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# THE HISTORY OF REFUGEES IN CANADA

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## LETTERS

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# INTRODUCTION

JACK JEDWAB

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Jack Jedwab is the President of the Association for Canadian Studies and the Metropolis Institute. Holding a PhD in Canadian History from Concordia University, he taught at Université du Québec à Montréal and McGill University. He has taught courses on the history of immigration in Quebec, on ethnic minorities in Quebec, on official language minorities in Canada and on sport in Canada. He has also authored essays for books, journals and newspapers across the country, in addition to being the author of various publications and government reports on issues of immigration, multiculturalism, human rights and official languages.

Canada is widely described as a nation of immigrants owing to a long history of migration and the demographic importance of its immigrant population. In 2021, more than 8.3 million people, or almost one-quarter (23.0%) of the population, were, or had ever been, a landed immigrant or permanent resident in Canada. It's a large and diverse group of peoples not only in terms of the hundreds of countries from which they hail but also on the basis of the immigration pathways through which they ended up entering Canada. In 2021, for the first time in the country's history over one million Canadians were refugees (1 039 275) according to the census with 218,430 admitted as permanent residents from 2016 to 2021. The primary places of birth of refugees have changed considerably over the decades, in tandem with conflicts and international events.

Who is a refugee? The first modern definition of

international refugee status was issued by the League of Nations in 1921 and thirty years later, the United Nations 1951 Refugee Convention defined "refugee" (in Article 1.A.2) as any person who "...owing to well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality and is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country;

**“ This edition of *Canadian Issues* seeks to expand our understanding of the history of refugees in Canada and makes the connection between past refugee movements and more recent ones.”**

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or who, not having a nationality and being outside the country of his former habitual residence as a result of such events, is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to return to it.”

This edition of *Canadian Issues* seeks to expand our understanding of the history of refugees in Canada and makes the connection between past refugee movements and more recent ones. To that end the varying contributions that follow aim at addressing important gaps in Canadians’ knowledge about the history of refugees as polls suggest that too many of us mistakenly believe that the country has always welcomed refugees.

This edition of *CITC* begins with an essay I’ve penned that describes the unparalleled challenges that were encountered by displaced persons in the aftermath of the Second World War. Several democracies, like Canada, were very reticent to admit European Jews into their countries, and this was despite increased awareness of the horrific tragedy and suffering that Jews endured. In the aftermath of the Second World War, international conventions for the protection of refugees ultimately emerged in response to the untenable migration experience encountered by Jews seeking a new home.

In her essay, Stephanie Bangarth focuses on the fear and racism that guided refugee admission in Canada across much of its history. Amongst other examples, she looks at the case of Chilean refugees attempting to enter the country in the 1970s. Thereafter, attitudinal changes emerged in Canada largely as the result of public campaigns that featured social justice and human rights principles. Bangarth wonders whether history is repeating itself as she draws parallels between the Chilean

experience and the disproportionate security concerns raised in Canada in regard to the recent admission of Afghan refugees.

Looking at the Canadian response to the 1959 World Refugee Year (WRY), Marlene Epp’s essay suggests that the government’s actions at that time paved the way for broader civil society engagement in years to come. While she says it is difficult to assess the direct impact of WRY in Canada’s future response to refugees, it does provide a glimpse into a highly concentrated moment when Canadians were galvanized to think and act collectively in support of a global need.

Ira Robinson looks at the historic migration of Jewish refugees to Canada which he maintains is vital to understanding the multifaceted Canadian Jewish story. The arrival of multiple waves of Jewish refugees in Canada significantly influenced the way that the Jewish communities of Canada understand themselves and their world. Knowledge about that immigration, he further contends, contributes to a broader understanding of the evolution of Canadian immigration and refugee policy in the twentieth century.

Rafael Girard contends that the diversifying of immigration in Canada in the 1970s was a direct result of the way in which the government managed the program rather than of a deliberate choice. He observes that there was very little legislation and even fewer parliamentary debates behind these dramatic shifts in immigration but points to the importance of key changes in immigration regulations creating the legal framework and their vigorous implementation by departmental civil servants that made for a substantial contribution to

making Canada a more diverse country in the decades ahead.

Hamilton, Veronis and Walton-Roberts observe that between 1980 and 2015, Canada was resettling relatively low numbers of refugees each year. That changed in 2015 when Operation Syrian Refugees led to the resettlement of over 26,000 Syrian refugees in 118 days. Building on this experience, Canada has quickly resettled cohorts of Afghan refugees and Ukrainians using a variety of temporary policies and programs. They caution that while it may be too early to speak about the durability of these policies, since 2015, we have witnessed significant changes in Canada's refugee policies.

Following a comparative analysis of the recent Syrian, Afghan and Ukrainian migration movements to Canada, Alboim and Cohl identify three interconnected elements for successful refugee movements—government leadership, media coverage, and public participation. They argue that government policies and programs work best if they secure public support. An engaged and committed public incites the government to exercise stronger leadership and action. Reporting on progress, challenges, and vehicles for participation encourages the media to bring issues to the forefront which will, in turn, drive public engagement on behalf of refugees.

Aziz Rafi documents the economic trajectory of recent Afghan refugees using three indicators of economic integration—employment status, occupational status, and employment income. Rafi uses the analysis to draw attention to important social barriers and calls for more attention to be

directed at social justice. Despite the fact that an overwhelming proportion of Afghan refugees were highly educated (with almost two-thirds' post-secondary certificate, diploma, or degree received in Canada) a larger portion of refugees arrived in Canada at a younger and core working age, they were disproportionately concentrated in low-skilled, low-paying jobs and often experienced underemployment, deskilling, and discrimination. Rafi concludes that the devaluation of human capital and the non-recognition of their foreign credentials is an obstacle to maximizing their human potential in their new home.

Wilkinson, Othman, Veisman, Wong and Ogoe conclude that more resources and information are needed for Afghan refugees when it comes to securing settlement and newcomer services. The authors remind us that while Canada has welcomed many refugees over the years, it has also denied many others. With that in mind, the authors suggest it is important for the general public to learn more about the history of Afghanistan and the turbulent history of Afghanistan leading many to come to Canada. The authors recommend that further research is needed into the interprovincial migration of newcomers and the reasons that lead them to leave their original destination. This, so as to contribute to understanding the resources Afghan refugees might need upon arrival and most importantly, aid with affordable housing and sustainable employment, and the reasons that lead them to leave their original destination.

Gina Csanyi-Robah reminds us of the continued challenges that some communities have in overcoming racism when it comes to refugee admission in her essay looking at the experience of

Roma refugees from Europe that sought asylum in Canada between 1990 and 2013. She documents her own personal efforts to sensitize Canadian officials to the discriminatory attitudes and practices and expresses the hope that the Roma community be able to live without the shadow of negative “Gypsy” stereotypes and systemic discrimination and the importance of addressing injustices and eliminating racism that continues to confront the Roma.

I conclude with an essay that looks at the evolving numbers of refugees admitted by Canada and the United States over the course of the twenty-first century. From 2000 to 2017 the US admitted considerably more refugees than Canada did (though certainly not on a per capita basis). But since 2018 refugees admitted by Canada exceeded those admitted south of the border (with the exception

of 2020 with admission numbers affected by the pandemic). The Biden administration has not meaningfully reversed the steep declines in refugee numbers enacted under the Trump administration and this is despite President Biden’s much higher annual targets. The inability to reconcile admission numbers with targets is widely attributed to the decline in support for the organizational capacity/infrastructure needed to receive refugees south of the border. That does not appear to be the situation where the refugee resettlement sector remains robust.

Our thanks from the Association for Canadian Studies and the Metropolis Institute for the many excellent contributions to this issue (save my own) which provide considerable opportunity for reflection about the past and the future when it comes to refugee admission and resettlement.



# POST-WAR DISPLACEMENT, CANADA, THE US AND THE EMERGENCE OF THE GENEVA CONVENTION: A BRIEF HISTORY

JACK JEDWAB

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Jack Jedwab is the President of the Association for Canadian Studies and the Metropolis Institute. Holding a PhD in Canadian History from Concordia University, he taught at Université du Québec à Montréal and McGill University. He has taught courses on the history of immigration in Quebec, on ethnic minorities in Quebec, on official language minorities in Canada and on sport in Canada. He has also authored essays for books, journals and newspapers across the country, in addition to being the author of various publications and government reports on issues of immigration, multiculturalism, human rights and official languages.

## INTRODUCTION

Understanding the global movement of refugees and displaced persons in the second half of the twentieth century requires knowledge of the decisions taken by world leaders in the aftermath of the Second World War. It also entails some comprehension of the post-war migration of survivors of the Holocaust as their circumstances contributed to considerable reflection amongst international agencies tasked with the resettlement of displaced persons. That which follows will examine how the displacement of persons in the post-war period informed the articulation and ratification of migrant's rights leading up to the adoption of the 1951 Geneva Convention on Refugees.

## DISPLACED PERSONS

By the close of the Second World War there were millions of persons that had been removed from their homelands and brought to Germany by the Nazi regime. While some six million people returned to their native countries after the War there remained an estimated 1.5 to 2 million that did not do so. Amongst them, some one quarter of a million were survivors of the Holocaust largely from Central and Eastern Europe. Although liberation from the death camps brought freedom to those persecuted and imprisoned by the Nazis, it was also a time of confusion and difficulty. For the most part, the Holocaust survivors felt they had little motivation to return home, and no one to return to, as with very few exceptions they lost

**“ Although liberation from the death camps brought freedom to those persecuted and imprisoned by the Nazis, it was also a time of confusion and difficulty.”**

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their friends, families and communities. Also, a return to what were once their ‘home’ towns risked encounters with hostile local populations.

By consequence, many of the Holocaust survivors were designated as displaced persons, (DP’s) and resided in camps that were run by the United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation agency (UNRRA) and the IRO (International Refugee Organization). These DP camps were intended to provide temporary accommodations aimed at caring for survivors by offering shelter and food and this included others that were uprooted by the war.

Initially, all DP’s (which included military personnel, concentration camp survivors, prisoners of war and slave laborers) were grouped together in the camps according to nationality. This meant that some Jewish survivors found themselves in camps alongside their former oppressors, simply because they both happened to be from the same country.

United States President Harry Truman appointed Earl Harrison, to inquire into the conditions and needs of persons in the DP camps with particular attention directed at the Jewish refugees that might be stateless or non-repatriable. The Harrison Report (1945) pointed out that many Jewish DP’s were living under guard behind barbed-wire fences in what were formerly some of the most notorious

concentration camps. Too often they had no clothing other than their concentration camp garb. Harrison regarded the treatment of the Jews as appalling. The report recommended the creation of separate camps for Jewish DPs to address their specific needs (in December 1945, the British zone of Germany also created separate camps for Jewish DPs, recognizing their special needs as a result of their traumatic experiences).

## **DISPLACED PERSONS: THE RESPONSE OF THE UNITED STATES AND CANADA**

### **UNITED STATES**

At the end of World War II, Jews comprised two percent of Germany’s “displaced persons”. By 1947, however, some 20% of DPs were Jewish. Nasaw (2020) points out that the world was finding work permits and resident status for Europe’s refugees but many of the Holocaust survivors constituted an exception. In 1948, then United States President Harry Truman and the American Congress adopted the Displaced Persons Act. The legislation enabled European refugees to enter the US as permanent residents – unless they arrived at a DP camp after December 1945. The latter provision effectively prohibited nearly all Holocaust survivors from coming to the United States. Truman recognized the inherent biases underlying Congress’ supposedly generous act. In an address to the American people regarding the legislation, Truman denounced its blatant discrimination and xenophobic undertones. Nasaw (2020) described it as a “...shameful moment in our [America’s] history”.

### **CANADA**

In 1939, some 907 Jewish refugees aboard the MS St. Louis were denied entry to Canada and

had to return to Europe, where many later died in the Holocaust. This was viewed by some historians as an indicator of our lack of readiness to accept refugees. But others have argued that the more likely cause was deep-rooted anti-Semitism (Government of Canada, 2016). In the post war period this antipathy persisted and during the middle of 1946 given the negative state of public opinion towards immigration, the possibility of DP's emigrating to Canada seemed remote.

**“ Canada eventually became one of the major countries receiving DP's and by the end of 1951 an estimated 157 000 settled in the country. ”**

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Still, the early post war reticence to admit the DP's gave way owing to a rapidly growing demand for workers in the post-War period. Thus, in spite of considerable domestic opposition, the country's Prime Minister Mackenzie King issued emergency orders to bring DP's to Canada. In March 1947 two Canadian resettlement teams were present in the DP camps and the first DP's sailed for Canada in the following month. Canada eventually became one of the major countries receiving DP's and by the end of 1951 an estimated 157 000 settled in the country.

### **INTERNATIONAL ENGAGEMENT ON DISPLACED PERSONS**

While the United States and Canada ended up amongst the two largest recipients of Europe's displaced persons, it became apparent that a broader

international strategy was required to address issues of displacement and statelessness. The issue of statelessness arose from modifications to national citizenship legislation that emerged during the Second World War.

The problem of statelessness after World War II was especially acute and demanded international attention. An amendment to Germany's citizenship law that in 1941 deprived all Jews who had taken residence abroad—several hundred thousand—of their citizenship. This occurred regardless of whether they had been forced out of the country by deportation or had chosen to leave voluntarily. By 1948, some 3 percent, or some 10,000 out of 280,000 displaced persons living in Germany, were stateless. Until a law concerning the legal status as homeless foreigners was passed in April 1951, these DPs were defined as stateless foreigners under the auspices of the United Nations High Commissioner of Refugees.

**“ The problem of statelessness after World War II was especially acute and demanded international attention. ”**

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### **A CANADIAN CHAMPION FOR THE RIGHTS OF MIGRANTS**

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights clearly states that “everyone has the right to a nationality” and that “no-one shall be arbitrarily deprived of his nationality.” As the first Director of the United Nations Division of Human Rights, Canadian John P. Humphrey was responsible for drafting the 1948

UN's Universal Declaration of Human Rights. In his memoirs, Humphrey (1983) observed that: "...no article in the Declaration has been more criticized than Article 14, which says that everyone has the right 'to seek and to enjoy' asylum from persecution. This gives no right to asylum but only a right to enjoy it once it has been granted. It was probably too much to expect that governments would give up their discretionary power under international law to refuse to allow foreigners to enter their territories." Ultimately Humphrey admittedly side-tracked the issue saying merely that 'every state shall have the right to grant asylum to political refugees,' a right which was already recognized by international law.

### **THE 1951 CONVENTION ON THE STATUS OF REFUGEES**

At the universal level, the most comprehensive legally binding international instrument, defining standards for the treatment of refugees, is the United Nations Convention relating to the Status of Refugees adopted in July 1951. This Convention was adopted at a time when the refugee problems confronting the international community were mainly those of refugees of European origin. It was for this reason that the Convention contained a deadline which limited its application to the then known groups of refugees, i.e. persons who had become refugees as a result of events occurring before 1st January 1951. Humphrey (1983) notes that the 1951 Convention on the Status of Refugees says that persons entitled to seek asylum are not to be rejected at the frontier, expelled to or made to return to the countries from which they have fled, if this would have exposed them to persecution.

**“ Despite the horrific tragedy that many displaced persons experienced during the second World War, many democracies remained reticent to admit them into their countries and this despite growing awareness in the post-War period of what the victims endured.”**

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At the time of its creation, the 1951 Refugee Convention was the most comprehensive codification of the international rights of refugees. The 1951 Refugee Convention legally recognized—for the first time—refugees in the region based on their experience of displacement, rather than their country of origin. However, the Convention was originally limited in scope to persons fleeing persecution in Europe. The Convention is no longer the only international protection regime for refugees, but it established an important moral and legal precedent in global refugee response. It also continues to serve as a reference point for refugee rights agreements around the world.

### **CONCLUSION**

In his book “DP’s: Europe’s Displaced Persons, 1945-1951” Mark Wyman (1998) notes that the sweep of postwar refugee flows began with East Europeans’ refusal to return to their ‘former ‘home’ countries. He maintains that displaced persons of the post-World War II years were caught up inextricably in politics. Despite the horrific tragedy that many displaced persons experienced

during the second World War, many democracies remained reticent to admit them into their countries and this despite growing awareness in the post-War period of what the victims endured. This was also true for Canada. Nonetheless, the arrival of displaced persons in the late 1940's ended up

constituting the largest group of twentieth century refugees to come to the country. Their arrival helped sensitize many Canadians to the plight of stateless peoples and ultimately marked a notable chapter in the nation's immigration history.

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# WHAT HAS HUMAN RIGHTS DISCOURSE MEANT TO CANADIAN IMMIGRATION AND REFUGEE POLICY?

