

SSHRC Strategic Research Cluster: A Critical Comparison of the Settlement and Integration Experiences of Refugees and Immigrants in Canada (concept paper)  
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*Funded by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council Strategic Research Clusters Grant*

Canada admits approximately 250,000 immigrants per year. In recent years refugees have constituted about 10% of all immigrants, but this has varied over time with levels in the early-mid 1990s averaging 15-20%. Intake policies and settlement services are different for refugee and non-refugee immigrants. More importantly, refugees often face greater challenges to integration, due to the fact that their departure from home countries is forced rather than planned, often involves devastating loss of property and family separations, and leads to a more troubled and challenging integration in Canada. Despite these very large differences between refugees and other immigrants, studies of immigrants in Canada do not always distinguish the refugee population. This is a major gap, since the comparison of refugees and non-refugee immigrant settlement patterns is a strategic viewpoint for assessing particular needs of refugees. On the positive side, in Canada there is a significant body of refugee-focused research and emerging networks of refugee researchers, policy advisors and settlement program developers. Canadian refugee settlement policy and research is currently considered “leading edge” internationally.

Significant opportunities currently exist for strengthening clusters of refugee researchers, advisors and settlement program developers in Canada. A positive response to these opportunities will lead to new knowledge and better programs in Canada and a more informed Canadian input to international developments in this field. Such a positive

response should give particular attention to research comparing refugee and immigrant settlement experience. This is needed to assess the effectiveness of the settlement process and related policies for both groups.

The Refugee Research Cluster (RRC) will develop a framework for the analysis of refugee migration, service and settlement experiences utilizing the context of the experiences of the non-refugee immigrant (hereafter referred to as immigrant). To take account of the diverse migration histories and displacement experiences of refugees, differences between refugee claimants, Landed-in-Canada Refugees (LCRs) and those seeking protection from outside Canada, and among the latter, differences between Government Assisted Refugees (GARs) and Privately Sponsored Refugees (PSRs) will be explored. The comparative framework will be organized around four main content areas: 1.Legislative and Policy Frameworks. 2.Services and Settlement Patterns. 3.Identity and Place Considerations. 4.Cultural Studies, Communication and Advocacy.

**Legislative and Policy Frameworks:** Refugee claims in Canada dropped by 30% in the first six months of 2004 (CBC News, Aug 11, 2004). This is consistent with the post 9/11 preoccupation with security in industrialized countries and resulting deterrence and deflection of would be asylum seekers before they have a chance to make a claim (Kumin 2004). What is the international significance of this decline and of changes in countries of origin of refugees admitted to Canada? Richmond (2001) warns that one of the unintended consequences of stricter border control is a form of institutional racism affecting refugees. Clearly, the present global context calls for greater international cooperation through more extensive multilateral agreements in order to renew and maximize the benefits of migration for countries such as Canada (Richmond 2002). How

can Canada balance its international responsibility to refugees as defined in the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees with its domestic responsibilities for economic stability and national security? What is the impact of new legislation and policy such as the Immigration and Refugee Protection Act, the “Smart Border Accord” with the United States and the federal government’s recently released national security policy?

**Services and Settlement Patterns:** How do outcomes in terms of employment and income security among refugees compare to those of immigrants and what implications does this have for the present differential access to settlement services? What criteria are used to measure successful integration and are they appropriate for refugees? There are several factors that may increase the settlement and health care needs of refugee claimants and refugees as compared to immigrants, such as trauma, long waiting periods to have their cases heard, extreme forced mobility, imported conflicts and tensions among refugees, uncertainty regarding family members left behind or their dependency on remittances, and discrimination in Canada. Another critical problem is how to assess the situation of non-status persons, given that they are often neglected and likely include a substantial number of failed refugee claimants.

