GARS VS. PSRS: EXPLAINING DIFFERENCES IN OUTCOMES FOR RECENT REFUGEES TO CANADA

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There is a growing body of literature in Canada that points to the superior economic performance of privately sponsored refugees (PSRs) as opposed to government assisted refugees (GARs) in the country and, at times, underlying that view is the idea that governments should cede more responsibility to the private sector when it comes to welcoming refugees and helping them adjust to their new homes. Using 2016 census data on refugee admissions, while affirming the better economic outcomes of PSRs, this paper suggests that background characteristics of the two groups may play a greater role in the varying results between the two.

Existe un creciente grupo de estudios en Canadá, que señala el desempeño económico superior de los refugiados patrocinados de manera privada (PSR en inglés) en comparación con los refugiados asistidos por el gobierno (GAR en inglés) en el país y, en ocasiones, subyace a esta idea la noción de que el gobierno debería ceder mayor responsabilidad al sector privado cuando se trata de recibir a refugiados y ayudarles a adaptarse a sus nuevos hogares. Utilizando datos censales sobre admisiones de refugiados en 2016, al tiempo que confirma los mejores resultados económicos de los PSR, este trabajo sugiere que las características de los antecedentes de ambos grupos pueden jugar un mayor papel en los divergentes resultados entre ambos.

Au Canada, de plus en plus de publications soulignent la performance économique supérieure des réfugiés parrainés par le secteur privé (RPSP), en opposition aux réfugiés parrainés par le gouvernement (RPG) dans le pays, et parfois, ce point de vue sous-jacent rejoint l'idée que les gouvernements devraient laisser davantage de responsabilités au secteur privé concernant l'accueil des réfugiés et les aider à s'adapter à leurs nouveaux lieux de vie. En utilisant les données du recensement de 2016 sur les admissions de réfugiés, et en confirmant de meilleurs résultats économiques des RPSP, cette publication suggère que les caractéristiques socio-démographiques des deux groupes pourraient jouer un rôle plus important dans les résultats variables entre les deux.

Contrary to what might be assumed, both the Government of Canada and private sponsors do offer a support network to refugees. However, the private sponsors are seen as extending a more personalized and dedicated type and degree of support to refugees than the government does. But the 2016 census results suggest that the major differences in economic outcomes may have more to do with selection on the part of refugee sponsors than the personalized services they offer. Either way it is an issue that merits greater attention in the evolving process of refugee admission.

In 2016, for the first time Canada's census made it possible to classify immigrants that arrived as of 1980 according to the category under which they were admitted into the country. This data will enable analysts to document a key component of the profile of Canada's immigrant population. In public discourse, immigrants are too often the object of caricature and the manner in which distinctions are made between immigrants and non-immigrants gives the impression that the two groups possess fundamentally different social and economic characteristics.

Measuring immigrant integration can be complex and policy-makers and researchers generally use the non-immigrant as the benchmark against which to assess the evolving economic and social circumstances of immigrants. Taking into account the diversity of immigrants and non-immigrants inevitably renders comparisons between them even more difficult. The new census data on immigrant categories offer important insights into the diversity of backgrounds and the trajectories of the country's foreign-born population.

When measuring immigrant integration, it is essential to keep in mind that the variation in the migrant's social and economic circumstances at their time of arrival can be a key predictor of future outcomes. That which follows will look at how two categories of refugees in Canada have fared over time, specifically government assisted refugees (GARs) and privately sponsored refugees (PSRs). It is generally held that the PSRs do better than GARs owing to the stronger support system that arises from community and/or family sponsorship. While not disputing this claim, the data from the 2016 census suggests that the differences in origins and language knowledge upon arrival in Canada need closer attention before drawing firm conclusions as to reasons for the economic gaps between GARs and PSRs.