STEPHANIE BANGARTH

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*“Ever since the war, efforts have been made by groups and individuals to get refugees into Canada but we have fought all along to protect ourselves against the admission of such stateless persons without passports, for the reason that coming out of the maelstrom of war, some of them are liable to go on the rocks and when they become public charges, we have to keep them for the balance of their lives.”*  
– F.C. Blair, Director, Immigration Branch, 1938

*“As human beings we should do our best to provide as much sanctuary as we can for those people who can get away. I say we should do that because these people are human and deserve that consideration, and because we are human and ought to act in that way.”* – Stanley Knowles, MP, House of Commons, 9 July 1943

Separated by a mere five years, these two statements reveal much about the historic contradictions of the Canadian approach in dealing with

**“ Make no mistake, the selection criteria were guided by racial and political bias, along with a heavy dose of economic self-interest.”**

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refugee crises. In fact, remove the dates and these statements would not seem out of place in the current Canadian divide over the global refugee crisis in which there are more than 60 million refugees fleeing war, persecution, and danger. This is a number that surpasses the number of displaced persons at the end of the Second World War, when 120,000+ refugees made their way to Canada between 1947 and 1953 thanks to contract labour schemes or government, family or church group sponsorships. Make no mistake, the selection criteria were guided by racial and political bias, along with a heavy dose of economic self-interest.

Of all the elements of Canada's immigration policy, those relating to the admission of refugees have been the most controversial and the most criticized. But for much of Canadian immigration history, neither politicians nor public officials made any distinction between immigrants and refugees. It was not until the passage of the 1976 *Immigration Act* that refugees constituted an admissible class for resettlement. Until that time, special refugee admission schemes were made possible only with the passage of orders-in-council which suspended normal immigration regulations and permitted relaxed criteria for screening. Ministerial permits also achieved the same thing. As a result, in the post-WWII period, Canada would see refugees arrive from around the world, such as 165,000 Eastern European displaced persons, 38,000 Hungarian 1956 refugees, 11,000 Czechs and Slovaks in 1968, 7,000 Uganda Asians in the early 1970s and over 6,000 Chileans in the period from 1973–1976.

This paper proposes to explore the ways in which concerned citizens approached the state to argue for humane, more open, and fair reform to discriminatory and selective immigration policy. I'm going to feature two case studies: the reception of Hungarian refugees over the course of late 1956

**“ This paper proposes to explore the ways in which concerned citizens approached the state to argue for humane, more open, and fair reform to discriminatory and selective immigration policy.”**

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and 1957 and the reception of Chilean refugees from 1973 to 1976. It will highlight how concerned Canadians lobbied the state to live up to human rights ideals and modify discriminatory immigration policy in post-WWII Canada. While the Hungarian refugees were fleeing a Communist state and welcomed as refugees seeking democracy, Chilean refugees fleeing a fascist state were viewed with suspicion. To varying degrees, these cases highlight how citizen activism around immigration issues evolved over the course of the mid-20th century, and how the state and social justice ideals clashed then as they do now.

With the first news of the Hungarian revolution in Canada in early November 1956, Prime Minister Louis St. Laurent and his cabinet met to determine the nature of Canadian relief efforts. It was clear that, according to one of many memoranda on the subject, those in attendance were aware that “unless the West gives some expression of its solidarity with and sympathy for the Hungarians, we will have lost the last remnants of our prestige in all of Eastern Europe.”<sup>1</sup> To that end, the prime minister and his cabinet considered their options, chief among which was the idea of giving monetary aid that would be administered by the Canadian Red Cross (CRC) for aid to refugees outside of Hungary. A grant of \$100,000 to the CRC was subsequently approved at the meeting, representing one of the first transnational links in the early stages of the Hungarian refugee crisis. Later, Lester B. Pearson, Secretary of State for External Affairs, recommended an additional offer of \$800,000 to be made available to the CRC to provide relief including, “to the extent practical and economical, of appropriate supplies of Canadian origin.” In his lengthy memo to Cabinet, Pearson justified

the increase in monetary aid to the CRC by noting the importance of aid from Western countries “on humanitarian as well as political grounds,” and noted that providing substantial emergency relief would serve as a replacement for military intervention.<sup>2</sup>

Shortly thereafter, the Minister of Immigration, J. W. Pickersgill, met with ethnic organizations representing not only Hungarian groups, but also individuals from other Eastern European countries. Days later at a meeting hosted by the International Institute of Metropolitan Toronto, Department of Citizenship and Immigration officials met again with the Canadian-Hungarian Federation, and also with church, voluntary, and social groups. Another meeting took place on 22 November with representatives from many of the same organizations. What emerged from these meetings is a clear indication of the shared goals between the federal government and voluntary organizations, initially that all parties were interested in securing adequate reception for Hungarian refugees.<sup>3</sup>

Historically, such cooperation between voluntary agencies and the state on matters relating to refugee and immigration reception was not uncommon, especially in the immediate post-war period, for reasons that were mutually beneficial. In the early days of the refugee crisis, the CRC engaged in its customary fundraising initiatives when faced with a humanitarian emergency. The Canadian Red Cross Hungarian Relief Fund, launched in cooperation with the Canadian Hungarian Federation, eventually raised over \$500,000 from citizen Canadians for relief in Hungary.<sup>4</sup>

In response to pressure from within and without

government circles on 26 November in the House of Commons Pickersgill went much further in committing his government to the reception of Hungarian refugees. In a speech that has been referred to as the “Magna Carta for the movement of Hungarian refugees,” Pickersgill reiterated his government’s commitment in giving priority to applications from Hungarian refugees, that any responsible individual or organization in Canada was free to sponsor immigrants, that arrangements would be made for those refugees requiring medical treatment, and that refugees would be given assisted passage to Canada.<sup>5</sup>

That this was an overwhelmingly positive refugee crisis situation is clear. Over the course of the period from 1956–1958, some 38,000 refugees from Hungary made their way to Canada. Gerald Dirks has noted that “the unqualified success of the Hungarian resettlement program for Canada acted as a useful precedent when in subsequent years, individuals and groups urged the Government to embark upon other humanitarian schemes aimed at relieving the plight of a portion of the world’s refugees.”<sup>6</sup>

Fast-forward some 20 years later and in 1973 over 7,000 Chilean and other Latin American refugees were admitted to Canada after the violent overthrow of Salvador Allende’s democratically elected Socialist-Communist government. Chilean and non-Chilean supporters of the old regime then fled the oppression directed against them by Chile’s new military ruler, General Pinochet, in the wake of the coup. Although Canada took the refugees in, it did so grudgingly—at least initially. Despite pressure from Amnesty International, church, labour, and Latino groups, the government was



slow to react, not wanting to antagonize Chile's new administration and the United States, which had condemned Chile's slide into economic chaos under Allende.

In the aftermath of the 1973 *coup d'état* Canadians, especially members of the Protestant and Catholic Churches of Canada, called on the Canadian government to denounce the human rights abuses and grant asylum to Chilean refugees located both inside Chile and in neighbouring Argentina. Robert Andras, the Minister of Immigration and External Affairs Minister Mitchell Sharp remained reluctant to do so. At the urging of Canadian Ambassador to Chile Andrew Ross, the Canadian government recognized the Pinochet junta on September 29, 1973, on the ground that it was the only authority in the country. This decision was not well received by refugee advocates.<sup>7</sup> Many, including the churches, questioned whether the Canadian government was displeased to see the Allende government fall. For their part, Andras and Sharp feared that among the refugees were terrorists, communists, and other subversives. Only after considerable outcry from various civil society groups did they go back on this position and begin the process by which Canada would take in more than 4,500 Chilean refugees by the end of 1976.

Concern for the refugees was receiving little traction in Parliament by the governing Liberal Party, so conversations about a fact-finding mission to Chile began in the spring of 1976. The Inter-Church Committee on Chile agreed to sponsor a fact-finding visit by three Canadian Members of Parliament to the three countries of the so-called southern cone of Latin America. Several other Canadian organizations, including Amnesty

International, Oxfam Canada and the Canadian Catholic Organization for Development and Peace supported the effort. The purpose of their mission was two-fold: to undertake an observation and evaluation of the situation of refugees and Canadian response to their needs; and to observe the general situation of human rights in the countries visited.

The federal government painted the Chilean refugees as subversives and dangerous to Canada. This was certainly out-of-step with the views of the Canadian population, many of whom by way of various organizations were urging the government to accept the refugees, as they had done in the past in other crises. The government was also out-of-step with the efforts of other nations, including Holland and Sweden, who were treating the Chilean refugees outside the normal flow of immigrants. For their part, the three MPs recommended in their report that standards for the definition and admission of refugees be clearly set out in legislation or at least in explicit regulations. Along with their report's recommendation that a separate and suitable application form for refugees be prepared, the MPs recommended that all UN accredited refugees be considered as refugees for the purposes of Canadian immigration. As of the report's publication in November 1976, while Canada accepted the United Nation's definition of a refugee, it did not accept the UN determination or assessment of who is a bona fide refugee. Indeed, Canadian immigration officers were known to reject a high number of refugees registered by the UNHCR.<sup>8</sup>

That there was considerable friction between NGOs, church groups and refugee organizations and the federal government is clear in the case of

the Chilean refugees. Numerous agencies called for the UN Protocol definition of refugees to be incorporated into the new act. Many hoped that this would prevent a repetition of Canada's unresponsive attitude to the Chilean refugee crisis. It must be stated that this positive reaction was not unanimous. The January 14, 1974 edition of the *Toronto Star* carried a story and photo of a small group of demonstrators parading in front of the Walker House Hotel where a group of recently arrived Chileans were being temporarily housed. Carrying placards bearing statements such as "Death to the Red Pest", "No More Marxists - FLQ was enough", and "Keep Marxist Gangsters Out of Canada", they claimed to be "objecting to Canadian tax money being spent on 'riff raff'".

As can be seen with the Chilean refugee situation, and perhaps not surprisingly, the relationship between the voluntary agencies and federal government was never quite the same after the Hungarian crisis. In the decades that followed, many of the organizations cited herein have remained heavily involved in the resettlement process; however, they have increasingly taken on the role of opponent, rather than partner. If nothing else, it proved that the combination of international and national pressure could lead, at least under certain circumstances, to more humane Canadian immigration and refugee policies, even if only temporarily.

On the other hand, advocates of the Chilean refugees were not pleased with Ottawa's handling of the crisis. The slow response led many to become increasingly suspicious of Ottawa's commitment to refugees. The response to the crisis helped to foster the perception that the federal government was

**“ We let fear and racism guide us for much of our history dealing with immigration but eventually campaigns that featured social justice and human rights principles prompted change.”**

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far more willing to accommodate refugees fleeing communist regimes on the left than those escaping fascist regimes on the right. This was made abundantly clear by the late 1970s, as Canada's response to the boat people of Vietnam fleeing a leftist government was in significantly marked contrast to that which was extended and continued to be extended to victims of right-wing regimes such as that in Chile.

We let fear and racism guide us for much of our history dealing with immigration but eventually campaigns that featured social justice and human rights principles prompted change. We, both the federal government and the Canadian people, didn't let fear guide us when we accepted 38,000 Hungarians in the mid-1950s. Concerns over potential Communist sympathies (remember that this was the height of the Cold War) were overridden by Canadians' enthusiasm to help these refugees. Fear and security issues emerged as an impediment in the case of Chilean refugees in the 1970s, which would again place the federal government in opposition to Canadian supporters.

Does history repeat itself? The Canadian government's approach to Afghan refugees versus refugees from Ukraine seem to indicate so. Not unlike the Chilean refugees, Afghan refugees are subject to significant degrees of security scrutiny and

delays, while Ukrainian refugees do not experience those multiple layers of inspection. Some Afghans, particularly those who served or supported the Canadian forces, believe something is amiss. Four men who deployed with the Canadian military in Afghanistan filed a complaint with the Canadian

Human Rights Tribunal, accusing the federal government of discrimination over the difference between immigration programs for Afghans and Ukrainians, both trying to flee violence and persecution in their home countries.<sup>9</sup>

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## WORLD REFUGEE YEAR: THE CANADIAN RESPONSE

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In late 1958 the United Nations General Assembly declared that 1959-60 would be recognized as World Refugee Year (WRY). While this came a decade after the height of the 'influx' of the post-Second World War movement of refugees and displaced persons, it was initiated to deal with a lingering population of refugees in Europe, and new crises of displacement emerging in Asia, the Middle East, and North Africa. During the years 1947 through 1962, Canada admitted a quarter of a million refugees and displaced persons, half of which arrived between 1946 and 1951.<sup>1</sup> Yet, Canada's responsibility to contribute to a global crisis was not over.

The Canadian Committee for World Refugee Year (CCWRY) was established in 1959 and directed by Muriel Jacobson, a woman with extensive international experience related to refugees and displaced persons.<sup>2</sup> The objectives of the Committee were public education—"to focus attention on the

refugee problem and to promote among the people of Canada a sympathetic interest in the plight of refugees throughout the world"—and to raise funds to support the work of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) to clear the remaining refugee camps of Europe, and to support the integration or resettlement of those refugees as well as many more in other parts of the world.

There is limited public awareness of the special Year, other than Canada's decision to admit 300 refugees with tuberculosis, an illness that at the time prohibited admission, as well as 526 family members.<sup>3</sup> The conversation among Canadians about World Refugee Year reveals a reluctant federal government, a broadly democratic national endeavor directed, in essence, by one woman, and a grassroots movement of civil society actors committed to improve the lot of the world's stateless and homeless.

**“What is remarkable about World Refugee Year in Canada is its role as a forerunner for civil society engagement in refugee issues, including private sponsorship, a phenomenon that tends to be highlighted for the late 1970s and beyond.”**

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The CCWRY consisted of forty-five sponsoring organizations, including faith groups, ethnic associations, a diverse array of women’s groups, student groups, labour unions, and a range of NGOs. These groups cut across ideological lines and represented a notable collective of actors coming together in a common cause. What is remarkable about World Refugee Year in Canada is its role as a forerunner for civil society engagement in refugee issues, including private sponsorship, a phenomenon that tends to be highlighted for the late 1970s and beyond.

As part of its publicity efforts, the CCWRY called on people to “Remember” that there remained homeless and desperate refugees in Europe. Its appeal was poetic and emotional, as was much of the rhetoric around World Refugee Year generally. The effort appealed to the charitable guilt—or to induce that guilt—of Canadians who were beginning to experience a postwar prosperity that allowed for the purchase of homes, modern household appliances, and vacations. Indeed, an editorial in the *Globe and Mail* proposed that “As one of the wealthiest and most respected nations in the world, Canada has a heavy obligation to take a leading part in this great humanitarian enterprise.”<sup>4</sup>

The educational component of WRY in Canada also included material demonstrating that “New Citizens are New Assets”<sup>5</sup> and offered stories of famous Canadians who were refugees.

In the spirit of identifying with the plight of refugees and to generate empathy, the CCWRY declared April 24-30, 1960 as “Austerity Week.” Canadians were encouraged to “Deny yourself something this week, and give what you save to WORLD REFUGEE YEAR... We can all do a LOT if we all do a LITTLE.”<sup>6</sup> Citizens were encouraged to put a collection box in “a prominent position” in their home during Austerity Week for all “positive acts of self-denial,” suggesting that “cigarettes, liquor, cinema and theatre tickets, dances and other entertainments, hairdresser and barbers, cream, sugar, chocolate” would provide the “principal opportunities for self-denial.”<sup>7</sup>

Along with education, fundraising was a significant aspect of WRY. One success that received international attention—called “Operation Eskimo”—was an auction of Inuit clothing, a harpoon, and soapstone carvings in Toronto on May 5, 1960 that generated 5,000 dollars. Peter Casson, the UNHCR representative in Canada, visited the “Eskimos” of Frobisher Bay Rehabilitation Centre in April 1960. Casson, who posed for photos with Inuit artists and children in traditional dress, said he was “sick of begging across Canada” and felt that “An Arctic setting...would give a sense of colour and urgency to the plight of thousands of men, women, and children still rotting in camps.” Representing the Inuit, Abe Okpik said that the Eskimos “knew what it was to be in need of food and shelter for they had lacked them many times in the past.”<sup>8</sup>

The irony that First Nations also struggled with inadequate housing, healthcare, and education, and lacked food security, while being asked to help refugees, was not part of the news stories. Media coverage concluded that, “If the Eskimos, who live in a region devoid of any comforts as we know them, can take of their potential meager income to help the refugees, surely all Canadians in the south cannot afford to do less!”<sup>9</sup> The Inuit were described with condescension yet lauded for empathizing with refugees when other Canadians were falling short.

Other fundraising initiatives included ‘Border Crossing Pennies,’ whereby donation boxes were placed at Canada-US borders during the tourist season, so that travelers could understand the privilege of free borders. The sale of jar opening devices, as well as theatre productions and dinners—organized mainly by women—generated small amounts of money for the cause. Many Canadians sent in one to five dollars in order to “do something” to help the homeless in the world. The donation of meal sales by Chinese restaurants in Toronto was another initiative that echoes present-day localized efforts on behalf of Ukrainian refugees.

