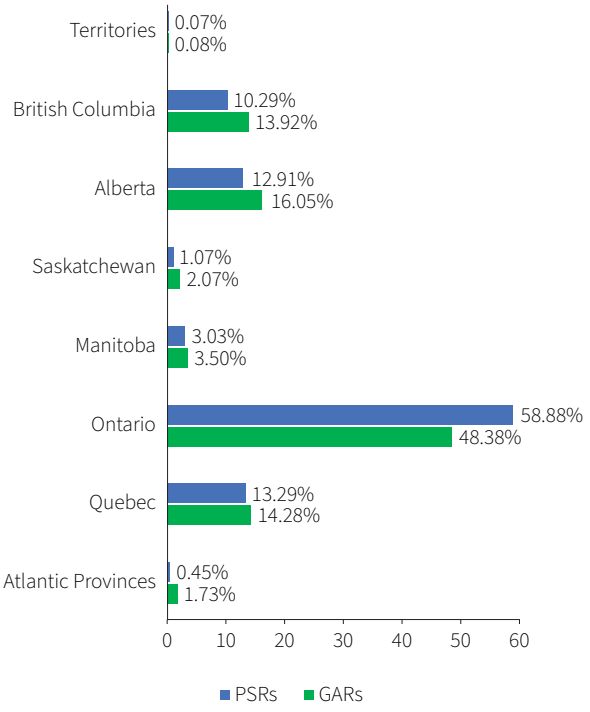
Source: Adapted from the 2016 Long Form Census Microdata File, Statistics Canada

than 60 percent of refugees were married, with more PSRs being married than GARs. Only 17 percent of resettled refugees had children aged between 0-5, and about 66 percent had no children aged below 15. The proportion of male and female refugees with children under 15 was the same (33 percent and 35 percent respectively). (See Figure 4)

LABOUR MARKET OUTCOMES OF RESETTLED REFUGEES IN CANADA

My analysis of the economic outcomes of resettled refugees based on three indicators—employment status, occupational status, and employment income presents a mixed or uneven picture. Over two-thirds of resettled refugees were employed, with high labour force participation of both genders. Among paid workers, refugee women outnumbered refugee men (89.87 and 81.72 percent respectively). Labour force participation rate, employment rate, and unemployment rate of resettled refugees aged 25 to 64 in 2016 were 75.4 percent, 69.3 percent, and 8.0 percent respectively, while the respective rates for the Canadian population of the same age group were 80.6 percent, 75.4 percent, and 6.4 percent respectively (Statistics Canada, 2017a). While refugees are not admitted to Canada based on their financial or human capital, a considerable number of resettled refugees tended to seek self-employment instead of paid work. The employment gap between PSRs and GARs is over five percentage points. PSRs were more likely to be employed than GARs, and less likely to be unemployed and out of the labour force than GARs. The bivariate relationship between employment status and admission category was statistically significant (Pearson Chi-square = 116.313, df = 1, $p<0.001$). (See Table 1)

FIGURE 4. PROVINCE/TERRITORY OF RESIDENCE OF GARS AND PSR.



Source: Adapted from Statistics Canada, 2016 Long Form Census Microdata File

My analysis found that around 15 percent of the resettled refugees were self-employed, which is higher than the proportion for the Canadian population (12.7 percent) (Statistics Canada, 2017a). The higher proportion of self-employment and home ownership (over 60 percent) indicates resettled refugees' financial and community belongingness, resiliency, and agency (UNHCR Canada, 2019). More than one-third of resettled refugees obtained postsecondary education upon their arrival in

TABLE 1. SOCIODEMOGRAPHIC CHARACTERISTICS OF RESETTLED REFUGEES.

VARIABLES	FEMALE (%)	MALE (%)	TOTAL (%)
Admission category (N = 397,635)			
GARs	55.33	52.88	54.00
PSRs	44.67	47.12	46.00
Location of study (N = 397,635)			
No high school diploma	25.46	23.16	24.22
High school diploma	24.32	28.57	26.62
Foreign trades certificate or college diploma	8.16	9.94	9.12
Canadian trades certificate or college diploma	23.11	20.69	21.8
Foreign university (at least a bachelor's) degree	7.19	8.00	7.63
Canadian university (at least a bachelor's) degree	11.76	9.63	10.61
Age of arrival in Canada (N = 397,635)			
0 to 14	24.45	21.49	22.85
15 to 24	24.95	25.68	25.34
25 to 34	33.21	35.84	34.64
35 to 44	12.91	13.07	13.00
45 to 65	4.47	3.92	4.17
Racialized (Visible) minority status (N = 397,635)			
Not-visible minority	29.21	28.52	28.83
Visible minority	70.79	71.48	71.17
Marital status (N = 397,635)			
Single/never married	23.12	26.25	24.82
Married/common law relationship	57.42	62.69	60.28
Separated/divorced/widowed	19.46	11.06	14.91
Knowledge of official language (N = 397,635)			
English only	74.48	79.14	77.00
French only	5.94	4.08	4.94
Both English and French	10.15	10.67	10.43
Neither English nor French	9.43	6.11	7.63
City of residence (N = 397,635)			
Small CMA, urban, or rural areas	12.49	12.77	12.64
Mid-sized CMA	17.18	15.99	16.53
Larger CMAs	18.25	17.98	18.10
Gateway CMAs	52.08	53.26	52.72
Time in Canada since landing (N = 397,635)			
0 to 4 years	7.42	6.75	7.06
5 to 10 years	11.61	9.70	10.58
Over 10 years	80.96	83.55	82.36