MIGRATION SELECTION IN CANADA

In Canada, immigrants are selected based on three main objectives: to enhance and promote economic development; to reunite families; and to fulfill the country's international obligations and uphold its humanitarian tradition. Within these three broad areas are multiple categories of immigrants. In 2016, some six in ten immigrants were admitted under the economic category, when combining principal applicants, spouses and dependents. Some three in ten immigrants were admitted as family class to join family already in the country and about one in ten immigrants were admitted to Canada as refugees. As a result of the admission of Syrian refugees in early 2016, the share of refugees represented just under one in five immigrants over the period of January 1st to May 10th, 2016. Statistics Canada data reveals that amongst immigrants admitted during the 1980s and still living in Canada in 2016, economic immigrants accounted for four in ten immigrants with three in ten immigrants under the family class and some two in ten admitted as refugees (Statistics Canada 2017).

Although refugees are not selected based on their capacity for economic success, one of the objectives of immigration policy is to support their self-sufficiency and their social and economic well-being. Apart from their diverse backgrounds, refugees fall under certain admission subcategories. Amongst the refugee sub categories listed in the 2016 census are: (1) 'protected persons in Canada or dependents abroad,' which includes immigrants who applied for refugee protection while in Canada and who were granted permanent resident status on the basis of a well-founded fear of returning to their country of origin, as well as immigrants who were granted permanent resident status as a family member abroad; (2) 'resettled refugees,' which includes immigrants who have been selected abroad while outside of their home country or country where they normally lived and who were granted permanent resident status on the basis of a well-founded fear of returning to that country. Within the latter category there are government-assisted refugees (GARs), privately sponsored refugees (PSRs), and blended visa office-referred refugees (BVOR).

Under the GARs program, refugees are referred to Canada for resettlement by the United Nations Refugee Agency (UNHCR) or another referral organization. Individuals cannot apply directly. You must register for refugee status with the UNHCR or state authorities to be considered by a referral organization. A GARs initial resettlement in Canada is entirely supported by the Government of Canada or the province of Quebec. This support is delivered by non-governmental agencies called service provider organizations, funded by the federal department of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada (IRCC). GARs obtain support for up to one year from the date they arrive in Canada, or until they are able to support themselves (Government of Canada 2016a).

PSRs are sponsored by Canadians that have volunteered to help them adjust to life here. Sponsors commit to finding refugees a place to live; giving them financial support, providing social and emotional support and ensuring they have food and clothing. They have agreed to support them for one year after arrival or until such time as they can support themselves. The sponsor must provide support and there is no requirement that they be paid to do so (Government of Canada 2017a).

REFUGEE ADMISSIONS

Canada has a long history of admitting refugees to the country. But that history is marked by difficult debates about the admission of certain refugees and a number of very unfortunate episodes where migrants were refused admission owing to their background and origins. Most Canadians are unaware of this history as some seven in ten believe that "throughout its history Canada has always welcomed immigrants" (Jedwab 2016).

The PSR program began in 1979 with the massive influx of persons displaced following the war in Vietnam, Cambodia and Laos. Private sponsors are groups of Canadians or organizations, many hailing from faith-based communities as well as ethno-cultural groups and settlement organizations (Canadian Council for Refugees 2014). Recently, the number of refugees from Syria was met with a significant expression of interest in sponsorship on the part of Canadians. The model for Canadian private sponsorship is the object of interest from a number of immigrant receiving countries. However, above all else, success in copying the Canadian approach requires some comprehension of why Canadians are ready to commit to sponsoring refugees. To this end, additional insight is required into who the private sponsors are and what motivates them to receive refugees (in this regard, see the essay by Wendy Cukier in this edition).

The 2016 census reports that there are nearly 859,000 persons that entered Canada as refugees as of 1980 and some 53% are men. As seen in Table 1, those who settled in the country during the 1980's were overwhelmingly resettled refugees, by contrast with the first decade of the twenty first century where the protected persons in Canada constituted the majority of the country's refugees. In the 2011 to 2016 period, the resettled refugees reemerged as the majority of refugees in the country. Within the resettled refugees, the majority are GARs across the entire period (1980-2016). But it is worth noting that the gap GARs and PSRs was widest in the first decade of the 21st century.