A third important outcome, along with education and fundraising, though not initially part of the CCWRY’s mandate, was the private sponsorship of refugees, representing a fundamental willingness on the part of some citizens, to open Canada’s doors. Residents of the Orchard Heights neighbourhood of Port Credit, Ontario became the first private sponsor of a European refugee family of five from Yugoslavia. Led by TV personality Fred Davis and his wife Jo Davis, Orchard Heights was willing to sponsor a refugee family regardless of

“occupation, religion, or nationality,” and stepped up with school children collecting vitamins and kitchen gadgets, a local physician and dentist offering free services, and food donated by the neighbourhood grocery store. There were many bureaucratic delays in the process, prompting writer Pierre Berton to point out that the Orchard Heights group would take “any family” but that restrictive government regulations forced them to make choices about family size, occupation, and religious affiliation. In the end, the Orchard Heights example of community action spread until thirteen groups across Canada had sponsored seventeen families comprising seventy persons.<sup>10</sup>

Although critique of government policy was not an expressed purpose of WYR, this did emerge. For example, the *Globe and Mail* offered a strong statement as WYR neared its end, saying, “As a nation, we are not accustomed to basing our national policies on humanitarian principles. Canada’s immigration policy, like nearly all immigration policies, is heavy on discrimination and light on considerations for social justice. It was formed solely to serve Canada’s immediate benefit. It was certainly not designed to help solve the refugee problem.” The admission of a large number of Hungarian refugees in 1956, it was argued, was done mainly to capitalize on a wave of anti-Communist feeling rather than genuine interest in helping refugees. What was needed, the writer suggested, was “a completely new policy based upon humanitarian values.”<sup>11</sup>

Was World Refugee Year a success in Canada? The financial impact was not substantial.<sup>12</sup> Yet, while opinion polls of the late 1950s showed 64 percent of Canadians were against increased immigration,

**“ While the small deeds of individuals in remote Canadian locales might seem as paltry as the government’s efforts on behalf of refugees, one shouldn’t underestimate the power, over the long term, of collective enthusiasm and action for a cause.**

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by March 1960, 61 percent approved the admission of certain ‘hard core’ refugees. Educational initiatives around WRY may have begun to drive a wedge into the racism that existed amongst Canadians towards non-white immigrants. Our understanding of the points system introduced to Canadian immigration regulations in the early 1960s—often lauded as a progressive end to race-based approaches—should be nuanced by our understanding of these years just prior. 1960 was

described as “the year Canada opened heart,” while less than two years later the press announced Canada’s large scale postwar immigration as officially over.

In her final report, Jacobson said “The first objective of the CCWRY—to create a favourable climate of public opinion on behalf of refugees—has been fulfilled in generous measure.”<sup>13</sup> While the small deeds of individuals in remote Canadian locales might seem as paltry as the government’s efforts on behalf of refugees, one shouldn’t underestimate the power, over the long term, of collective enthusiasm and action for a cause. Much of the collective good that emerged during WRY paved the way for broader civil society engagement in years to come. We can’t quite measure the direct impact of WRY in Canada’s future response to refugees, but it does provide a glimpse into a highly concentrated moment when Canadians were galvanized to think and act locally to support a global need.

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## A PERSPECTIVE ON JEWISH REFUGEES IN CANADA

IRA ROBINSON

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To properly understand the impact of refugees on the Jewish communities of Canada, we must begin by understanding what the term signifies. The United Nations Refugee Agency defines refugees as “people who have fled war, violence, conflict or persecution and have crossed an international border to find safety in another country.” We begin, therefore, by observing that a decided majority of Jewish Canadians today, though they have not themselves immigrated to Canada, are descended from immigrants who were “pushed” out of their country of birth by combinations of religious,

racial, and economic discrimination on the part of their home country, and were hoping to achieve legal and social equality, as well as economic opportunity, in Canada.

This was especially true for Jews originating in the pre-1917 Russian Empire, who faced legal discrimination, state-condoned violence, and much else. They were “refugees,” though they were not described with this term at the time of their arrival in Canada. It was this wave of Jewish immigrants at the turn of the twentieth century that gave the Canadian Jewish community its religious and cultural flavor as well as its historical memory.

**“It was this wave of Jewish immigrants at the turn of the twentieth century that gave the Canadian Jewish community its religious and cultural flavor as well as its historical memory.”**

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Refugees as we now understand them only became an issue facing Canada and the rest of the international community with the imposition of passport and visa regulations during World War I, followed by restrictions of immigration in the post-World War I period in the United States, Canada,

and elsewhere. All refugees from the upheavals of World War I and its chaotic aftermath in Eastern Europe seeking to come to Canada became a political problem for the Canadian government in several ways: French Canadian political leaders feared the diminution of their political power in the Dominion through increased immigration, which would only strengthen the demographic dominance of Anglo-Canada.

Canadian workers feared that immigrants would compete for their jobs. Jewish refugees wishing to settle in Canada faced, on top of the previous factors, endemic antisemitic prejudices in both French and English Canada that portrayed Jews as liable to utilize all means to destroy Canada's established (Christian) values and institutions through, for instance, their alleged prominence in the communist movement.

All these factors combined to make Canadian immigration authorities deaf, for the most part, to the incessant pleas of German Jews seeking to flee Nazi oppression in the 1930s to enter Canada. This governmental policy was summarized by the director of Canada's Immigration Branch, Frederick Blair, who, when asked how many Jews should be allowed to immigrate, responded "none is too many." This policy was strictly maintained despite intensive lobbying on the part of the Canadian Jewish community, represented by the Canadian Jewish Congress, seeking to open Canada's doors to increasingly desperate Jews.

These included hundreds of passengers on the German ship *St. Louis*, whose entry into Canada was denied, for which Prime Minister Justin Trudeau formally apologized on behalf of Canada

in 2018. Ironically, however, during World War II large numbers of German-Jewish refugees in England were incarcerated as enemy aliens and transported to Canadian prison camps, from which many of them were ultimately freed to make their home in Canada.

In the immediate post-World War II period, immigration of Jewish refugee survivors of the Holocaust to Canada turned out to be almost as strictly regulated as in the pre-war period. Those Jewish survivors who would or could not repatriate to their prewar homes, as Allied refugee policy initially dictated, remained in limbo as "Displaced Persons" in the Allied zones of Germany and Austria, since no country was willing to receive them in large numbers. This "limbo" lasted until after 1948, which not coincidentally marked the establishment of the State of Israel that accorded all Jews free immigration rights.

Only at that point did the United States, Canada, and other countries begin to modify their immigration policies in order to allow a significant migration of Jews. At that point, Canada, which still hesitated to declare itself open in principle to the entry of European Jewish refugees, nonetheless began to admit significant numbers of Jews under programs like the "tailor project" which succeeded in bringing several thousand Jewish immigrant to Canada, ostensibly to fill job openings in the Canadian garment industry.

The reception of approximately 40,000 survivors of the Holocaust by a Canadian Jewish community that had not seen significant Jewish immigration for over two decades left much to be desired. Survivors quickly learned that there

was little effort to understand their experience among Jews who had not undergone that experience. On the other hand, the influx of thousands of Holocaust survivors in Canada in the postwar period necessarily spurred the development of the major Canadian Jewish communities, particularly Montreal. Survivors and their issues also challenged the agencies of the Jewish community in Canada, especially the Canadian Jewish Congress and the Jewish Immigrant Aid Society, to work with greater effectiveness. This stood the community in good stead when new waves of Jewish refugees sought immigration to Canada. Jewish community organizations learned to work with the Canadian government with great effectiveness in order to deal with extremely sensitive issues relative to Jewish refugees and their complex and vulnerable situations.

The several thousand Jewish refugees who came to Canada after the Soviet suppression of the Hungarian Revolution in 1956–57 marked the beginnings of a shift in the Canadian government’s perspective on its refugee policy. The government ceased regulating immigration through orders-in-council, which had characterized the pre-World War II period. New parliamentary legislation, like the 1976 *Immigration Act* marked Canada’s new openness to immigration on a wider scale and from non-European countries.

Beyond the Hungarian Jewish refugees, the late 1950s and 1960s also saw major cohorts of Jewish immigrants to Canada fleeing the Arab world because of its violent reaction to the establishment of the State of Israel. This reaction in the Arab world undermined the security and the confidence of Jewish communities in the Middle

East and North Africa, and Jews began arriving in Canada from countries like Iraq and Morocco. While these Jews did not enter Canada as refugees in any formal sense, their experience was similar to that of other refugees of the era. Indeed, many of the Jewish immigrants from Arab countries to Canada came to consider themselves as refugees and the Canadian government, under Prime Minister Stephen Harper, ultimately granted them recognition as refugees in 2014. Social and political developments in South Africa contributed as well to the arrival of a significant number of South African Jews in Canada.

In 1982, scholars Irving Abella and Harold Troper published an influential book on Canada’s treatment of Jews seeking to immigrate to Canada in the 1930s and 40s entitled *None Is Too Many: Canada and the Jews of Europe, 1933–1948*. What is remarkable is that this was a scholarly book whose influence went far beyond the academic world and became a factor of some importance in Canadian discussions of policies toward refugees as well as in the actual formulation of government policy. The phrase “none is too many” became a symbol of a wrongheaded Canadian policy and, according to Abella, constituted “an ethical yardstick against which contemporaneous government policies are gauged.”

Jews from the Former Soviet Union began arriving in Canada in large numbers in the 1990s. Their arrival in Canada was an extremely complicated process because the Soviet Union had formally agreed to the “repatriation” of these Jews to Israel, and not to other countries. Israel for its part was not happy with the reality that a significant number of Jewish emigrants from the Former Soviet

Union preferred living somewhere other than the State of Israel.

This Israeli sensitivity was further aroused by the fact that hundreds of Jews from the Former Soviet Union, who had lived in Israel for a time but were not considered “Jewish” according to Israeli law, claimed refugee status in Canada on the grounds of persecution in Israel as “non-Jews.” Their argument before Canadian refugee tribunals was successful

**“It is clear that immigration of Jewish refugees to Canada is an important part of the multifaceted Canadian Jewish story.”**

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in a number of cases, particularly in Quebec, and was the subject of a diplomatic exchange between Israel and Canada, in which Israel objected to its designation as a “refugee-producing country.”

It is clear that immigration of Jewish refugees to Canada is an important part of the multifaceted Canadian Jewish story. This immigration reflects as well the evolution of Canadian immigration and refugee policy in the past century. Finally, we must understand that the arrival of multiple waves of Jewish refugees in Canada significantly influenced the way that the Jewish communities of Canada understand themselves and their world.

*Note: This article was enriched through conversations with Rivka Augenfeld and Sean Remz. Any errors in this article remain my responsibility.*

# EFFECTS OF POSTWAR IMMIGRATION SELECTION POLICY ON ETHNOCULTURAL DIVERSITY IN CANADA

RAPHAEL GIRARD

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Raphael Girard joined what was then the Department of Citizenship and Immigration in 1963 and moved to External Affairs in 1981. Over the span of 40 years in the Canadian foreign service he specialized in refugee and immigration issues, leading the task force on refugee determination which developed legislation that continues to form the basis of Canada's approach to the protection of persons claiming asylum.

*The following article is sourced from the Canadian Immigration Historical Society (CIHR) Bulletin, March 2021, Issue #96.*

In Canada's 2016 census data, 7,674,585 people identified themselves as members of a visible minority group. They represented 22.3 percent of the total population. Of these visible minorities, almost 70 percent were born outside the country and came to live in Canada as immigrants.

Contrast this with what prevailed when I joined the Department of Citizenship and Immigration in 1963. Results of the 1961 census show that only 1.33 percent of the non-aboriginal population in Canada consisted of members of visible minority groups. People of British origin dominated, while those coming from continental Europe were close behind.

No one disputes the fact that the most important contributor to the growth in ethnocultural diversity in Canada has been and remains the immigration

program. My intention is to demonstrate how the transformation of the face of Canada was a direct result of the way the immigration program was managed, rather than of a deliberate choice by governments. Surprisingly there was very little legislation and even fewer parliamentary debates behind this dramatic demographic shift. Two key changes in immigration regulations created the legal framework and were followed by vigorous implementation by public servants within the immigration program. This combination was the primary driver that created the Canada we see today, which will continue to become more diverse into the future. This is a situation where the plumbing (program delivery) was at least equal to, if not more important than, the poetry (policy).

In the years after the Second World War, immigration policy was controversial. Within the federal

cabinet, the immigration portfolio was thought to be the graveyard of ministerial ambitions. Between 1910 and 1978 there was only one significant legislative change, and yet by 1978 the wheels had already been set in motion to transform the ethnocultural composition of Canadian society. The questions are: how did that happen, and who was responsible?

During my 34 years in the immigration program, the last 10 of which were in senior management, bureaucrats had a remarkably free hand in shaping how and where immigration services were dispensed to the world at large. In most cases, rather than directing the department, ministers looked to it for guidance in dealing with the enormous pressures flowing from the immigration program and its multiple facets. There were exceptions—Robert Andras, Lloyd Axworthy, Flora MacDonald, Barbara MacDougall, and Sergio Marchi—but by and large ministers looked to the department for advice rather than imposing their vision on it.

I joined the immigration department in September 1963 shortly after graduating from the University of British Columbia. I left as assistant deputy minister of Operations in August 1997 to accept an appointment as ambassador to Yugoslavia. That period coincided with the program's transformation. I do not pretend that I had a major influence on the changes that made Canada a much more diverse and tolerant society than the one I grew up in, but I influenced some of the improvements that were made in policy and program delivery, and I was certainly a witness to the rest.

The numbers tell the story. In 1963, immigration to Canada was still primarily European—a pattern

that began in colonial times and continued into the immediate postwar years, when much of western Europe was in ruins from the effects of World War II.

Statistics for that year show that Canada welcomed 74,586 immigrants and the top five source countries were Great Britain, the United States, Italy, Germany, and Portugal. Statistics for 1997, by contrast, show a transformation in sources and ethnic composition: the top five source countries were China, India, Taiwan, Sri Lanka, and the Philippines, in a movement in excess of 216,000 immigrants.

European migration, which had accounted for more than 80 percent of the immigration flow in 1963, was reduced to 17 percent by 1997, while Asia, Africa, and the Middle East accounted for almost 68.5 percent—an almost complete inversion of the immediate postwar pattern.

How did this transformation happen? While there was waning interest in immigration to Canada among Europeans once the postwar economic miracle took root in Europe by the early 1970s, it was not just a matter of replacing Europeans with more numerous candidates from elsewhere. There were a number of other factors.

In 1963, immigrant selection was governed by the *Immigration Act* of 1952, which had been authored by Jack Pickersgill. It delegated authority to the government to decide, more or less at its discretion, who could be admitted for permanent residence. There were no classes of immigrants mentioned in that Act. The basic test for a person to be accepted as an immigrant was the ability to establish successfully. The 1952 Act did little to change the

direction implicit in the *Immigration Act* of 1910, but it did provide a ministerial override on decisions by immigration officers to circumscribe concerns about their arbitrary decision making.

The regulations that followed the 1952 Act preserved preference for British subjects from the old Commonwealth and for citizens of countries in continental Europe. Curiously, it also included Egypt, Israel, Lebanon, and Turkey among preferred sources. Pickersgill was the minister behind Prime Minister Mackenzie King's speeches that supported the need for immigration but insisted that it should not change the character of the country. Application forms and landing records from that era still contained references to the holder's religion and ethnicity, although by 1963 these were no longer formal selection factors.

The 1952 Act also maintained a number of long-standing clauses that, by the time I started my career in immigration, were already considered anachronisms by my peers and more experienced colleagues. The prohibited classes barred homosexuals (who were lumped in with pimps and prostitutes); it excluded people who were public charges or unable to settle in Canada; and it prohibited the entry of people labeled as idiots, imbeciles, and morons. Immigrant selection could be arbitrarily denied to individuals based on their inability to adapt to Canada's climate or culture, which was seen as shorthand for a colour bar. Similarly, immigration could be denied based on the individual's habits with regard to the ownership of property, which excluded communal religious groups such as Hutterites and Doukhobors. The Act proudly proclaimed that decisions taken under the *Immigration Act* were not reviewable by any court.

Through the 1950s, Canada opened more widely to the world as it industrialized and developed a national identity. Canada became an active player in the United Nations system and a leader in the Commonwealth. The election of the Progressive Conservatives in 1957 provided an impetus for human rights reform, both domestically and in immigration policy. The proclamation of the Canadian Bill of Rights in 1960 made it virtually impossible to continue to pursue an immigration policy consisting of preferred sources selected on the basis of race and ethnicity.

Initial Conservative government attempts to bring about an ambitious reform of the *Immigration Act* ran into difficulty almost immediately. In 1957, thanks to the Hungarian Revolution and Suez debacle, more than 250,000 immigrants came to Canada, the second-largest number since the turn of the century. With the economy in recession and poorly skilled people from southern Europe outpacing British immigration year after year, the federal government felt pressure from Ontario to slow things down. A planned change to limit sponsorship rights to curb unskilled migration was shelved rather quickly after a bitter and well-organized campaign by Italian and other southern Mediterranean communities in southwest Ontario. Instead, the government resorted to less transparent administrative restraints while it searched for a means to increase the skill requirements for new immigrants.