Source: Adapted from the 2016 Long Form Census Microdata File, Statistics Canada

Canada despite their lack of financial resources and documentation to prove their educational or occupational credentials, pre-migration disruption of their education and/or work, and their deficiency in both official languages, which stipulate that resettled refugees want to contribute as constructive and productive members of the society just like other Canadians. Along with these, the higher labour force participation and employment rates, and the lower rates of social assistance collection among resettled refugees aged 25–64, compared with the Canadian population aged 25–64, contradict negative stereotypes and myths that refugees are economic burdens, they are lazy, they do not want to work, they drain our welfare system, they do not pay taxes, and they get more assistance than our pensioners do (Best & Yachoua, 2015; Canadian Council for Refugees, 2013; Hathaway, 2007; Kanu, 2008; Kaplan, 2009; Puzic, 2015; Salehyan, 2019; Sersli et al., 2010; UNHCR, 2019a). (See Table 2)

Surprisingly, the data on occupational status did not support the PSRs' economic advantages over GARs as seen in earlier research with respect to their employment status and earnings (Devoretz et al., 2004; IRCC, 2016; Kaida et al., 2020; Lu et al., 2020; Watson et al., 2020). The data reveal a negative picture of resettled refugees' economic integration in occupational status terms. More than half of resettled refugees were employed in low-skilled (Skill level C and D) jobs, with the remainder found in skilled trades (Skill level B), and high-skilled (Skill level A) jobs. While more women held professional or managerial positions (Skill level A), more men worked in skilled trades. PSRs were

TABLE 2. EMPLOYMENT STATUS, OCCUPATIONAL STATUS AND EMPLOYMENT INCOME OF GARs AND PSRs.

	GARs N (%)	**PSRs** N (%)	**ALL** N (%)
Employment Status (N = 397635)			
Not in the labour force	57760 (26.90)	40225 (21.99)	97985 (24.64)
Unemployed	13360 (6.22)	10630 (5.81)	23985 (6.03)
Employed	143625 (66.88)	132040 (72.19)	275670 (69.33)
Occupational Status (N = 397635)			
Low skilled occupations	78000 (48.70) 4879049,128.4	72100 (49.55)	150100 (49.10)
Skilled trades occupation	1 (30.46)	43255 (29.72)	92050 (30.11)
Professional and managerial occupations	33390 (20.85)	30165 (20.73)	63555 (20.79)
Average Annual Employment Income (N=254715)			43,704.01 (SD 30137.34)
Female (N=111505)			38,279.62 (SD 27699.88)
Male (N=143210)			49,128.41 (SD 32574.80)

Source: Adapted from the 2016 Long Form Census Microdata File, Statistics Canada

slightly more concentrated in low-end occupations than GARs (a little over one percentage point gap), but the GARs were slightly more clustered in skilled trades (skill level B) occupations and high-skilled jobs, i.e., (skill level A) occupations. The bivariate relationship between occupational status and admission category was statistically significant (Chi-square = 28.941, df = 2, $p<0.001$).

The majority of refugee workers had lower levels of personal waged earnings in the 2015 calendar year. The average personal employment income for resettled refugees aged 25–64 who landed between 1980 and 2014 was about $43,704 (Standard Deviation = $30,137 approx.) (Table 2). Refugee women earned an average of $38,279 (Standard Deviation = $27,700 approx.), and refugee men earned $49,128 (standard deviation = $32,575). Descriptive data also show that PSRs earned more than GARs. The Pearson correlation between employment income and admission category was statistically significant. The independent sample t-test also suggests that PSRs' mean employment incomes were significantly higher than GARs.

CONCLUSIONS

Using three indicators of economic integration—employment status, occupational status, and employment income while previous research overwhelmingly focused on their employment status and/or income, my descriptive and bivariate analysis point to various social barriers and social justice issues. Despite the fact that an overwhelming proportion of the resettled refugees were highly educated with almost two-thirds' postsecondary certificate, diploma, or degree received in Canada, a larger portion of refugees arrived in Canada at a younger and core working age, many refugees knew of the official languages, and an overwhelming majority had lived in Canada for over 10 years). An overwhelming proportion of the resettled refugees were employed, a disproportionate concentration of refugee workers was employed in low-skilled low-paying jobs, and the majority of resettled refugees had lower employment incomes suggesting that many resettled refugees might have experienced underemployment, de-skilling, and discrimination.

> **"If refugees are employed in jobs below their qualifications, they cannot move upward in the occupational ladder or they do not enjoy equality of opportunities in the labour market, then they will continue to experience a lower average income than the Canadian average."**

The devaluation of their human capital and the non-recognition of their foreign credentials may prevent resettled refugees from utilizing their full human potential in their new home. Various studies indicated the potential factors affecting refugees' economic outcomes in Canada including pre-migration trauma and mental health, and lack of social capital (Beiser, 2009; Devoretz & Pivnenko, 2004; Samuel, 1984), education and official language knowledge (Dhital, 2015; Jedwab, 2018; Kaida et al., 2020), region of origin, foreign credential recognition, region of settlement, years living in Canada (De Silva, 1997; Devoretz et al., 2004; Mata & Pendakur, 2016), and settlement

and integration services (Hiebert, 2009a). Levels of income depend on the type of job. If refugees are employed in jobs below their qualifications, they cannot move upward in the occupational ladder or they do not enjoy equality of opportunities in the labour market, then they will continue to experience a lower average income than the Canadian average.

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