TABLE 1: NUMBER OF REFUGEES IN CANADA BY SELECTED CATEGORY OF ADMISSION AND TIME OF ARRIVAL, 1980-2016

Category	Total	1980-1990	1991-2000	2001-2010	2011-2016
All refugees	858 850	229 120	242 275	246 940	140 520
Resettled refugees	533 505	221 510	127 055	99 760	85 180
i. Government-assisted refugees	297 105	115 135	68 680	66 805	46 485
ii. Privately sponsored refugees	233 340	106 380	58 370	32 955	35 630

Source: Statistics Canada, 2016

As observed in table 2, since 1980 just under half of the country's refugees have come from Asia. The share of refugees from Europe dropped from some one in four during the 1990's to some 4% since the year 2000. Refugees from Africa increased from about 12% in the 1990's to 25% in the period of 2011-2016. As regards specific countries, the data illustrates the decline in refugee numbers from a number of countries between the first decade of the century and the years 2011 and 2016, with Iraqi numbers remaining consistent and the numbers of Syrians rising substantially.[1]

When looking at the distribution of GARs and PSRs by continent and country of birth, one observes that GARs are more numerous across the spectrum and in particular amongst those coming from the Americas. where overall there are more than double the number of GARs and for the period 2011-2016 (the ratio of GARs to PSRs is four to one). When looking at specific countries, in terms of overall admissions, the GARs significantly outnumber PSRs for resettled refugees in Bosnia and Herzegovina and El Salvador, while there were far more PSRs than GARs from Poland, Ethiopia, Eritrea and Pakistan. In the more recent period (2011-2016), while refugees from Syria represented one quarter of all admissions, refugees entered from several other countries.

REFUGEES: WHERE DO THEY LIVE?

More than one-third of Canada's refugees live in the Toronto region (37%) followed by Montreal (14%) and Vancouver (8%). A majority of the refugees are "resettled" and the majority of the group are GARs. Yet over the period of 1980-2016, of the ten largest refugee receiving cities listed in table 4, all but Toronto and Montreal had more GARs than PSRs.

1 The 2016 census covers an important part, though not the entire wave, of Syrians that entered the country since 2015.

TABLE 2: NUMBER OF REFUGEES IN CANADA BY CONTINENT, SELECTED COUNTRY OF BIRTH, AND TIME OF ARRIVAL, 1980-2016

Place of Birth	Total	1980-1990	1991-2000	2001-2010	2011-2016
Total outside of Canada	858 845	229 115	242 275	246 940	140 520
Asia	421 830	112 265	111 580	117 475	80 515
Europe	152 285	65 930	65 340	15 755	5 255
Africa	147 055	14 760	36 620	59 705	35 970
Americas	136 155	35 640	28 280	53 580	18 655
Viet Nam	60 145	50 450	8 360	860	470
Poland	56 615	42 845	13 145	515	110
Sri Lanka	55 195	8 635	29 920	14 160	2 485
Iraq	43 590	2 545	10 765	14 770	15 505
Afghanistan	41 165	3 905	12 155	19 005	6 105
Iran	34 705	9 765	13 140	7 600	4 200
Colombia	31 680	300	1700	25 685	3 995
Syria	29 025	440	805	1 225	26 550
El Salvador	28 385	17 650	8 150	1 490	1 095
China	27 000	2 855	4 705	14 555	4 880

Source: Statistics Canada, 2016

TABLE 3: GARS AND PSRS BY CONTINENT, SELECTED COUNTRY OF BIRTH AND TIME OF ARRIVAL, 1980-2016 AND 2011-2016

	1980-2016		2011-2016	
	GARs	PSRs	GARs	PSRs
Total	297 100	233 340	46 485	35 630
Asia	137 985	122 730	32 500	24 335
Europe	67 785	56 205	730	410
Africa	47 255	34 585	11 680	10 520
Americas	43 955	19 070	1 565	370
Viet Nam	33 040	26 295	220	115
Bosnia and Herzegovina	20 385	3 400	60	10
Iraq	19 020	20 470	7 550	6 760
El Salvador	17 800	6 285	90	170
Afghanistan	17 090	17 765	1 135	3 320
Poland	16 960	38 845	-	10
Syria	13 730	10 625	12 785	9 955
Ethiopia	6 600	10 480	865	2 135
Eritrea	3 485	6 705	845	3 480
Pakistan	2 030	3 950	360	1 480