The first woman appointed to the Diefenbaker cabinet, Ellen Fairclough, was named Minister of Citizenship and Immigration and counseled to avoid parliamentary debate on immigration reform. She settled instead for a change in the immigration

regulations in 1962. For the first time, anyone, anywhere in the world could qualify to immigrate to Canada if they could prove they had the skills and the means to establish successfully without assistance from government or family. I regard this as less an attempt to universalize access to Canada and broaden the number of source countries than an attempt to inject more skill content into the immigration flow to curb the flow of unskilled southern Europeans.

Even after 1962, for many who wanted to immigrate to Canada the opportunity remained largely theoretical. Entire regions had no access to selection because everyone who wanted to settle in this country had to apply for and receive an immigrant visa before travelling to Canada. There was a mandatory personal interview with a visa officer as well as medical and other tests. The network of visa offices was biased toward the old policy, and there were no plans to change it substantially. Fully 23 of the 30 visa offices Canada operated abroad were in Europe, while there were only two in Asia, two in the Middle East, and one in Africa. Americans could simply present themselves at any border station to be assessed for immigration.

The 1962 regulations also perpetuated some of the discriminatory provisions of the 1952 regulations. All Canadians had the right to sponsor immediate family living abroad, but only Canadians from Europe and the four eastern Mediterranean countries named above could sponsor extended family members. The 1962 regulations also retained the miniscule quotas on total immigration from the Indian subcontinent.

The watershed for fundamental change came in

1966–1967. The reform package was preceded by a government policy paper (known as a “White Paper”). Both emphasized matching immigration to skill shortages and did not set out to make the immigration movement more diverse. The problem the paper sought to rectify was the continuing large-scale intake of sponsored immigrants with skills that did not correspond to labour market shortages. There was no public policy review or parliamentary debate, but the process did elicit a fair amount of reaction, mainly from ethnic communities that complained about the measures in the same way they had objected to the proposed restraints on extended family migration proposed in 1957.

What have become known as the regulation changes of 1967 occurred during the tenure of Jean Marchand, one of the “three wise men” brought into the cabinet from Quebec by Liberal Prime Minister Lester Pearson. My own view is that, although the changes certainly reflected the liberal attitudes of Marchand, they were very much a creature of his deputy minister, Tom Kent. Almost all of the reforms that Kent championed were achieved through changes to immigration regulations pursuant to the 1952 Act. Some minor changes in law were enacted in 1967, such as when the government enacted a separate piece of legislation to create the Immigration Appeal Board as a body independent from the department.

There remained an abiding reluctance to open up the Act to debate, given the uncertainty about Canadians’ attitudes on either side of the question. Government majorities in parliament were razor-thin through the period, and political strategists therefore avoided controversial issues. Amendments to the 1952 Act had been proposed



by the immigration department almost annually since the Act was first proclaimed to bring it into step with evolving practices and social values, yet political support for such changes was always found wanting.

The 1967 regulatory changes embodied five major principles:

1. Immigrant selection criteria were universally applicable. The last vestiges of discrimination by country of origin were swept away though regulation changes that made family class and extended family sponsorship available to everyone who had the means and reaffirmed that anyone who could establish successfully in Canada could apply and receive a decision.
2. A point rating system was introduced in order to standardize selection practices and remove the subjectivity that had plagued the system in the postwar years. Points were awarded on the basis of age, education, skill level, demand for the applicants' skills, linguistic competence in English and French, close family already established in Canada, arranged employment, labour market conditions in the area of destination, and personal assessment by the visa officer in charge of the application. The pass mark was initially 50 points, but over time it varied to produce more or less volume annually depending on Canada's general economic conditions.
3. Facilities would be created to accept applications from candidates in any country except those where security screening facilities were not available, such as countries in the

**IMMIGRATION SELECTION SYSTEM**  
 INFORMATION REFERENCE CARD FOR VISAS OFFICERS

	1967	1968	1969	1970
A. EDUCATION & TRAINING	30	20		
B. PERSONAL ASSESSMENT	15	15		
<b>OCCUPATIONAL DEMAND</b>				
C. * CHANGING DEMAND FOR OCCUPATION IN CANADA AND IN AREA OF ORIGIN	15	15		
D. OCCUPATIONAL SKILL	10	10		
E. AGE	10	10		
F. ARRANGED EMPLOYMENT OR DESIGNATED OCCUPATION			10	
G. LANGUAGE * ENGLISH - 5 * FRENCH - 5			10	
H. RELATIVE				5
I. AREA DEMAND				5
* APPROVED APPLICATION BY RELATIVE IN CANADA			25	10
TOTALS	100	100	100	100

**DECISIVE FACTORS ON PAPER SCREENING-NOMINATED & INDEPENDENT CASES**

Units of Assessment of Paper Screening	Occupational Demand	Valid Offer of Employment	Designated Result on Occupation Paper Screening	Priority
41 06 1005	YES	YES	YES	705
41 06 1005	5	NO	NO	545
41 06 1005	5	YES	NO	545
41 06 1005	5	NO	YES	545
41 06 1005	1 70 15	YES	NO	545
41 06 1005	1 70 15	NO	YES	545
41 06 1005	1 70 15	YES	YES	545
41 06 1005	1 70 15	NO	NO	4
41 06 1005	1 70 15	NO	YES	545

**GENERAL PRIORITY SYSTEM**

**PRIORITY 1** → Immediate Dependents  
**PRIORITY 2** → Entrepreneurs  
**PRIORITY 3** → All others on a "first-come, first-served" basis

**PRIORITY 4** → Independent Applicants, Reciprocal Relatives and "Relatives"  
 40 Decided by arranged employment  
 41 Decided by designated occupation  
 42 Occupational Demand is 5 to 15

Information reference card for visa officers, prepared by Canada's immigration department, showing the grid for Canada's "points system". Published in November 1974 (notated at the bottom of the first image). Fortunately, both sides of the card were retained and scanned! (Images courtesy: Michael J. Molloy)

communist bloc. Provision was also made for visitors to Canada to apply to change their status to that of permanent resident without leaving Canada if they could qualify according to the same criteria as were being used abroad.

4. Right of appeal to the newly established Immigration Appeal Board was provided to everyone who had been ordered deported from Canada, for sponsored immigration cases that had been refused, and for people facing deportation who believed themselves to be refugees in accordance with the 1951 Geneva Convention.
5. Annual intake volumes would be adjusted to labour market conditions and moved up or down accordingly by changing the weight of immigrant selection factors (points) and by varying the pass mark.

This plan was more permissive and reactive in terms of changing the ethnic mix in the immigration intake than it was deliberate or proactive. There were minor improvements to the network of visa offices abroad to give some substance to the policy changes. Every country was given a designated visa office to which their citizens could apply. For example, an office was established in Beirut to cover all of the Middle East and Africa (excluding Egypt, which already had a visa office). Port of Spain in Trinidad was established to serve the Caribbean (excluding Jamaica, which got its own visa office), as well as the entire Central and South American region. A central processing centre was set up in Ottawa to cover those parts of Asia not already served by Hong Kong, New Delhi, and Manila.

A regional office was also established in Geneva to provide itinerant service to countries in Eastern Europe other than Yugoslavia, which received its own office, to deal with those clients in the family and assisted relative categories whose security screening could be carried out based on their family connections in Canada. No independent immigrants would be selected through this process.

There was greater efficiency in these measures, but nothing that would level the playing field for non-European applicants. Applications in the large processing centres often languished, as increasing demand and appallingly bad communications prevented timely delivery of visas to those who qualified.

It was not until 1973 that measures were introduced to rectify the glaring inequalities in service to applicants in areas outside of Europe. I had been assigned to the operational planning function at immigration headquarters and was immediately confronted with having to justify a resource base that was producing fewer and fewer immigrants due to the precipitous drop in interest in north-western Europe. At the same time, data from area offices such as Beirut, Port of Spain, and the central processing office in Ottawa, indicated important sources outside of Europe had no resident visa facilities. My group put together a proposal to senior management to rationalize underutilized resources in Europe and open new facilities in those places where there was growth. We enunciated the principle that productive demand should be served from within those countries where the demand arose. The decision to proceed was taken without cabinet consultation, nor was there much interdepartmental dialogue. An exchange of

letters between the ministers of Immigration and External Affairs set the wheels in motion that over time would produce the 180-degree shift in the ethnic composition of the annual intake of immigrants—and it was done with no new resources nor direction from the government.

The department, which was by then called the Department of Manpower and Immigration, opened more than 20 new visa offices in the 1973–1975 fiscal years. In addition to improving access to immigration services to applicants from outside of Europe, these measures also wiped out the advantage enjoyed by American applicants, who until then had still been able to apply at the border. In addition to offices that had promoted immigration to Canada from the United States in places like New York, Chicago, and San Francisco, more than 10 new offices were opened in the U.S. to ensure program continuity. At the same time, the network in northwestern Europe was rationalized, with the closure of some 15 offices in the U.K., Scandinavia, and Germany. This rearrangement of the overseas network of visa offices set the stage for the gradual shift in the composition of the annual immigration intake from European to non-European. There were no quotas nor country preferences. The only factor that influenced the speed with which an application could be completed was the capacity of the immigration office to receive the application and make a decision on it.

When legislation finally came, it ratified these developments; it did not precede them. The impetus for modernization of the *Immigration Act* to conform to the earlier modernization in selection policy came in 1973, with the complete breakdown of the immigration enforcement system

resulting from the appeal provisions the Tom Kent reforms had provided for individuals facing deportation. The assumption proved to be unfounded that those who applied to immigrate to Canada while here as a visitor would leave if they failed to meet immigration selection requirements. Most of these people ended up having to be ordered deported after refusing to leave voluntarily, and while they could not appeal their failure on selection, they could appeal against deportation, even if the grounds for appeal were not strong. The Immigration Appeal Board had a statutory limit of 10 judges and was unable to keep pace with the scale of removals being ordered. By the early 1970s, anybody wanting to achieve *de facto* permanent residence had only to seek to appeal from a removal order to be added to the IAB backlog, which at its worst even then extended into the 21st century. Minister of Immigration Bryce Mackasey's apparent lack of concern over loss of control of the border provoked a revolt by immigration enforcement officers, who refused to clear aircraft inbound to Canada with would-be immigrants seeking to exploit the appeal loophole.

The immediate effect was the dismissal of Mackasey and the appointment of Robert Andras and Alan Gottlieb as minister and deputy minister respectively to put the house in order and fix immigration. Andras and Gottlieb not only pushed through adjustments to the immigration regulations to close the appeal loophole and regain control of the border, but they seized the opportunity to launch a broad consultation with Canadians through the publication of a Green Paper that elicited Canadians' views on immigration. They also modernized the Act, which had remained essentially untouched since 1952.

What became the *Immigration Act 1976* essentially caught up with the selection principles championed by Tom Kent in 1966-1967, in effect for almost ten years. It reinforced the cornerstone of the policy flowing from the 1966 White Paper on alignment with the labour market, but it also highlighted the principal objectives of family reunification and resettlement of refugees. The 1976 Act was more important for modernizing the prohibited classes, detention, and removal powers. Although it was essentially myopic on the issue of refugee claims in Canada, it did provide for protection of refugees via the Immigration Appeal Board that would review administrative decisions by the minister on recommendations from the newly established Refugee Status Advisory Committee. It introduced the concept of planned levels of immigration, compulsory approval of annual levels by the cabinet, and mandatory consultations with the provinces (section 91 of the British North America Act gave all provinces shared jurisdiction with the federal government over immigration). It also sought to develop a national demographic policy that would give immigration planning a more solid base, to which annual levels planning could be referenced.

While the 1976 Act did little to alter immigrant selection and practice, another major step in 1981 affected the delivery network and access to Canada by intending immigrants. In that year, the immigration delivery system was transferred to External Affairs from Employment and Immigration. Immigration services became a business line of the Department of External Affairs, and that department became accountable for the achievement of the annual intake level approved by parliament. Establishment of new visa offices in embassies,

consulates, and high commissions became much simpler, and budgeting became much less complex. It was in this period that the immigration program delivery system became global. Visa services were expanded in Latin America, Asia, Africa, and the Middle East, and more points of service were set up in eastern Europe after the fall of the Berlin Wall. At the same time, office coverage in the United States was sharply rationalized when the demand for migration services from U.S. residents declined. Nevertheless, those visa offices near the border (Buffalo, Detroit, Chicago, and Seattle) continued to serve temporary workers, who, being manifestly settled in Canada, needed an easy way to change status to become permanent residents.

*The Federal Court Act* of 1971 was also a watershed, but it affected immigration enforcement practices in Canada more than selection practices abroad. The Federal Court from its inception became heavily involved in overseeing the treatment of non-residents in Canada who had become implicated in the immigration enforcement system. Parliament probably did not foresee what would happen when it gave oversight of all federal government decisions to the Federal Court, but by the early 1980s, the immigration caseload of the court's Trial Division exceeded 80 percent of its cases and caused long queues of cases seeking judicial review. Cynical observers pointed out that a motion to the court was sufficient to stave off the execution of immigration enforcement action for months if not years, regardless of the case's merit or lack thereof. In immigrant selection, the Federal Court intervened on the margins of selection practices in ways that probably embedded principles of procedural fairness and transparency in decision making that have now become routine. Court

surveillance has also been the root cause of the curtailment of subjectivity in personal assessment awards by immigrant selection officers and the use of discretion by such officers to reverse a pass or fail based only on points.

In the landmark *Singh* decision in 1985, the Supreme Court of Canada ruled that the Immigration Appeal Board's practice of deciding the merit of claims to refugee status without a hearing involving the claimant constituted a denial of fundamental justice because the *Charter of Rights and Freedoms* and the *Canadian Bill of Rights* guaranteed due process. The Immigration Appeal Board, which still had a statutory limit of 10 judges, overnight found itself in charge of an oral hearing backlog which completely overwhelmed its capacity. The resulting inability of the immigration department to remove anyone in the refugee claims backlog endured for more than five years and led to two different amnesty programs: Immigration Minister Walter McLean's Administrative Review of the 25,000 cases backlogged prior to *Singh*; and an additional 125,000 cases that accumulated between *Singh* and the coming into effect of the reformed refugee determination system enacted through Bill C-55 in 1989. Through these measures to address immigration backlogs, large-scale intakes came from countries such as Sri Lanka, Somalia, Trinidad, Portugal, Turkey, and El Salvador. The first boat landings on Canadian shores by immigrants from the Indian state of Punjab also exploited the stalled refugee determination system to effect de facto immigration to Canada. Most of these people were able to settle in Canada as immigrants without passing through the selection process.

The resulting amendments to Canada's asylum system in 1988-1989 and subsequent revisions to it, gave Canada the most generous refugee claims system in the world and thereby provided access to other non-European groups in large numbers who would not have made such a rapid impact on the immigration mosaic had they had to comply with more conventional forms of selection.

What is most interesting about this evolution of immigration policy was the almost total lack of debate about either the size or composition of the immigration flow and its long-term impact on what Canada would become over time. There was political consensus on objectives such as family reunification, assistance to refugees, and supply of needed skills to the labour market. Beyond that, there was a very passive, perhaps laissez-faire, attitude where no substantive debate took place. Some political parties proposed the notion of an intake of one percent of the Canadian population annually, but that idea never really captured the public's imagination. No discussion occurred about race or ethnic origin. In the initial drafts of the 1973 Green Paper that led to the *Immigration Act* of 1976 there were timid references to visible minorities and the rate of change in the ethnic composition of Canadian society, but the reaction to early drafts from a select audience of academics and members of the Immigration Bar was so shrill that the draft was personally edited by Deputy Minister Alan Gottlieb before sign-off by Minister Robert Andras.

Similarly, attempts to link immigrant intake to an overall demographic policy for Canada sputtered to collapse when, after several years of federal efforts to begin a dialogue with the provinces, it turned out that there was no support among provinces

to set growth objectives for the country. The futility of using immigration to iron out demographic imbalances across the country became more and more evident when it was realized that because of mobility rights enshrined in the Charter, immigrant selection based on destination could not be enforced either directly or indirectly.

What my 34 years in the immigration program were witness to was a process in which the policy makers laid down some basic general principles and then let the public service, supervised by an activist Court, get on with the job. Despite interludes of anarchy, settlement data bear witness to what was a successful match of the immigrant

flow to opportunity in the labour force. At the same time, the pace of change of the ethnic composition of the immigration flow was sufficiently gradual that there was no significant pressure on political leaders to slow it down or stop it altogether. Immigration created the diversity that is Canada today and will continue to make our society more diverse as we move into the future. Contrary to the views of skeptics who opined that the government approved the universal approach to immigrant selection in the 1960s in the belief the Public Service would find a way to defeat it, the Public Service championed the change and became part of it in the process. It is a lesson for us all and an example for the future.