**Identity and Place:** How do gender, “race” and generation influence the settlement process for refugees and immigrants? Most refugees and immigrants entering Canada settle in a few large urban centers that profoundly influence their integration. The Canadian government recently launched an initiative to settle skilled immigrants outside of major urban centers (Krahn et al 2003). The success of this initiative requires more understanding of the variations in refugee and immigrant integration across different

cities. How does the forced displacement of refugees compare to the voluntary migration of immigrants in terms of return migration and the myth of return? What are the transnational ties sustained by refugees and immigrants and how do these influence settlement experience in different Canadian cities? Comparison of resettlement patterns of refugees and immigrants in different locations will help to assess separate settlement services and policies, identify major differences between the two groups that transcend place, and assess the role of transnational ties for both groups.

**Cultural Studies, Communication and Advocacy:** How do public perception and the portrayal of refugees in mainstream media influence refugee experiences in Canada? Differences in degrees of attachment to home countries may be significant in the comparison between refugees and immigrants. Is there also a relationship between attachment to the homeland and substantive citizenship, i.e. full participation in Canadian society? Do refugees who achieve the landed status of immigrants necessarily achieve full participation in Canadian society or do social structural factors specific to refugees continue to limit participation? Refugees and immigrants come from a wide variety of cultural backgrounds. How are refugees received by the general public, and what kinds of accommodations are made to either enable or hinder the retention of specific cultural values, beliefs and practices?

**Research Rational:** Nathwani (2004) argues that Canada's refugee policy is both in the best interest of Canada and justified by the legal principle of necessity, i.e. national and global forces create a situation where refugees must move and it is therefore in the best interest of Canada to facilitate settlement to stem the flow of illegal immigration. While this may be true, this instrumental view reinforces the polarization of refugees as

liabilities and immigrants as potential assets. The diversity of refugee experiences and refugee agency are difficult to study within such a framework. Furthermore, Adelman (2004) argues that analyses of the connection between settlement services and outcomes often miss the unique quality of resiliency among refugees. Incorporating refugee resiliency into intake policies may help to renew the logic for accepting refugees. While the recent preoccupation with security and the associated higher costs of settlement in Canada threaten existing returns on settlement, this does not mean that Canada cannot adapt policies to better meet its own needs and at the same time continue to fulfill its international responsibilities. Canada may need to rethink its whole immigration paradigm, however, in order to come up with durable solutions within the changing global context.

**Previous Research:** Initial research has already pointed to some of the unique settlement challenges and strategies of refugees. Derwing (2000) found that refugees with high educational attainment initially settled in Alberta experienced more downward mobility than their immigrant counterparts, a finding she attributes to structural factors operating in a segmented Canadian Labor market. Stigmatization of sponsored refugees in Quebec also had a significant negative effect on performance in the labor market (Renaud 2003). Ighodaro (2003), similarly, found that highly educated African refugees were being systematically marginalized in the Canadian labor market. In Toronto, women admitted as refugee claimants had trouble obtaining work permits only to then have them viewed with suspicion by potential employers (Wong 2000). This research displays a continuity of disadvantage faced by refugee women who flee conflict zones to claim refugee status in Canada (Giles and Hyndman 2004). On a more positive note, Wilkinson (2002) found

that 80% of refugee youth studying in Canada were expected to complete high school, and 50% of those were expected to continue to postsecondary education. Whether this will translate into employment and income security is less clear.

**Value and Impact of RRC:** The RRC will build on the above studies by tapping into and strengthening emerging research networks in Canada, including non-academic governmental and non-governmental partners, and community research partners. A cluster approach is ideally suited to this topic since it will bring together valuable fragments of refugee research in Canada. This will generate critical questions to be considered in light of new realities. Graduate students working under the supervision of the principal investigators will assist in consultation with non-academic partners and other related tasks. Working closely with non-academic partners will ground the research framework creating more direct links between knowledge production and the application of that knowledge. A primary goal will be to develop innovative methods to critically assess the effectiveness of various legislative and policy frameworks in addressing the diverse needs of refugees. A secondary goal of the project will be to identify specific strategies in service delivery that are working well, areas in need of improvement and areas requiring further research. These goals can be successfully pursued within a cluster approach because it will allow comparisons across geographic areas, different migrant groups and different theoretical approaches to studying refugee migration and settlement.

