

Refugee –related research themes & questions for students

Centre for Refugee Studies, York University September, 2013

This list of research themes and questions has been developed by the Refugee Research Network (RRN) at the Centre for Refugee Studies (CRS) at York University to encourage the generation and mobilization of research on refugees in Canada.

These priority areas of research are drawn from two reports generated by the practitioner community. The first, entitled: *A Sector-Based Research Agenda: Issues Affecting Government-Assisted Refugees in Canada*, was published on November 15, 2010, and compiled by Chris Friesen (ISS of BC) and Jennifer Hyndman (CRS). This research agenda focuses on government-assisted refugees and emerged in consultation with representatives from service providers across Canada. The second, entitled: *Refugee Integration: Key concerns and areas for further research*, was published on December 23, 2011, by the Canadian Council for Refugees. The report emerged through a consultation with settlement practitioners, private sponsors, academics, and other stakeholders to identify priority concerns regarding refugee integration.

We invite faculty and students to work with us in responding to this community-generated research agenda. The field of refugee studies is interdisciplinary and all interested scholars are encouraged to engage with this project – whether from the professional programs, the arts, or the social sciences. While some of the research questions listed below may already have been addressed by researchers, the issues raised by the practitioner community would seem to indicate that the knowledge produced may not have been sufficiently disseminated. A useful response in these cases would be to develop comprehensive literature reviews and make them widely available online. Alternatively, there are questions that have not been extensively researched and could be studied in term papers or major research papers.

Students who participate in the project will have their peer-reviewed literature reviews and research papers posted on the RRN website (www.refugeereseach.net) as a resource and have an opportunity to submit their work for presentation at community-based and academic consultations and conferences. Travel support will be provided by the RRN to a number of students who have their research accepted for presentation at these events. In addition, students will receive training in developing research summaries from the Knowledge Mobilization Unit at York, where they will learn how to write about their work for non-academic audiences

Researchers are expected to put the welfare of refugees first in any studies they undertake and to respect the principle of 'do no harm' that Mary B. Anderson (1999) outlined in her

work on humanitarianism aid some years ago, i.e. no research should be undertaken if it has potentially harmful consequences in policy or practice to refugee welfare¹. Our goal in compiling this community-generated research agenda is to improve the experiences of refugees and the policies and practices that support them. We acknowledge and understand that research can be put to unintended uses; as a result, it is important for students working on these questions to consider the potential impacts of the knowledge they produce.

1. Settlement outcomes

General

- What are the settlement outcomes for refugees (e.g. labour market participation, use of provincial income support, impact of language requirement for citizenship, impact of religion/spirituality)?
- What factors contribute to barriers/successes and how can longitudinal settlement outcomes be measured?
- How should integration be measured? (E.g. alternative approaches to outcome measurement with regards to employment success and other integration factors; considering refugees' 'sense of belonging' as measure of integration.)

By immigration category & length of time in Canada

- What are the differences in a) eligibility for, b) availability of, and c) uptake of settlement assistance services among GARs, PSRs, Refugees Landed in Canada, and non-refugee immigrants, across the provinces?
- How do the differences between refugee categories (i.e. inland refugees, GARs, and PSRs) impact settlement and integration experiences?
- Are there differences in integration experiences between different groups? (E.g. first and second generation refugee families; refugee children and children from other categories of immigration.)
- What are the consequences for inland refugee claimants of waiting for their claims to be processed? (Anecdotal evidence suggests that hardships experienced in the initial years in Canada can have profound and long-lasting consequences for integration.)
- What are the impacts of temporary status experienced by refugee claimants and those coming from protracted refugee situations?

Employment

- How do refugees find their first job?
- How does immigration status on arrival interact with other factors to influence access to employment over time? (Longitudinal study following first 5 years after arrival.)
- What is the impact of access to provincial employability programs on arrival?
- How do language, discrimination, education, and other factors influence access to employment upon arrival and over time?

¹ Anderson, M. B. (1999) Do No Harm: How Aid Can Support Peace or War, Boulder CO: Lynne Rienner Publishers; 3rd Printing edition.



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- Do refugees face particular issues with respect to credential recognition and accessing appropriate employment? (E.g. are there psychological barriers to “starting again” that may prevent some refugees from getting their credentials recognized?)
- What might be some innovative ways for refugees with work experience in their home countries to use their skills? (Anecdotal evidence suggests that many refugees have transferable skills that go unrecognized.)
- What are the experiences of older adult refugees in relation to access to employment and labour market integration? (E.g. issues related to limited use of English/French, fragile health.)
- What are some alternative methods for measuring employment success?
- Do refugees face discrimination in the labour market?