# HOW OPERATION SYRIAN REFUGEES INFORMS CANADA'S RESPONSES TO CURRENT AND FUTURE REFUGEE CRISES

LEAH K. HAMILTON, LUISA VERONIS & MARGARET WALTON-ROBERTS

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In a record-breaking 118 days—between November 3, 2015 and February 29, 2016—Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada (IRCC), in coordination with other federal ministries (Kiziltan, 2020) led the resettlement of 26,172 Syrian refugees (Government of Canada, 2017b). This number grew to over 40,000 by January 2017 (Government of Canada, 2021). Known as Operation Syrian Refugees (OSR; Government of Canada, 2017), this initiative was the result of one of Prime Minister Justin Trudeau's primary election promises. In this short piece, we discuss several lessons from this large resettlement effort that can inform our response to current refugee crises. Moreover, we question Canada's focus on 'signal' refugee movements—events of forcible displacement that garner international media attention—rather than endemic situations.

Canada has an established history of accepting refugees (Hamilton et al., 2020; as this special issue underlines), including large cohorts. But the only previous event comparable to OSR was in 1979–1980, with the arrival of 60,000 Indo-Chinese refugees (Alboim, 2016; Beiser, 1999; Molloy et al., 2017). Since the 1990s, Canada was resettling approximately 11,000 to 13,000 refugees annually, thus the arrival of Syrians marked a significant turn in its international commitment to supporting refugees.

In addition to the speed of this resettlement effort, this cohort of refugees differed from other groups in several important ways. About 55% of Syrians arrived as Government-Assisted Refugees (GARs), with 36% as Privately Sponsored Refugees (PSRs) and nearly 10% as Blended Visa Office-Referred Refugees (BVORs; Government of Canada, 2017a).

Syrian refugees had significantly larger family sizes (especially among GARs) and nearly half were minors under the age of 18 (IRCC, 2019). Generally, this cohort tended to have less formal education and was not as familiar with Canada's official languages (IRCC, 2019). Finally, many Syrian refugees had significant health needs owing to the considerable pressures on the health system in Syria and major refugee hosting countries in the region. All these characteristics had implications for the resettlement ecosystem, including housing, the education and healthcare systems, and language training among others (Walton-Roberts, Veronis & Hamilton, 2020).

During OSR, the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (SSHRC, 2016) partnered with IRCC to award 27 rapid response targeted grants examining different dimensions of the Syrian refugee arrival, resettlement and integration experience. Inspired by the recording of earlier resettlement events in important collections—such as *Strangers at the Gate* (Beiser, 1999) and *Running on Empty* (Molloy et al., 2017)—, we edited a multidisciplinary book featuring 13 of these projects. *A National Project: Syrian Refugee Resettlement in Canada* (2020) has three main objectives:

1. To document Canada's experience with OSR;
2. To provide a systems approach to highlight how the dynamic interplay between processes, structures and actors shape refugee resettlement; and
3. To assess what worked, what did not and why. Drawing on the third objective of our edited collection, OSR provided key lessons



that can inform Canada's response to current refugee crises, specifically in Afghanistan and Ukraine.

Since the collapse of the Government of Afghanistan in August of 2021, 22,915 Afghan refugees have arrived in Canada under three streams:

1. The existing permanent residence pathways, specifically for extended family members of former interpreters;
2. "Special Immigration Measures" program for Afghan nationals who assisted the Canadian government's efforts in Afghanistan; and
3. Existing humanitarian programs as GARs and PSRs (Government of Canada, 2022a).

Of note, IRCC has tried to streamline the PSR process by enabling groups of five and community sponsors to sponsor Afghan refugees who do not have a refugee status determination (RSD) document. This temporary exemption from the typical private sponsorship regulations was granted in recognition of the significant and timely barriers refugees often face in obtaining an RSD document from UNHCR or a third country. Compared to OSR—which required the mobilization and coordination of no less than 12 different federal ministries, departments and services, the resettlement plan and process for Afghans was faster and more streamlined.

This speaks to the strengths of Canada's refugee resettlement initiatives and the robust expertise it has acquired over the years, enabling it to deploy

responses more rapidly. OSR tested and strengthened Canada's unique, intersectoral approach to newcomer settlement. This contributed to better collaboration and communication between providers, communities and other stakeholders, as well as the emergence of new organizations and the development of innovative programs and approaches to resettlement (including indirect services; Veronis et al., 2020). Ultimately the investments and infrastructure expansion made before and during OSR paid off (see Walton-Roberts et al., 2019 for details on how Local Immigration Partnerships factor into this). In turn, Canada's response to the situation in Afghanistan showed its readiness to rapidly support a new cohort of refugees.

Since Russia invaded Ukraine in February 2022, the Government of Canada has created several special programs to support those fleeing Ukraine. In particular, the Canada-Ukraine Authorization for Emergency Travel (CUAET) is "a special, accelerated temporary residence pathway for Ukrainians seeking safe haven in Canada while the war in their home country continues" (Government of Canada, 2022b). This program enables Ukrainians (and their immediate family members) to stay in Canada for up to three years as temporary residents (Government of Canada, 2022b). Technically this is not a refugee program; it uses an existing temporary resident visa process to bring as many Ukrainians as possible to Canada very quickly. To date IRCC has received 628,492 applications—312,318 applications have been approved and 105,651 Ukrainian nationals have arrived in Canada (Government of Canada, 2022c). Ukrainian nationals can apply for an open work permit when they submit their application,

and they receive a one-time payment of \$3,000 per adult and \$1,500 per child under the age of 17. Some immigration scholars (e.g., Garnier et al., 2022) have argued this may be a new era in refugee policy. This program differs from Canada's previous resettlement efforts in several notable ways, including that it only offers temporary protection (Garnier et al., 2022). While this ensures Ukrainians can get to Canada quickly, it is not a permanent solution, rather it reflects the failure of current refugee policy (where it often takes over 2 years to bring people to Canada) to meet the needs of those facing conflict. This program continues to evolve (e.g., Ukrainians arriving under this program are now eligible for language training) and its long-term effects—for this and future cohorts of refugees – remain to be seen.

For both Afghan and Ukrainian Refugees, it will be important for IRCC to implement a robust performance measurement plan to evaluate resettlement outcomes. In its OSR evaluation (IRCC, 2019), IRCC illustrated its commitment to better data collection and dissemination. A similar evaluation strategy ought to be implemented for refugees from Afghanistan and Ukraine. For the latter cohort, it will be particularly important to examine which factors (e.g., housing, labour market integration, education, healthcare) may influence return and/or onward migration decisions. Potentially, this new model may represent a promising approach to assist future temporarily displaced populations so that they are supported and prepared when the time may come to return home.

CUAET leverages some key learnings from OSR, notably that it is possible to resettle large cohorts of temporary residents/refugees relatively quickly.

This can be critically important when people need to be rapidly evacuated. Nevertheless, as learned in OSR, rushed processes lead to resettlement problems (e.g., information gaps, housing issues), and place pressure on resettlement stakeholders and the system. Since OSR, the settlement sector and IRCC policymakers have quickly responded to crises in Afghanistan and then Ukraine; it is important to note that these efforts came during the COVID-19 pandemic (2020–2022), exacerbating challenges for the immigration system and socio-economic conditions at large (e.g., housing, healthcare, inflation, and cost of living). This pace surely cannot be sustained in the medium and longer term.

One of the critical lessons from OSR was that resettling large cohorts of refugees creates inequities (both real and perceived) within and between refugee groups, and between refugees and other equity-deserving groups in Canada (Veronis, Hamilton, & Walton-Roberts, 2020). Since OSR, Canada moved quickly to resettle cohorts of Afghan refugees followed by Ukrainians, both of which were 'signal' refugee movements that received extant media coverage and captured Canadians' attention and support. Meanwhile, there are other protracted, endemic refugee crises that deserve our attention, including in North and East Africa, and throughout Central and South America. For instance, little attention has been paid to refugees living in Kakuma refugee camp in Kenya which was established in 1992 to host mainly unaccompanied children and youth fleeing the war in Sudan.

It was still open in June of 2022, hosting over 160,000 refugees, many of whom have lived in

**“As we continue to see record levels of forced displacement year over year, there will be challenges with trying to balance resettlement needs resulting from crises with those from endemic situations.”**

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Kakuma for their entire lives. In *A National Project*, we argue that policymakers need to be mindful of the moral and ethical implications of using policy to select certain cohorts of refugees over others. As we continue to see record levels of forced displacement year over year, there will be challenges with trying to balance resettlement needs resulting from crises with those from endemic situations. As

we saw with Trudeau's election promise leading to OSR, political goals ultimately tend to determine Canada's response to global resettlement needs.

Between 1980 and 2015, Canada was resettling relatively low numbers of refugees each year. This changed at the end of 2015 when OSR led to the resettlement of over 26,000 Syrian refugees in 118 days. Building on this experience, Canada has quickly resettled cohorts of Afghan refugees and Ukrainians using a variety of temporary policies and programs. It is too early to speak to the durability of these policies, and the resettlement outcomes for these cohorts. It is clear, however, that in the last 7 years we have witnessed significant changes in Canada's refugee policies, whether it has the potential to shape a new era of humanitarian assistance remains to be seen.

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**HOW OPERATION SYRIAN REFUGEES INFORMS CANADA'S RESPONSES TO CURRENT AND FUTURE REFUGEE CRISES -  
LEAH K. HAMILTON, LUISA VERONIS & MARGARET WALTON-ROBERTS**

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# ELEMENTS OF SUCCESS: LEADERSHIP, MEDIA, AND PUBLIC PARTICIPATION IN REFUGEE MOVEMENTS TO CANADA

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## INTRODUCTION

Responding to a refugee crisis is never easy. Despite strong humanitarian instincts, there are limits to what any country can do, and each refugee movement comes with its own complexities and challenges. Canada's experience with the Indochinese and Syrian refugee movements

**“Refugee movements to Canada are most successful when three elements are present: government leadership, media coverage, and public participation.”**

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has helped to highlight elements that are key to success. Recent responses to the situations in Afghanistan and Ukraine are also instructive and can benefit from lessons learned as they continue to evolve.

## THREE ELEMENTS OF SUCCESS

Refugee movements to Canada are most successful when three elements are present: government leadership, media coverage, and public participation.

Government leadership is exemplified when the federal government demonstrates a strong and sustained commitment; creates and implements responsive policies, programs, and vehicles for

public participation; and keeps information flowing to the media and the public. Partnerships with provincial and municipal governments are also critical for successful refugee resettlement.

The media has the greatest impact when it galvanizes public opinion and awareness which in turn strengthens government commitment and public participation. The media can also play an important role by maintaining a critical eye on government responses and keeping the public informed about what is happening, why, and how to become involved.

Public participation means that civil society, the private sector, and individual Canadians are meaningfully engaged in various ways. Partnerships with civil society organizations can help to shape and implement refugee policies, programs, and vehicles for public participation. The private sector can provide goods, services, housing, employment, and financial donations. And individual Canadians make an enormous contribution by serving as volunteers and sponsors, forming important connections with refugees.

### **INDOCHINESE REFUGEE MOVEMENT**

All three elements for success were at play during the second wave of Indochinese refugees. Although Canada's response had been relatively modest during the first wave from 1975 to 1976, government policy innovations and compelling media coverage contributed to a robust response resulting in many more arrivals and unprecedented levels of public participation in the second wave which occurred just a few years later.<sup>1</sup>

A new *Immigration Act*<sup>2</sup>, which came into force in April 1978, set the stage for success. This was the first Canadian legislation to recognize refugees as a distinct class of immigrants and to enable private sponsorship. Regulations<sup>3</sup> under the Act created a designated class for people from Vietnam, Cambodia, and Laos, allowing them to be admitted without having to undergo formal determination as Convention refugees, and streamlining the formal selection process. The designated class and the introduction of private sponsorship greatly facilitated the arrival of Indochinese refugees to Canada with significant levels of public participation.

The government created an incentive to sponsor when it committed to increase government assisted refugee spots by matching the number of privately sponsored Indochinese refugees. The government also showed leadership by creating special programs, in cooperation with provincial governments, for unaccompanied minors and refugees with disabilities. Civil society organizations such as Operation Lifeline and Families for Children played important roles in engaging and supporting the sponsorship of Indochinese refugees and the placement of unaccompanied minors respectively.

Another highlight of the Indochinese movement was the government's commitment to keep families intact. Visa officers on the ground in refugee camps were instructed to select entire family groupings, regardless of the degree of relationship. "No family member left behind" was the operational instruction. Later, an "orderly departure program" allowed family members still in Vietnam to be reunited with their families in Canada directly, without the risk of having to escape to a

country of first asylum. Such policies enabled families to help each other in resettlement without the constant worry about those left behind.

The media was instrumental in heightening public interest and government action through intense coverage, including televised images of people drowning in the sea as they tried to escape. The government also took its communication role seriously, disseminating proactive messages through a weekly newsletter to stakeholders and the media, and keeping them abreast of developments.

A UNHCR representative in Canada underscored the impact of the intersecting roles of government, media, and the public during this movement:

*In Canada, individuals and groups were so moved by the plight of the Indochinese that they not only advocated for government action, but also organized a public response encouraging Canadians “to rescue” the Indochinese through the private sponsorship program. This movement was facilitated by an interested media and a government who welcomed the opportunity to tap into the public concern of Canadians. – Michael Casasola, 2016.<sup>4</sup>*

## SYRIAN REFUGEE MOVEMENT

Canada’s response to the Syrian crisis is another example of media attention helping a modest approach to become much stronger. A photo of three-year old Alan Kurdi lying face down on the beach motivated many people to take notice and take action, and to demand that their government do the same. Syrian refugee resettlement became a 2015 election issue and a top priority for the newly elected Liberal government. The new government

quickly committed to ambitious goals and targets in collaboration with provinces, municipalities, and civil society. Canadians stepped up in droves to sponsor Syrian refugees or to donate money and goods.

This was the first refugee movement with a strong role for federally funded settlement agencies across the country. Once again, civil society organizations – such as Lifeline Syria – emerged to facilitate private sponsorship. In the absence of a formal family reunification program, private sponsorship began to be used more often for that purpose.

The government showed leadership by deeming Syrians to be prima facie refugees. As such, Syrians did not have to undergo a formal determination of refugee status, which greatly facilitated private sponsorship by Groups of Five individuals or community groups. The government also increased the number of visa officers abroad, reinforcing them with significant resources from the military and other departments; created a coordinating body involving federal departments and provincial-territorial governments; and held regular briefings with the media.

The Liberal platform initially provided no ceiling for privately sponsored refugees. This added a real incentive for people to become sponsors. After the overall target of 25,000 admissions for all Syrian refugees had been reached within a few months, enthusiasm turned to outrage and frustration when the government was slow to process many outstanding sponsorship applications and placed a cap on the total number of applications that could be submitted. In response to the public outcry, the cap for sponsorships was removed and admissions

rose to over 40,000 by the end of October 2020.<sup>5</sup>

As with the Indochinese movement, the participation of private sponsors helped many refugees to settle successfully. Unlike government assisted refugees, privately sponsored refugees benefited from personal connections with the sponsors and access to their social and professional networks.

### AFGHAN REFUGEE MOVEMENT

The Afghan refugee movement is rife with problems. This is in large part due to the brutal realities on the ground which make it difficult to escape from a country now ruled by the Taliban. These realities also create challenges in working with neighbouring countries hosting Afghans who have managed to escape. In addition, this movement has not garnered the level of sustained media attention and public participation that was evident in the Indochinese and Syrian movements.

While there has been some strong media coverage, it has not been as prevalent or sustained as in the two other movements. Nor did Afghanistan become a major issue in the federal election which took place in September 2021. The re-elected Liberal government honoured its election platform commitment to increase its Afghan resettlement target from 20,000 to 40,000 over two years. As of February 8, 2023, approximately 28,000 have been admitted since the Taliban takeover in August 2021.<sup>6</sup> Despite the government's collaboration with allied countries, progress has been difficult due to the political situation in Afghanistan and Pakistan.

The urgency of the situation in Afghanistan and neighbouring countries would dictate welcoming

larger numbers on a faster timetable. However, thousands of Afghans who have expressed their interest in coming to Canada are still waiting for information about next steps. An arbitrary target of 18,000 for people who worked for the Canadian military or diplomatic corps flies in the face of the moral imperative to help Afghans at risk from having worked alongside Canadians to achieve our objectives. Only about 9,500, a little over half of that target, have arrived as of February 8, 2023. And with no Canadian military or diplomatic presence left in Afghanistan, there is no on-the-ground support apart from volunteer associations such as Aman Lara comprised of Canadian veterans and former interpreters. Afghans who have escaped to Pakistan or other neighbouring countries are often subject to harsh living conditions, changing entry and exit requirements, and political instability.

The reality is that government mechanisms have not been put in place to promote wide-spread public participation in the Afghan movement. Referral of individuals to the special resettlement programs can only be made by organizations such as the UNHCR, the United States, the Department of National Defence, Global Affairs Canada and designated human rights organizations.