Source: Statistics Canada, 2016

TABLE 4: NUMBER OF REFUGEES IN CANADA BY SELECTED CATEGORY OF ADMISSION AND SELECTED CENSUS METROPOLITAN REGION, 1980-2016

Region	Refugees	Resettled refugees	GARs	PSRs
Canada	858 850	533 505	297 100	233 340
Toronto	319 290	161 705	70 930	90 775
Montréal	117 890	53 470	25 070	28 400
Vancouver	71 115	54 090	34 315	19 775
Calgary	48 120	35 460	20 695	14 765
Edmonton	42 345	32 520	20 425	12 095
Ottawa	39 835	24 025	15 875	8 150
Hamilton	28 030	20 025	12 040	7 985
Kitchener - Cambridge - Waterloo	23 845	19 670	12 420	7 250
London	20 300	14 905	9 670	5 235
Winnipeg	18 925	17 330	10 165	7 165

Source: Statistics Canada, 2016

With the influx of Syrian refugees over the period of January 2015 to January 2018, the share of PSRs grew considerably and their number approached that of the GARs. As observed in Table 5, the vast majority of resettled refugees in Montreal were PSRs and two out of three refugees were settled in Toronto. In all likelihood, this is a function of where much of the sponsorship emerged for the Syrian refugee population.

TABLE 5: PERCENTAGE OF PSRS IN ADMISSIONS - OUT OF ALL RESETTLED REFUGEES - BY TOP 10 CENSUS METROPOLITAN AREA (CMA) OF INTENDED DESTINATION, JANUARY 2015-JANUARY 2018

Canada	48%
Montreal	85%
Oshawa	81%
Guelph	76%
St. Catharine's - Niagara	68%
Toronto	65%
Sherbrooke	64%
Calgary	63%
Winnipeg	62%
Belleville	54%
Edmonton	50%

Source: Government of Canada, 2017b

GARS VS PSRS

In the aftermath of the admission of Syrian refugees to Canada, the country's immigration department, Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada (hereafter IRCC) conducted a Rapid Impact Evaluation (RIE) that aimed to assess the early outcomes of the 2015-2016 Syrian Refugee Initiative. The evaluation examined the Syrian refugees who were admitted to Canada between November 2015 and March 2016 and were part of an initial 25,000 Syrian refugee commitment made by the government of Canada (the RIE was conducted prior to the release of the 2016 census data). The RIE employed data from a Longitudinal Immigration Data Base (IMDB)[2] to examine the overall economic performance of GARs and PSRs for the period 1992-2012. The Report concluded that "in the first years following admission, GARs tended to have lower economic performance as compared to PSRs. Specifically, they had lower incidence of employment, lower employment earnings, and higher social assistance reliance" (Government of Canada 2016b).

On the basis of their economic performance, the RIE reported that GARs caught up to PSRs after seven years in Canada (and surpass them after 10 years). However, amongst those refugees arriving since 2002, the catch-up did not occur until after ten years in the country. Among refugees who landed between 1993 and 2007, the department found those sponsored by the government were, on average, about twice as likely as those sponsored privately to be on social assistance two years after resettling in Canada. Also, the RIE adds that during the

2 The IMDB provides detailed and reliable information on the labour market behaviour of different categories of immigrants over a period that is long enough to assess the impact of characteristics at admission, such as education and knowledge of French or English.

year 2009, some 19% of PSRs were receiving social assistance compared to 49% of GARs. During the same period, PSRs also consistently earned a higher annual income than their government-sponsored counterparts. The RIE reaffirms that PSRs had better economic outcomes than GARs. They had considerably better access to lodging, medical services and had less difficulty with language acquisition in finding employment and overall, had fewer challenges at adjusting to life in Canada than did GARs (Government of Canada 2016b).