Health, mental health, and trauma-related issues

- What are the mental health issues of GARs (government assisted refugees) and what treatment models and/or approaches are culturally appropriate?
- What are some affordable alternative ways of maintaining mental health? (E.g. social groups, physical activity, nutrition, etc.)
- Are there barriers to the uptake of mental health services by refugees? (E.g. issues around concepts of mental health; stigmatization of mental health.)
- What physical health issues do refugees face? (Including HIV/AIDS.)
- What are the health needs of older adult refugees and of refugees with disabilities?
- What are the impacts of health issues on social and economic integration?

Language training programs

- What are some of the barriers that refugees face in accessing existing language training programs?
- What are some of the shortcomings of existing language training programs for refugees? (E.g. lack of adaptation of language training for people who are illiterate or have low levels of education; lack of job-specific language training.)

Housing issues

- Do refugees face barriers in terms of access to housing?
- Does discrimination based on refugee status play a role in the housing market?
- What are the housing experiences of refugees outside of major urban centres?
- What is the impact of regionalization and of specific settlement areas on individuals and families?
- What is the relationship between place and housing experiences? (E.g. big city, small community; type of neighbourhood.)
- Is there a role for cooperative models of housing for refugee settlement?

Other economic issues that affect settlement

- Transportation loans
 - How does refugees’ repayment of transportation loans impact their settlement and integration outcomes? (E.g. employment, language acquisition, high school completion rates. Particular attention to impacts on individual refugees versus families, as well as on youth.)
- Remittance obligations

- What are the impacts on integration of refugees with family members abroad to whom they have financial responsibilities?

Settlement program coordination & evaluation

- Does centralization of settlement services in urban centres form a barrier to integration? (E.g. differences in access to settlement services outside of urban centres or where services are centralized; comparison of experiences between smaller communities and larger cities.)
- Can an evaluation framework be developed that addresses outcomes, is agreed upon by service providers and funders, and does not require the reallocation of resources from programs?
- Do particular pilot programs or experiments lead to improved outcomes for refugees? (E.g. Local Immigration Partnerships as good model of coordination.)
- Could alternative models of settlement program coordination be used?
- Do different provincial jurisdictions have an impact on access to settlement services and mainstream social welfare services?
- How well are various services coordinated within regions?

2. Government Assisted Refugee (GAR) youth

- How well are GAR youth settling in Canada over time? How do family and integration-related factors/needs impact GAR youth's settlement and high school completion rates?
- How do single/lone parents raising refugee youth who have daycare needs and are attending regular school fare?
- What are GAR youth's experiences with accessing employment? (E.g. lack of access to employability programs.)
- Do refugee youth have unique education needs and if so, what are they and how can they be addressed?
- Need for longitudinal studies to follow youth progress over time.

3. Resettlement Assistance Program (RAP) funding

- Does the limited RAP funding structure reflect the different needs of refugees, especially the (perceived) higher medical requirements of GARs who arrived after new selection criteria were implemented under the 2002 *Immigration and Refugee Protection Act* (IRPA)?
- Is there a way to allocate settlement resources that corresponds to different levels of need for post-IRPA refugees?
- How effectively does RAP income support the settlement and integration of GARs? (Does it set them up for failure?)
- Cost-of-living or livelihood studies would be helpful – in large cities where costs are higher, a large study that documents food bank access would be relevant.

4. Family reunification



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- What is the impact of delayed family reunification on refugees? How do family dynamics change (including gender relations) and does this impact settlement?
- How do delays in reunification affect single/lone parents who face the double stress of raising children alone and supporting a spouse abroad?
- What are the integration experiences of refugees arriving with their families and how do those compare to those of refugees arriving alone and awaiting reunification?
- What has been the impact of the moratorium on applications for sponsorship of parents and grandparents?
- What challenges do refugees face due to family separation? (E.g. mental health issues; economic responsibilities, remittances.)

5. Pre-arrival information-sharing

- How effective is pre-departure training for refugees? What is its impact on settlement outcomes?
- What gaps, if any, exist in pre-arrival orientation and information-sharing, and how can they be filled?
- Critical content analysis of orientation abroad materials would be valuable.

6. Destination policy

- What factors should be considered in destining refugees? Which factors drive secondary migration? What factors drive retention?
- How many refugees from one ethnic/national group should be destined to a specific location in order to maximize retention?
- How can better matches be created between destination and refugees' needs?

7. Protracted refugee situations (PRS)

- What are the settlement needs and outcomes of refugees from protracted situations compared to those from shorter term displacements? (Especially in terms of health and mental health needs and outcomes.)
- Do refugees from protracted situations require a special program that addresses their learning needs as these relate to language and professional training? (Development of a 'Protracted Refugee Benchmark' to address this?)

8. Discrimination & stereotyping

- How can discrimination/prejudice against and stereotypes of refugees be addressed in host communities?
- What tools can be created to educate Canadian communities to dispel stereotypes and help prepare for the arrival of newcomers? (E.g. public awareness campaigns about the situations of claimants awaiting status determination.)
- What approaches can be followed to educate locally elected government representatives on the needs of the refugee population in their jurisdictions?