The private sponsorship route remains problematic. The vast majority of Afghans who arrived under

**“ The reality is that government mechanisms have not been put in place to promote wide-spread public participation in the Afghan movement.”**

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private sponsorship in the early months of the movement were people who had been in the inventory for years, as opposed to individuals affected by the Taliban takeover.

After much advocacy, the government allocated 3,000 spaces in October 2022 for Groups of Five and community groups to sponsor Afghans without formal determination as a Convention refugee. Demand was so great on the part of sponsors that all 3,000 spaces were quickly exhausted and no new applications are being accepted.<sup>7</sup>

In 2023, the government allocated 3,000 new spaces to Sponsorship Agreement Holders. Most of these spaces were quickly spoken for, leaving many interested sponsors without an opportunity to assist Afghan refugees. This is especially problematic because private sponsorship is often used for family reunification. Without an avenue for family reunification, refugees worry constantly about family members left behind to the detriment of their own settlement in Canada.

On a positive note, Afghans who arrive in Canada as government-assisted or privately sponsored refugees are entitled to all services and a wide network of excellent support available to refugees and permanent residents. In addition, a national Afghan resettlement steering committee is functioning well under joint leadership from the immigration department and the resettlement sector. Their work includes active engagement with Canadian veterans and associations of former Afghan interpreters. One of the committee's priorities is to encourage refugees to settle in locations across Canada to reduce the pressure on housing and services, especially in large urban centres.

**“ On a positive note, Afghans who arrive in Canada as government-assisted or privately sponsored refugees are entitled to all services and a wide network of excellent support available to refugees and permanent residents.”**

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There has been little visible effort by the federal government, however, to keep the public and stakeholders apprised of progress and challenges. Nor is there an apparent willingness to increase targets or avenues for family reunification despite the huge need.

#### **UKRAINIANS FLEEING THE RUSSIAN INVASION**

The most striking feature of the government's response to people fleeing the Russian invasion of Ukraine is that it treats them as temporary residents and not as refugees. This innovative approach, and the speed with which it was announced and implemented, is evidence of strong government leadership to respond quickly to an urgent situation but has also created problems and concerns.

Canada has a large Ukrainian community, a strong Ukrainian Canadian Congress, and a Deputy Prime Minister who understands that part of the world well. These factors helped to expedite government decision-making and contributed to the generosity of the approach. Ukrainians are eligible to receive emergency travel authorizations, to work or study in Canada, to stay for three years or more, and to receive priority processing to become permanent

residents. There is no cap on the number of arrivals. The volume and speed of arrivals has been unprecedented.

As of the first week of February 2023, a year after the Russian invasion, there were over 158,000 arrivals of Ukrainian citizens and returning Canadian permanent residents of Ukrainian origin. Approximately 840,000 applications had been submitted for emergency travel and temporary resident permits and over 540,000 had been approved.<sup>8</sup> The government promised to develop a family-reunification sponsorship program for both immediate and extended-family members of Ukrainians in Canada, but none has yet been announced.

Questions remain about whether Ukrainians should have been treated as a refugee movement from the outset. The decision to consider them temporary residents assumes that they will return home or can find durable solutions elsewhere. The reality is that many Ukrainians who choose to come to Canada can be expected to stay, as borne out by a recent survey conducted by the Operation Ukrainian Safe Haven Task Force in which 84% of respondents indicated that they would like to apply for permanent resident status.<sup>9</sup>

Previous experience with refugees from Kosovo is illustrative. Seventy percent of Kosovars who were airlifted to Canada on a temporary basis chose to stay here rather than return to Kosovo when the war ended, despite being offered free transportation home and start-up funds to re-establish themselves there.<sup>10</sup>

The longer the war in Ukraine lasts, the more likely

that individuals will stay in Canada. Yet there seems to be no plan for transitioning potentially hundreds of thousands of Ukrainians to permanent residence if they do indeed choose to stay.

One downside of the Canadian approach is that temporary residents are not entitled to many of the government services and supports available to refugees. This has led to parallel systems and processes, lower federal benefits than refugees receive, and a heavy reliance on provincial and municipal governments, the private sector, and the Canadian Ukrainian community. It has also created confusion and differential treatment across the country, with some getting more support than other refugees, and others falling through the cracks. A national steering committee which includes representatives of the federal, provincial, and territorial governments, the settlement sector, the Ukrainian Canadian Congress, and other stakeholders, is helping to address these problems but disparities remain.

Another downside is that Ukrainians, as non-refugees, are ineligible for private sponsorship, which drastically reduces opportunities for public participation. Many Ukrainians have chosen to settle in large urban centres such as Toronto, creating enormous pressure on housing and other services in those locations. If Ukrainians were considered to be refugees, sponsorship would help to alleviate such pressure by attracting people to the many communities across Canada where private sponsors reside. As demonstrated in previous refugee movements, sponsors also use their social networks to help refugees to obtain interim and permanent housing, employment, and the personal connections that are vital to successful integration.

Sympathetic and sustained media coverage has helped to build public support for Canada's role in providing a safe haven for Ukrainians. However, commentators have questioned whether there is a racial component to the differential treatment offered to Ukrainians as opposed to refugees from Afghanistan or other parts of the world.

Despite the various concerns, the innovative approach the government chose in response to the situation in Ukraine will be a valuable case study on the development, modification, and potential future use of non-traditional approaches for groups at risk.

## CONCLUSION

The three elements identified for successful refugee movements – government leadership, media coverage, and public participation – are interconnected. Government policies and programs only work if the public supports them. An engaged and committed public can spur the government to exercise stronger leadership and action. Transparent government information about progress, challenges,

**“ Despite the various concerns, the innovative approach the government chose in response to the situation in Ukraine will be a valuable case study on the development, modification, and potential future use of non-traditional approaches for groups at risk.”**

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and vehicles for participation will encourage the media to keep the issue on the front burner. This in turn will motivate public engagement for the benefit of refugees.

There is much to learn from prior movements that exemplified these features and from more recent innovations and experience. Reflecting on proven elements of success can help Canada to achieve its humanitarian objectives and to benefit from the social, cultural, demographic, and economic contributions that successfully resettled refugees provide.

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# REFUGEE RESETTLEMENT AND ECONOMIC INTEGRATION IN CANADA

AZIZ RAHMAN

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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

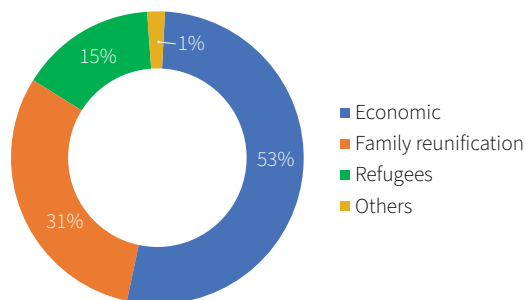
The world has witnessed a historically record number of (89 million) forced migrants including 27.1 million refugees, 53.2 million internally displaced persons (IDPs), and 4.6 million asylum seekers, resulting from persecution, armed conflict, and human rights violations in the Global South (UNHCR, 2022c). 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 UNHCR 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.

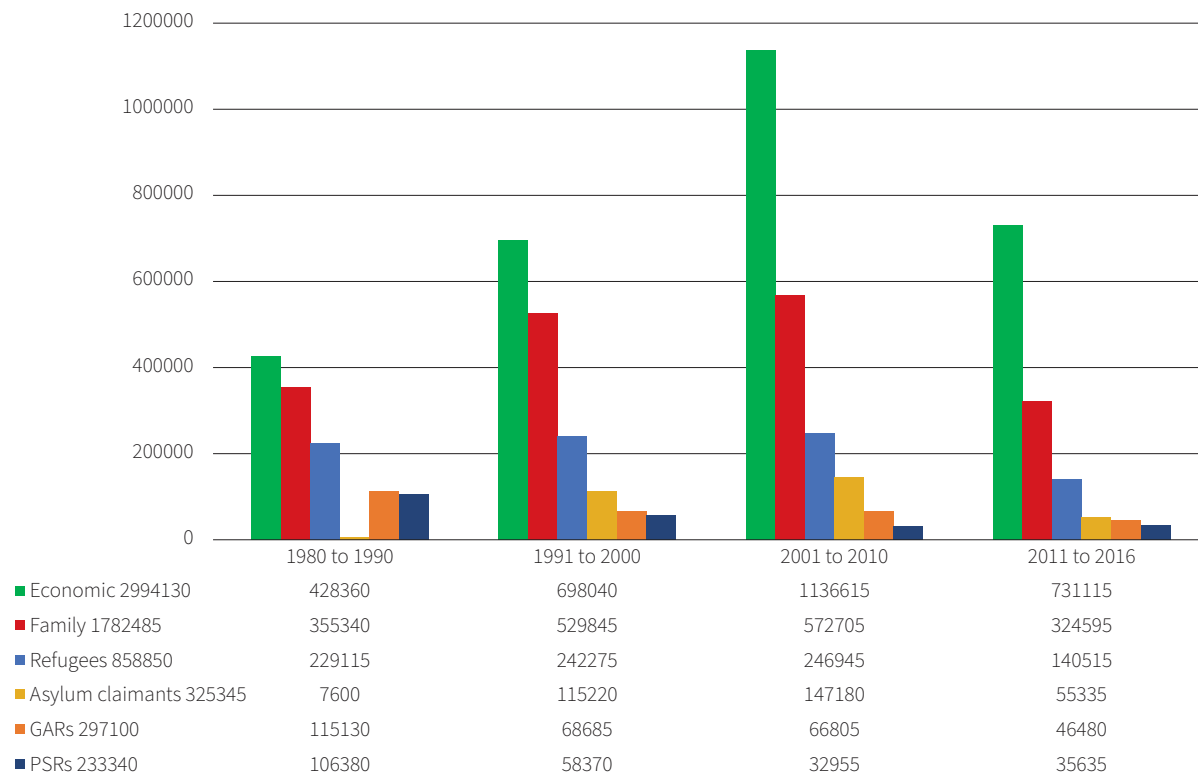
### **SOCIODEMOGRAPHIC PROFILE OF RESETTLED REFUGEES**

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 not 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).**

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.

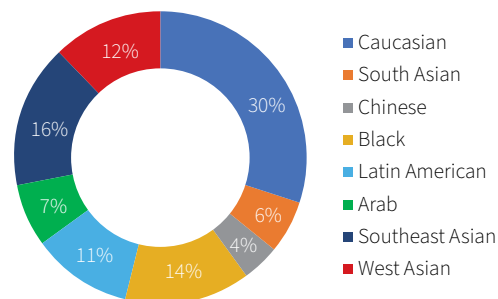
Racialized (visible) minority refugees made up the majority of the resettled refugee population (about 71 percent), with Southeast Asians, Blacks, West Asian, Latin American, Arabs, South Asian, and Chinese (Figure 3). Although there was no remarkable difference between male and female refugees' racialized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



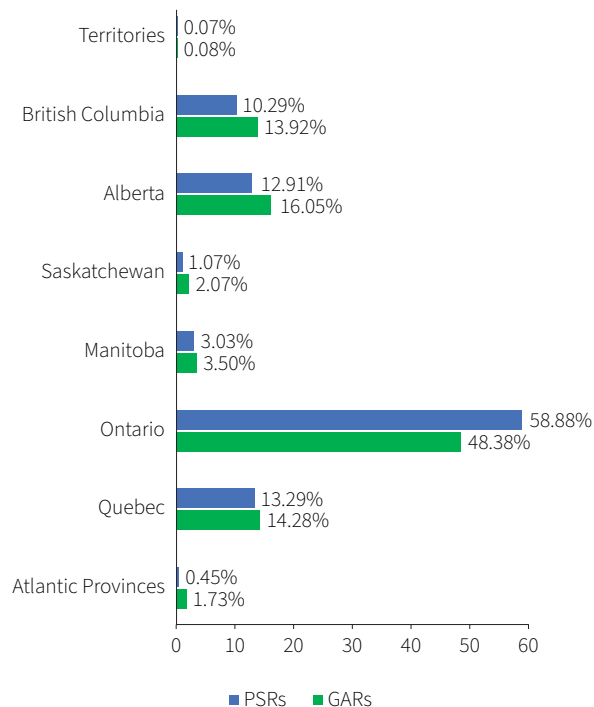
Source: Adapted from the 2016 Long Form Census Microdata File, Statistics Canada

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 (%)
<b>Admission category (N = 397,635)</b>			
GARs	55.33	52.88	54.00
PSRs	44.67	47.12	46.00
<b>Location of study (N = 397,635)</b>			
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
<b>Age of arrival in Canada (N = 397,635)</b>			
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
<b>Racialized (Visible) minority status (N = 397,635)</b>			
Not-visible minority	29.21	28.52	28.83
Visible minority	70.79	71.48	71.17
<b>Marital status (N = 397,635)</b>			
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
<b>Knowledge of official language (N = 397,635)</b>			
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
<b>City of residence (N = 397,635)</b>			
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
<b>Time in Canada since landing (N = 397,635)</b>			
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 (%)
<b>Employment Status (N = 397635)</b>			
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)
<b>Occupational Status (N = 397635)</b>			
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)
<b>Average Annual Employment Income (N=254715)</b>			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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## A BRIEF HISTORY OF AFGHAN REFUGEES IN CANADA

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## OVERVIEW

Afghanistan's long history of violence and political insecurity has resulted in a large proportion of its population being displaced. Starting in the late 1970s, the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan prompted many Afghans to flee their country (Přívará & Přívarová, 2019). Through the 1970s and 80s, approximately 3 to 5 million Afghan refugees escaped the war in Afghanistan and sought refuge, mainly in Iran and Pakistan (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees [UNHCR], 2023a), where the majority remained in refugee camps. Political conflicts and power shifts between the Taliban and the Afghan government have been ongoing throughout the decades (Goodson, 2001; Rubin, 2006). The most recent conflict left many behind. During the recent conflict, an estimated 2.6 million Afghans made it out of their country while another 3.5 million became Internally Displaced Peoples (IDP). According to the UNHCR (2022), after four decades of conflict and war, nearly 24 million Afghans require help and support and one in four Afghans is or was previously a refugee (National Geographic, 2011).

**“The refugee population in Canada is comprised of a variety of nationalities and ethnicities, highlighting the diversity of the refugees.”**

Canada has welcomed 1,088,015 refugees since 1980 (UNHCR, 2023b). According to the 2016 Census, 482,610 Afghans were living in Canada (Statistics Canada 2017). The refugee population in Canada is comprised of a variety of nationalities

and ethnicities, highlighting the diversity of the refugees. During the most recent conflict in Afghanistan in 2021, the Taliban assumed power once more, endangering ethnic minorities and the rights of women (Cultural Orientation Resource Exchange [CORE], 2021). In response to the conflict, the federal government promised to bring 20,000 Afghan refugees to Canada. Following an election in 2021, the federal government promised to increase the number of Afghan refugees to 40,000 (Marchand, 2022). At this time, more than 28,870 Afghan refugees have arrived in Canada, the majority (52%) settling in Toronto and Calgary (Begin et al., 2023).

## AFGHAN REFUGEES IN CANADA

Canada has a long and complicated history of both providing and denying refuge to those in need, beginning in the late 18th century (Canadian Council for Refugees [CCR], n.d.; Dench, 2000; Government of Canada, 2021). People from all over the world sought and continue to seek refuge in Canada. When Canada began to record migration movements, 25% of all immigrants in Canada were refugees (CCR, n.d.; Dench, 2000; Government of Canada, 2021). Immigration, Refugee, and Citizenship Canada (IRCC) records refugee admissions in Canada; Between 1980 and 2016, admission numbers fluctuated between 14,000 and 55,000 per year. Because of the dangerous and unlivable conditions in refugee camps, many refugees seek to secondarily migrate to another country (Barfield, 2012). Many Afghans who seek better living conditions arrive in Canada.

Prior to the 1980s, there was little research into refugees in Canada, and even less research into

Afghans in Canada. Afghans began to arrive in Canada in large numbers at the turn of the 21st century. Throughout the 2000s through today, the number of Afghans arriving in Canada annually remains between 1000-3000 per year (Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada, 2016). When the Taliban came to power in 2001 (Barfield, 2012), many more Afghans fled the country. In Canada, the number of Afghan refugees in 2001 rose to 4,067 (IRCC, 2016). Throughout the last five years, the number of Afghans arriving in Canada continuously increased due to various natural or political conflicts and hardships in the country (Přívvara & Přívarová, 2019). Over time, the number of Afghan refugees that have been admitted to Canada has also increased, rising from 6,000 in 2019 to 20,000 by the end of 2022 (IRCC, 2022). During the past few years, the Canadian government has published more detailed research on the demographics of Afghans in Canada. At present, the provinces with the largest Afghan population are Ontario, followed by Alberta (Government of Canada, 2023).