**Method:** Step 1. The RRC will begin with three regional consultation workshops in Edmonton, Montreal and Toronto respectively. Each workshop will develop a series of critical issues facing refugees living in the respective regions and identify significant differences with respect to immigrants. Step 2. A broader research framework will be

developed at a main integrating workshop in Toronto by comparing the critical issues raised at the regional workshops with each other and to existing research and research frameworks for immigrants. Step 3. A concept paper will be prepared by the CRS by refining the results of the integrating workshop, and incorporating comments from the principal investigators via electronic communication as the draft develops. Results of the RRC project will be posted on the CRS website and made available to key non-academic partners in government and non-governmental organizations to increase the impact of the proposed research framework. Key non-academic partners will be consulted at each stage of the project and invited to attend all workshops.

**CRS and the Project Team:** The Centre for Refugee Studies (CRS) is an organized research unit of York University founded in 1988 by Dr. Howard Adelman, a leading scholar in refugee studies. The mandate of the Centre is to engage in research on refugee issues; to inform public discussion as well as policy development and practice innovation through international, governmental, advocacy and service organizations; and, to support teaching in refugee and migration studies. The Centre publishes *Refuge*, Canada's only inter-disciplinary refereed journal on refugees. The new director of the Centre, Dr. Susan McGrath will manage this project. Dr. McGrath has extensive experience in project development and management in academic and community settings. Through her research and work in community development with a particular interest in refugee populations, she has extensive ties with the NGO sector and with researchers across Canada and internationally, most recently in Rwanda.

The four remaining investigators were chosen based on their demonstrated expertise, publications and extensive research networks in the field of refugee and immigrant

studies. Dr. Tracey Derwing, Professor in the Department of Educational Psychology at the University of Alberta, is co-Director of the Prairie Metropolis Centre network, member of the American Association of Applied Linguistics and TESL Canada and soon to be member of the Canadian Modern Language Review. Dr. Jean Renaud is Professor of Sociology at l'Université de Montréal and director of the Centre d'études ethniques des universités montréalaises (CEETUM). He is co-Director of the Canadian summer school on longitudinal analysis, a joint initiative by CEETUM and the Centre interuniversitaire d'études démographiques (CIED). Dr. Sharryn Aiken, Assistant Professor in the faculty of Law at Queen's University, has been actively engaged in public advocacy on refugee and immigration issues for the past decade. She is editor-in-chief of Refuge, and co-chair of the Equality Rights Panel of the Court Challenges Programme. Dr. Tania Das Gupta is Associate Professor in the School of Social Sciences at Atkinson, York University. She brings cutting-edge research experience in intersecting areas of work, race, racism and anti-racism; women, race and family; and organizing immigrant contingent workers, with a particular focus on South Asian Immigrant women in Canada.

**Non-academic partners:** CRS and the researchers on this cluster have far-reaching ties to the NGO and public service sectors, provincially, nationally and internationally. Settlement agencies and ethnocultural groups are crucial sites of public education, policy advocacy and services development and provision. CRS and Canada's leading umbrella organization of refugee agencies, the Canadian Council of Refugees (CCR), have a memorandum of understanding defining their commitment to work together on refugee issues. CCR, including its regional and national members such as the Ontario Coalition of



Agencies Serving Immigrants (OCASI) and the Alberta Association of Immigrant Serving Agencies (AAISA), will be included in regional workshops and the integrating workshop. Members of the cluster are also active in the Metropolis project and will draw on the extensive research networks of Metropolis and their links with provincial and federal public servants in the settlement sector to participate in workshops and provide feedback on drafts of the concept paper. Other organizations to be consulted and which may serve as users include Citizenship and Immigration Canada (CIC) the United Nations High Commissioner on Refugees (UNHCR), and the Canadian Centre for Victims of Torture (CCVT).