### **REFUGEE RESETTLEMENT IN CANADA SINCE 2020**

Canada continues to be one of the major countries for the permanent resettlement of refugees (Esipova et al., 2020). The country faced challenges when it came to bringing in and resettling newcomers in the country when the pandemic started, and new challenges evolved (Esses et al., 2021). Similar to other countries across the world, with the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, Canada closed its borders to non-essential travel in early 2020 to curb the spread of the virus and the death toll. As a result, the federal government implemented different policies, one of which focused

on factors for immigration decisions, and which immigrants could be admitted into the country.

Refugees are among the many newcomers who face economic and social challenges (Alrob & Shields 2022), and these challenges were amplified by the pandemic and its related restrictions. Afghan refugees were among the largest group of refugees who arrived in Canada amidst the COVID-19 pandemic. The added health protocols including quarantine and vaccination requirements resulted in additional delays in resettling and integration after their arrival. The measures to curb the pandemic also increased hardships in the process of finding housing, finding employment and language barriers, accessing some settlement programs and services among others.

As with most refugee plights, the world's attention span is short. International attention has recently shifted away from Afghanistan towards other conflicts. The 2022 war between Russia and Ukraine shifted to provide immediate aid for Ukrainian refugees to integrate into Canadian cities. While Afghan refugees have been welcomed in Canada, Canadians are less likely to have knowledge of the conflict in Afghanistan, despite the fact it has been ongoing for over 40 years. As a result, the wait to enter Canada becomes longer and the slower pace of arrivals lengthens the time they spend in displacement and delays their integration into Canada.

### **WHAT IS COMING NEXT? WHAT CAN BE DONE TO HELP THE UPCOMING AFGHANS?**

With Canada still short of its target to bring 40,000 Afghan refugees to Canada, many Afghans

“As with most refugee plights, the world’s attention span is short.”

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are expected to arrive in Canada in the next months (Government of Canada, 2023). Our recent research with the Association for Canadian Studies reveals that among the Afghans who made it to Canada since 2021, the most pressing integration issues they have reported have to do with finding affordable rent/living accommodations, connecting with family, finding community, employment, and learning English and/or French (see Wilkinson et al., 2023 for more details). While the English and French language programs are oversubscribed and the waitlists to enroll are long, finding affordable and permanent accommodations, finding a job and developing social connections are the most pressing issues Afghan refugees report in their initial resettlement.

## CONCLUSIONS AND POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS?

In conclusion, it is important to have more resources and information available for settlement and newcomer services, and for the general public to learn more about the history of Afghanistan in Canada, and the turbulent history of Afghanistan leading many to come to Canada. While Canada has welcomed many refugees over the years, it has also denied many entries, and many refugees require more support to settle and adapt to their new residence. Further research into interprovincial migration can also contribute to understanding the resources Afghan refugees might need upon arrival and most importantly, aid with affordable housing and sustainable employment, and the reasons that lead them to leave their original

destination. Policy should also focus on prioritizing family reunification and simplifying the process of arrival for Afghan refugees to help with their integration.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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# **“HONK IF YOU HATE GYPSIES”<sup>1</sup> AND BOGUS REFUGEES: THE UNWELCOME HISTORY OF ROMA REFUGEES FROM EUROPE WHO SOUGHT ASYLUM IN CANADA BETWEEN 1990 AND 2013**

GINA CSANYI-ROBAH

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*“The blatant and pervasive injustices stemming from the top echelon of Canada’s government toward the European Roma refugees was counterbalanced by an equally huge dose of Canadian love that manifested in countless ways. It was this support that ultimately sustained my struggle to help thousands of people from my community.”* –Gina Csanyi-Robah

Gina Csanyi-Robah is the Executive Director of the Canadian Romani Alliance and teacher for the Vancouver School Board. A Canadian born granddaughter of Roma refugees from Hungary who fled during the 1956 Hungarian Revolution, she began her work as an educator and a Romani rights activist 20 years ago. In 2012, Gina was the Executive Director of the Roma Community Centre in Toronto when she testified in Ottawa to both a Canadian Parliamentary Committee and the Canadian Senate Committee Social Affairs, Science, and Technology regarding the systemic discrimination experienced by Roma Refugee Claimants in Canada, as well as the prejudicial reforms to national immigration policy that directly impacted Roma refugees from Europe.

Her dedicated work on behalf of her community earned her the Queen Elizabeth Diamond Jubilee Medal in 2012, as well as the Canadian Association of Refugee Lawyers 2012 Advocacy Award. Also, in 2012, she designed a public education program called “Hate Can Kill” which earned an award nomination from the Canadian Race Relations Foundation. In 2013, Gina was invited to join the Canadian delegation to the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance to serve on the Committee of the Roma Genocide. The following year, Gina was invited by the Office of the Human Rights Commissioner to speak at the United Nations in Geneva, Switzerland on April 8, 2014, in honour of the UN’s first International Roma Day commemoration. In August 2020, after many years of advocacy and public education by the Canadian Romani community, the Government of Canada officially recognized the Roma Genocide during the Holocaust of WWII. Gina has been a contributor to anthologies, books, and articles.

It has been a long, hard, challenging road for the Romani diaspora originating in Northwestern India beginning in the 11th century. Those roads, often a result of forced migration, brought us Roma people through the Silk Road through Persia, the Middle East and North Africa before entering Europe through either Turkey or Spain in the 14th century. We are currently the largest minority on the European continent with approximately 12 million people.<sup>3</sup> Our history in Europe includes many atrocities including centuries of enslavement and genocide, most recently during the Holocaust when at least a million Roma perished.

Despite widespread documentation of serious human rights abuses, the Roma people from Europe who sought asylum in Canada between the years 1990 – 2013, experienced tremendous hardship resulting from racism and discrimination by individuals, socially, and the Canadian institutions. Thankfully, there is now general knowledge about the endemic discrimination experienced by Roma people in Europe, as reflected in the 2021 high acceptance rates for Roma refugee claimants at the Canadian Immigration and Refugee Board (Czech Republic 75%; Hungary 91%; Romania 72%; and Slovakia 100%)<sup>4</sup> at the Immigration Refugee Board of Canada.

Fortunately, it is quite clear that Canadian immigration officials are aware and willing to acknowledge the endemic discrimination toward the Roma minority in Europe, including in Hungary. Recent NGO reports from Europe have continued to document the prevalence of systemic discrimination. According to a 2021 report, Roma in Hungary: The Challenges of Discrimination, “research in recent years has shown that Roma in Hungary suffer

substantial disadvantages in all areas of their daily life”<sup>5</sup>

**“ It has been a long, hard, challenging road for the Romani diaspora originating in Northwestern India beginning in the 11th century.”**

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## **THE HISTORICAL IMPACT OF CANADIAN IMMIGRATION POLICIES ON THE ROMA REFUGEE CLAIMANTS**

### **CANADIAN POLITICIAN INCITES ANTI-ROMA RACISM**

The Canadian federal government has had a long history of institutionalized discrimination against the Roma community. Shortly after the fall of the Iron Curtain in 1989, which signaled the end of Soviet occupation in Hungary and much of Central Europe, Hungarian Romani refugee claimants in the post-Soviet period arrived in Canada, with approximately 9,500 refugee claims made between 1998 and 2002. At first, recognition rates in these cases were very high: around 70% of the approximately 200 Hungarian refugee claims.<sup>6</sup>

In 1992, there was an appalling article in the Toronto Star which shared a very negative perception of the ‘Gypsies’ coming from Europe.

A Toronto area politician, Gordon Chong, had been quoted in the tabloid Toronto Sun as stating that when he was growing up in Toronto he saw “Gypsies running brothels, where the men would stand outside calling in men to have sex with their wives and daughters.” Ronald Lee, co-founder

of the Roma Community Centre in Toronto, approached the then Toronto Mayor, Barbara Hall, and she called a Council meeting, demanding that Alderman Chong apologize or resign. After three calls for an apology, or a vote for his dismissal, he apologized. Ronald Lee called the Toronto Sun asking for a retraction, explaining that what Chong had described were fortune-telling establishments. The newspaper refused.<sup>7</sup> The negative perception of ‘Gypsies’ inevitably caused damage at the Immigration Refugee Board and acceptance rates plummeted.

Later, a group of local skinheads demonstrated in front of the Lido Motel in Toronto where Czech-Roma refugees were temporarily housed. They carried signs stating: “Canada is not a trash can” and “Honk if you hate Gypsies.”<sup>8</sup> The local Roma community in Toronto, with the support of Bernie Farber, the Canadian Jewish Congress CEO, held these hate mongers responsible for making criminal, hate crime reports that successfully brought the neo-Nazi skinheads to court.

By 1998, thousands of Roma people were again coming from Hungary and the Czech Republic to seek asylum in Canada and most had successful claims until the Canadian government directly intervened into the independent decision making process of the Immigration Refugee Board. In 1998, the IRB accepted an overwhelming majority of Roma claimants. The next year, however, less than 10 percent of the Hungarian Roma cases were approved due to the discriminatory action of the government that took place in late 1998 when senior IRB officials took the unprecedented step of crafting a lead case decision based on the claims of only four Hungarian Roma refugee claimants.

At some point it was decided to conduct a “test case” to examine the overall situation of Roma in Hungary, which would then be used in deciding other Hungarian Roma cases. From the testimonies of these “experts” establishing the “lead case” the adjudicators concluded that while discrimination is common, actual persecution of Roma in Hungary is rare, and that the situation is steadily improving. The inevitably negative decision led to an immediate and dramatic decrease in positive decisions. The Hungarian Roma acceptance rate of 70%, in 1998, plummeted to 16% for the whole of 1999, and to just 8% in the two quarters that followed the Lead Case decision.<sup>9</sup>

In a 2019 Walrus article entitled, *No Refuge: For Challenging a Policy that Discriminated Against Certain Refugees, a Federal Employee’s Career was Ruined*, former Immigration Refugee Board judge, Lloyd Fournier, reflects upon the pressure to deny Hungarian Roma refugee claims back in 2003 during the period of the discriminatory “lead case” immigration policy. According to the article, Fournier said, “I was called into a presiding member’s office and told that he had heard through the grapevine that I was going to make a decision that might not be good for me.” He was warned that his decision would be watched and that a positive ruling “would not be very well received by the board.” Fournier’s positive ruling for a Hungarian Roma refugee claimant had horrible repercussions for him, as he was attacked by the government for ignoring the “lead case”.<sup>10</sup>

On March 1, 2004, just a month after Fournier formally delivered his Roma ruling, the Justice Department went to the Federal Court of Canada to have the decision quashed. It was an extraordinary



move by Ottawa to try to undo an IRB member’s positive ruling and to interfere directly with a refugee determination process.

In 2005, a Toronto lawyer, Rocco Galati, successfully challenged the IRB “lead case” decision. He claimed that it was institutionalized discrimination and won in a federal court of appeal in April 2006. Galati argued that the lead case method “demonstrates institutional bias.” This distortion of normal procedures, he says, is being visited on the Roma because “they are the most marginalized, non-represented and alienated racial group. The government figured they’d have an easy time picking on them.”<sup>11</sup>

According to a 2006 Osgood Law School Article, “No Refuge: Hungarian Romani Refugee Claimants in Canada”, the “Federal Court of Appeal found it reasonable to believe that, through the lead case, the Immigration Refugee Board was attempting to manufacture a negative precedent that would reduce recognition rates and discourage Hungarian Romani refugee claimants from coming to Canada.”<sup>12</sup>

### **ROMA DECLARED “BOGUS REFUGEES”: SYSTEMIC DISCRIMINATION—PART 2**

Beginning in 2007, as the Canadian government was working toward solidifying the Canada-Europe Free Trade Agreement (CETA), the Immigration Policy toward Hungary changed, and once again the travel visa was no longer required for people from Hungary and the Czech Republic. The EU had made it clear that for CETA to be ratified, there could be no travel restrictions for EU member states.

Beginning in 2009, approximately 13,000 Hungarian Roma sought refuge in Canada until the federal government created a very unwelcoming environment and eventually changed their federal immigration and refugee policy in 2012. In 2007 and 2008, thousands of Czech Roma once again sought asylum in Canada when there was a huge resurgence of neo-Nazi violence toward Roma in the Czech Republic. The acceptance rate at the Immigration Refugee Board was 80%! Once political interference into the Immigration Refugee Board began, and Hungarian Roma asylum seekers were unjustly labeled as “bogus refugees” by the then Canadian Immigration Minister, Jason Kenney, the acceptance rate quickly fell sharply to zero. It remained at zero for 4 straight months, and then slowly began to climb back up to 12% where it remained for the next few years as the Canadian public was bombarded by negative messages about the Roma refugees.

According to Kenney, Roma refugee claimants came to Canada to commit crime, collect welfare, and receive free healthcare. He fanned the flames of negative Gypsy stereotypes and the plan worked very well. Hungarian Roma found themselves in such an unwelcoming, discriminatory climate in society and in institutions. Being labelled as bogus claimants, or fraudsters, wanting to take advantage of Canada, resulted in many people of Roma ethnicity becoming subjects of suspicion in their neighbourhoods, workplaces, schools, and when accessing social services or medical care. Many told me directly that they felt that they were receiving the same hatred that they were fleeing from in Hungary. Canada became a frightening place for these refugees. Many of them became so disheartened, by the discrimination from the Canadian

Federal Government, as well as by the serious negligent legal representation that thousands received, that they gave up on their asylum claims.

To make matters worse, many of those who returned to Hungary are living in a nightmare situation, which in many ways is worse than the one they left. They continue to be targets of human rights abuse, forced evictions from homes, and racially motivated violence, but now they also endure harassment for being considered traitors to Hungary.

Then former Minister of Immigration, Jason Kenney, continued to insist that Roma were “bogus refugees”. He made an impromptu attendance at a roundtable discussion at the Roma Community Centre on October 29, 2011 while I was the Executive Director. The meeting I organized was held at the request of local officials of Citizenship and Immigration Canada. At the meeting, Minister Kenney had the opportunity to hear first hand testimony from Hungarian Roma refugee claimants who shared stories of the torment and attacks they experienced in their village by neo-Nazi extremists in Hungary, and the horror that they had endured prior to coming to Canada. Disappointingly, despite these heart wrenching stories he heard, Minister Kenney ended the meeting still insisting that Roma were “bogus refugees”.

The fanning of negative “Gypsy” stereotypes became commonplace by the Immigration Minister. Kenney continued to very publicly iterate that Hungarian Romani refugee claimants were criminals and were coming to Canada to take advantage of social programs. According to Minister Kenney, Hungarian claimants come

to Canada not because they “need our protection” but rather “to benefit from the generosity of Canada’s social welfare system.” He also told a Senate Committee that Hungarian refugee claimants come to Canada because of programs such as the GST rebate, the Child Tax Benefit, welfare, public housing, and health care. As he put it, “There is a wide series of benefits that people can obtain, which appears to be a significant factor in that migration.”<sup>13</sup>

The largest number of deportations of Roma refugees was in 2012. The experience of 2011 and 2012 was devastating to the Roma community in Canada. The mass deportations of Roma seeking asylum in this country tore the fabric of the community. They had fled harsh treatment in Hungary, and now did not have the protection of the rule of law in Canada.

In April 2012, at a time when there was a UN Universal Periodic Review of Canada, I wrote a submission to the United Nations High Commission for Human Rights about the unfair treatment Roma refugees were receiving from the Immigration Minister, Jason Kenney. It was entitled “Delegitimizing Roma Refugees in Canada”. I wrote extensively about the discrimination experienced by Roma asylum seekers. The Canadian government not only characterized them as ‘bogus refugees’ for all Canadians, but Minister Kenney went as far as to appear on Hungarian public television in an interview where I heard and watched him reassure Hungarians that he knew that Hungary was a good, safe country. Rather than acknowledge the plethora of well-documented evidence pointing to abuse of Roma in Hungary by the State, Kenney went on to state that he fully

supports the Hungarian government and is aware that these are “bogus refugee” claims.

Moreover, Immigration Minister Kenney took his prejudiced views and discriminatory actions toward Hungarian Roma refugees to the next level by erecting Canadian billboards in one of the main cities in Hungary that many of the refugee claimants came from. The clear message is that you will be deported! This was an unprecedented move by Canadian immigration officials. The Canadian Civil Liberties Association rang alarm bells. In a 2012 *Toronto Star* article entitled, “Roma Refugees: Canadian Billboards in Hungary Warn of Deportation” stated, “Since last week, the Canadian government has erected six billboards in Hungary’s fourth largest city, proclaiming: ‘Those people who make a claim without sound reasons will be processed faster and removed faster.’”<sup>14</sup>

As well, the Citizenship Immigration Minister encouraged overt racism with Canada Border Services Agency officers at Toronto’s Pearson Airport where most of the Hungarian Refugee Claims were made. CBSA depicted the Roma people in such a negative, racist view. It described the Hungarian refugee claimants as criminals and fraudsters. “Not only did government officials assert that Hungarian Romani refugee claimants were fraudsters who came to Canada to abuse welfare and other social programs, they also issued warnings about risks of criminality.”<sup>15</sup>

**DESIGNATED “SAFE COUNTRIES” -  
CHANGING CANADA’S IMMIGRATION REFUGEE SYSTEM:  
SYSTEMIC DISCRIMINATION—PART 3**

In 2012, Citizenship and Immigration Canada

reformed the refugee determination system in Canada to deter Roma refugees from coming to Canada. It would become a two-tier system with a list of designated “safe countries”. The refugees from the “safe designated countries of origin (DCO)” would have differential treatment resulting in a more challenging time to obtain a successful asylum claim. “Ultimately, the measure selected by the government to, among other things, deter the arrival of Hungarian Romani refugee claimants was to reform Canada’s refugee determination system. The new system, which came into effect in December 2012, purportedly aims to discourage unfounded refugee claims by speeding up the process and by limiting the procedural and substantive rights.”<sup>16</sup>

In response to this differential treatment, I wrote to the United Nations, did countless public talks, and raised the issue in the media. In a *Toronto Star* article, *Why the Roma are Fleeing Hungary and Why Canada is Shunning Them*, I was quoted as saying, “Would-be refugees from those countries would have only 15 days to file a personal information form outlining their claim instead of the current 30 days. And they would have to prepare for a hearing in 30 days, instead of the several months they now have. It’s setting people up for failure right from the get-go. There’s just no way... you can get supporting documentation like medical and police reports in that time. You must order these from these countries. Try to get it from the U.S. and it’ll take you more than six weeks. Now you want it in less than 15 days from Hungary? Come on. Do you think these people are going to get any co-operation from Hungary, where people say Roma are giving their country a bad name?”<sup>17</sup>

As a final remedy for this institutional discrimination toward my community, I went to the federal government. In May and June of 2012, I was the first Canadian Romani to testify in front of a Parliamentary Committee, and the Canadian Senate, regarding Romani asylum seekers and the unfair treatment they were receiving from the Immigration Minister Jason Kenney, particularly in the forthcoming changes to immigration policy that would establish a list of “designated safe” countries and a two-tier asylum system.

#### **INTERDICTION – ROMA BEING PREVENTED TO BOARD PLANES TO CANADA -SYSTEMIC DISCRIMINATION–PART 5**

Since 2013, since the inception of the Electronic Travel Authorization (ETA), which is required to enter Canada, I have received at least 100 reports of Hungarian and Czech Roma not being allowed to board airplanes to Canada. This interception at airports when boarding planes is a clear example of racial profiling, is yet another example of discrimination from the Canadian government toward Roma people.

In a 2017 *Toronto Star* article, *Roma Say They’re Being Barred from Flights to Canada*, a Toronto immigration and settlement worker, Paul St. Clair, who has helped the Roma refugee community for over 20 years, said, “The interdiction is happening everywhere. I have had 50 Roma families in Toronto coming to us in the last six months, asking

**“ Hopefully, the Roma community will be able to live without the shadow of negative “Gypsy” stereotypes and systemic discrimination continuing to plague us.”**

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me what to do about it, how they can help their relatives come to visit. While advocates including St. Clair agree that many Roma, who were once known as Gypsies, may intend to come to Canada for asylum, they say Canada cannot stop legitimate refugees from traveling and accessing its asylum system if they have the proper documentation to visit the country and solid grounds to support their need for Canada’s protection.<sup>19</sup>

A CBC news report, “Roma Refugees Victims of Systemic Discrimination in Canada” shared that Canada still has some distance to go to fully embrace respect for the human rights of those seeking refuge from hatred, racism and xenophobia. “The country must do better.”<sup>20</sup>

Hopefully, the Roma community will be able to live without the shadow of negative “Gypsy” stereotypes and systemic discrimination continuing to plague us. It impacts all of us Canadians when this one seemingly acceptable form of racism continues to linger and exemplifies the injustice that we collectively seek to eliminate.

**“HONK IF YOU HATE GYPSIES”1 AND BOGUS REFUGEES: THE UNWELCOME HISTORY OF ROMA REFUGEES FROM EUROPE WHO SOUGHT ASYLUM IN CANADA BETWEEN 1990 AND 2013 - GINA CSANYI-ROBAH**

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**“HONK IF YOU HATE GYPSIES”<sup>1</sup> AND BOGUS REFUGEES: THE UNWELCOME HISTORY OF ROMA REFUGEES FROM EUROPE WHO SOUGHT ASYLUM IN CANADA BETWEEN 1990 AND 2013 - GINA CSANYI-ROBAH**

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# REFUGEE ADMISSION IN CANADA AND THE UNITED STATES: EVOLVING NUMBERS AND CHANGING RELATIONS

JACK JEDWAB

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## INTRODUCTION

In 2016 President Donald Trump took office on what several observers described as an anti-immigrant agenda. The year 2018 saw Canada resettled more refugees than the United States thus marking the first time that the US did not lead the world in this regard. The Trump administration's anti-immigrant rhetoric raised legitimate concerns on the part of Canadians about America's treatment of refugees.

On December 5, 2002 an agreement was struck between Canada and the United States with the stated purpose to "facilitate the management of refugee claims" made in the US and Canada by citizens of other countries (it came into force on December 29, 2004). What is called the Safe Third

Country Agreement or STCA required that persons who intend to seek asylum in Canada or the United States make their refugee claim in the first country of the two in which they arrive. In effect, persons fleeing their countries of origin who arrive either to the United States or Canada will only be eligible to seek protection in that country. From the outset, the STCA has been the object of some controversy owing in particular to concerns expressed by human rights groups in Canada about the 'plight' of refugees in the United States.

That which follows will look at the recent evolution in the numbers and source countries of refugees admitted in the United States and Canada. We will also look at the debate over the STCA and what it might imply by way of cooperation of the two countries when it comes to refugee admission(s).

## THE NUMBERS OF REFUGEES ADMITTED IN THE TWO COUNTRIES

In the United States the number of refugees admitted for resettlement is set by the President. In 2018 the Trump administration established a considerably lower cap on the number of refugees allowed into the country than in previous years. The following year yet another cut was implemented, greatly dimming the United States' role in accepting refugees from most parts of the world (Shear and Kanno-Youngs, 2019). The administration said it would accept 18,000 refugees during the next 12 months, down from the current limit of 30,000 and a fraction of the 110,000 President Barack Obama said should be allowed into the United States in 2016, his final year in office.

The Trump administration contended that the safety and security of the American people justified the reducing the numbers adding that "...the current burdens on the U.S. immigration system must be alleviated before it is again possible to resettle large number of refugees," the State Department said in a news release (see Allyn, 2019).<sup>4</sup> When elected in 2020, the Biden administration's stated aim was to reverse the immigration policy objectives set previously. In 2021 the Biden administration established the cap for refugee admissions at 62,500. Yet, as observed in Table 1, it ended up admitting only 11,454 refugees. Undoubtedly, the pandemic curtailed refugee admissions (which is also the explanation for the reduction in such admissions in Canada in the previous year that is also observed in Table 1).

In 2022, the Biden administration further raised the cap on refugee admissions to 125,000. Just

over 25 000 refugees were admitted in 2022 representing more than double that of the two previous fiscal years. Still, according to an analysis conducted by the Migration Policy Institute, at one-fifth of the total cap, the gap between the actual numbers admitted and the cap was the largest it's been in 20 years.

By contrast in Canada, the numbers of refugees remained consistent since the start of the twenty-first century. The decline emerged shortly after the onset of the pandemic as reflected in the numbers for 2020 and to a lesser degree for 2021. In the year 2022 Canada welcomed more than 47000 refugees. Hence, Canada took in nearly double what the United States allowed in 2022, the difference being by far the largest between the two countries over the course of the twenty-first century (keeping in mind that this is in real numbers and not per capita, a basis upon which Canada would vastly exceed the United States). (See Table 1)

## REFUGEE SOURCE COUNTRIES IN CANADA AND THE UNITED STATES

The United States has consistently received refugees from Asia, Africa, Europe, and Latin America. From 2010 to 2020, the highest number of refugees came from Myanmar, Iraq, and Bhutan, in descending order. By comparison, in 2021, the countries with the highest number of refugees admitted to the United States were the Democratic Republic of Congo, Syria, Afghanistan, and Ukraine, in descending order. In 2017, Trump issued an executive order that temporarily prohibited the entry of nationals of seven Muslim-majority countries—Iran, Iraq, Libya, Somalia, Sudan, Syria, and Yemen—and indefinitely barred



**TABLE 1. ANNUAL NUMBERS OF REFUGEES ADMITTED TO THE UNITED STATES AND CANADA RESPECTIVELY, 2000-2022.**

ANNUAL REFUGEE ADMISSION	UNITED STATES	CANADA
2000	72,165	30,095
2001	68,920	27,919
2002	26,785	25,118
2003	28,286	25,993
2004	52,840	32,695
2005	53,738	35,776
2006	41,094	32,501
2007	48,218	27,955
2008	60,107	21,860
2009	74,602	22,855
2010	73,293	24,699
2011	56,384	27,873
2012	58,179	23,092
2013	69,909	24,129
2014	69,975	24,068
2015	69,920	32,111
2016	84,989	37,308
2017	53,691	26,590
2018	22,405	27,790
2019	29,916	30,055
2020	11,840	9,235
2021	11,454	20,405
2022	25,465	47,530

Sources: Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada "Immigration of Permanent Residents by Immigration Category", 2000-2022 and United States, Department of Homeland Security "Immigration Statistics", 2000-2022.

all Syrian refugees. (Admissions for Syrians restarted in January 2018.) The executive order also tightened visa restrictions that had been imposed under Obama on those seven countries. The Trump administration revised the order twice amid legal challenges, until April 2018, when the Supreme Court allowed the third version of the order to stand. (See Chart 1)

When considering the source countries for refugees admitted in the United States and Canada one observes below that there are marked differences over the period covered in Table 2. In the case of the United States most of the refugees came from the Democratic Republic of Congo, Myanmar and Iraq (keeping in mind that over the period 2015-2021 most of the refugees came in the period 2015-2017). By contrast, the refugees that were admitted to Canada came mainly from Syria, Afghanistan and Eritrea. (See Table 2)

## CONFLICT AND COOPERATION

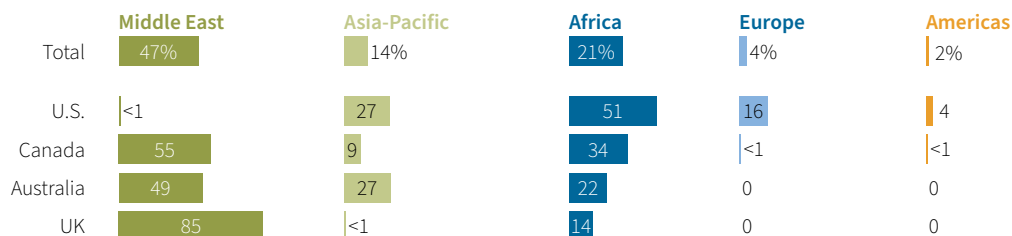
On 5 July 2017, Amnesty International, the Canadian Council of Churches, and the Canadian Council for Refugees announced the launch of a new legal challenge to the Safe Third Country Agreement (STCA) contending that policy and practice as regards refugees deteriorated since President Donald Trump took office. On July 22, 2020, Canada's Federal Court agreed with the applicants and declared the provisions enacting the STCA unconstitutional on the basis that it infringed the claimants' right to life, liberty, and security, under section 7 of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms. In April 2021, the Federal Court of Appeal (FCA) overturned the Federal Court's decision. The FCA held that the claimants

**TABLE 2. NUMBERS OF REFUGEES ADMITTED TO CANADA (2015-2022) AND TO THE UNITED STATES, (2015-2021) BY SELECTED COUNTRIES OF ORIGIN.**

CANADA 2015-2022 UNITED STATES 2015-2021	CANADA		UNITED STATES	
	217,06	PERCENTAGE	284,215	PERCENTAGE
Syria	85,755	39.5	23,205	8.1
Afghanistan	33,205	15.3	8,448	2.9
Eritrea	28,600	13.1	9,082	3.2
Iraq	20,960	9.6	30,945	10.9
Somalia, Democratic Republic of	9,285	4.3	24,838	8.7
Congo, Democratic Republic of the	8,710	4.0	61,882	21.7
Ethiopia	5,775	2.6	3,423	1.2
Pakistan	3,145	1.4	2,727	1.0
Sudan, Democratic Republic of	2,535	1.1	5,200	1.8
Iran	2,490	1.1	9,966	3.5
Burundi	2,245	1.0	2,916	1.0
Myanmar (Burma)	1,305	0.6	46,998	16.5
South Sudan, Republic of	1,000	0.4	5,200	1.8

Sources: Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada, 2015-2022 and United States, Department of Homeland Security “Immigration Statistics”, 2015-2021. (nb. The data was made available for those defined periods in Canada and the United States)

**CHART 1. WORLDWIDE, MOST RESETTLED REFUGEES COME FROM THE MIDDLE EAST, BUT NOT IN THE U.S.**  
Region of origin for resettled refugees in 2018 (%).



Note: Unknown nationalities not included.

Source: Pewt Research Center analysis of United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees data, accessed June 12, 2019.

should have challenged the process by which the Canadian government reviews whether the US continues to be a safe country for refugees, not the designation itself. The FCA's decision was appealed to the highest court in Canada, which agreed to hear the case (and a decision is expected in 2023).

The Government of Canada maintains that the agreement is an important part of the country's management of its asylum system. It adds that not everyone that is turned away by the US is detained. That the treatment of refugees in the United States does not breach rights in a way that "shocks the conscience" and that there are adequate safety valves in place. It maintains that removing the STCA will result in an "influx" of asylum seekers across the U.S. border, causing "irreparable harm" to the public by impeding the "functioning of the border, the sustainability and integrity of the Canadian asylum system, and the services and resources that support claimants in Canada.

That view has been challenged by a number of observers. For their part, Arbel and Macklin contend that "...by its own terms, the STCA can only operate if both Canada and the United States qualify as 'safe' countries for asylum seekers — that is, countries that afford asylum seekers the basic protections required by international law. By that measure, the United States is often unsafe for asylum seekers, and this did not begin or end with Donald Trump's presidency" (Indeed, challenges to the STCA pre-date the Trump administration).

While the STCA is the object of ongoing political debate and legal challenge, there has been continued cooperation between the two countries

in certain areas of refugee resettlement. A recent example is the cooperation around Afghan refugees which has been described by the government of Canada as reflecting a "...long and proud history of shared values and strong cooperation with the United States around refugee issues". The US State Department has referred more than 5,000 Afghan refugees seeking admission to the United States to a similar program in Canada where it noted that waiting times were shorter for refugees.

### **REFUGEE RESETTLEMENT IN THE UNITED STATES AND CANADA**

As regards the significant gaps between the projected cap on admissions and the actual numbers admitted, the Biden administration has contended that it is largely due to the damage done to the resettlement system by the administration reflected in massive funding cuts and accompanying staff reductions. Observers remark that while the Biden administration has made some progress in rebuilding resettlement, many experts insist that the resettlement system remains critically underfunded. The government has acknowledged that reaching the goal of 125,000 refugees will be an ongoing challenge (Dhingra 2022).

By contrast the settlement sector in Canada has benefitted from consistent government support across the pandemic. The 2022 federal budget proposed robust five year funding levels for Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada to "improve its capacity to respond to a growing volume of enquiries and to invest in the technology and tools required to better support people using their services" (Government of Canada, 2022).

As a government official stated “Newcomers and refugees have long been a driving force behind Canada’s society and economy. Our country has a proud tradition of being an international leader in resettlement and integration... and...this success could not be achieved without vital settlement service organizations...”

## CONCLUSION

Looking at the evolution of the numbers of refugees admitted by Canada and the United States over the course of the twenty-first century, from 2000 to 2017 the US admitted considerably more refugees than Canada did (though certainly not on a per capita basis). There were some exceptions in terms of the refugee admission gaps between the two countries most notably in the years 2002 and 2003 (in the years following the tragic events of September 2001).

Under the Trump administration, the numbers of refugees dropped quite significantly to the point where those admitted by Canada exceeded those admitted by the United States. in the years 2018, 2019, 2021 and 2022 with the exception of 2020 (that year especially affected by the pandemic).

But as observed above, the Biden administration has not meaningfully reversed the steep declines that were implemented under the previous administration and this despite the substantial increase in the targeted numbers determined by the cap. The inability to reconcile admission numbers with targets in the United States is widely attributed to the decline in support for the organizational capacity/infrastructure needed to receive refugees in the country. That does not appear to be the situation in much of Canada where the refugee resettlement sector remains robust.

Refugee admission numbers in the two countries do indeed matter. The cooperation between Canada and the United States around refugee admission(s) has come under some scrutiny as rights groups in Canada have appealed to the judiciary to suspend the STCA insisting that protection is at risk in the United States. For its part, the Government of Canada will undoubtedly defend the agreement with the United States as being in everyone’s interest and consistent with the idea that cooperation is the best course of action when it comes to the admission and settlement of refugees. This, despite the two countries apparent divergence in their respective approach to refugee admission(s).

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