One explanation for the differences in economic outcomes offered by the RIE was that adult Syrian GARs were less educated and less knowledgeable of either of the country's official languages compared with previous resettled refugee cohorts. In effect, the adult Syrian PSRs have more knowledge of the official languages compared with the resettled PSRs that arrived between 2010 and 2014. Adult Syrian refugees were less likely to be referred to employment services and more likely to be referred to language services than previous waves of resettled refugees. Given GARs weaker language skills compared with other newcomers, many were unable to access employment services until a specific language level had been reached (Government of Canada 2016b).

REFUGEES: SOCIO-ECONOMIC STATUS ACCORDING TO THE 2016 CENSUS

Results of the 2016 census confirms some of the findings in the RIE. It is important to note that the census data covers the entire country whereas the IMDB data employed by the RIE does not include Quebec. As observed in table 6, the overall rates of unemployment are somewhat greater for the GARs than the PSRs, but the gap is especially pronounced during the period of 2011-2016 where, especially so amongst men, the GARs unemployment rate was at 20.3 percent compared with a rate of 13.9 percent for the PSRs.

TABLE 6: UNEMPLOYMENT RATE FOR GARS AND PSRS BY GENDER, AGED 25-54, FROM 1980-2016

Period	GARs		PSRs	
	Male	Female	Male	Female
Total period	8.6%	9.0%	7.2%	8.2%
1980-1990	6.8%	6.4%	5.6%	5.6%
1980-1990	6.8%	6.4%	5.6%	5.6%
1991-2000	7.1%	7.3%	5.9%	6.7%
2001-2010	11.0%	13.9%	9.5%	12.3%
2001-2005	10.7%	12.3%	8.3%	12.0%
2006-2010	11.5%	15.8%	10.6%	12.6%
2011-2016	20.3%	24.7%	13.9%	24.2%

Source: Statistics Canada, 2016

As observed in table 7, the GARs overall income is similar to that of the PSRs when considering the entire group. But the census data reveal that amongst the most recent arrivals (2011-2014) male PSRs between the ages of 25 and 54 have much higher average total income than do GARS.

TABLE 7: AVERAGE TOTAL INCOME IN 2015 AMONG RECIPIENTS CANADA, AGED 25-54, FROM 1980-2016

Period	GARs		PSRs	
	Male	Female	Male	Female
Total period	$44 017	$35 524	$45 175	$36 819
1980-1990	$55 498	$44 810	$54 174	$44 223
1991-2000	$45 282	$37 363	$46 758	$38 327
2001-2010	$34 147	$27 280	$35 352	$27 338
2001-2005	$36 259	$29 748	$37 707	$30 959
2006-2010	$31 722	$24 694	$33 345	$24 169
2011-2016	$22 239	$19 734	$29 279	$19 999

Source: Statistics Canada, 2016

When it comes to overall rates of low income, the census points to little difference between GARs and PSRs. As seen in table 8, there are substantial gaps between the percentage of GARs and PSRs men and women in low income in the most recently arrived cohort (2011-2014) amongst those between the ages of 25 and 54.

TABLE 8: PREVALENCE OF LOW INCOME FOR GARS AND PSRS IN CANADA BY GENDER, AGED 25-54, BASED LOW-INCOME CUT-OFFS AFTER TAX (LICO-AT), FROM 1980-2016

Period	GARs		PSRs	
	Male	Female	Male	Female
Total period	22.8%	23.9%	18.9%	19.8%
1980-1990	10.7%	9.0%	11.1%	8.7%
1991-2000	13.3%	11.5%	13.7%	10.9%
2001-2010	20.7%	24.3%	16.7%	17.9%
2001-2005	18.9%	21.3%	14.8%	15.4%
2006-2010	22.8%	27.4%	18.4%	20.2%
2011-2016	41.6%	45.5%	22.9%	31.3%

Source: Statistics Canada, 2016

MINDING THE GAPS BETWEEN GARS AND PSRS

While the 2016 census confirms the IMDB findings on economic performance of refugees, it points to certain other considerations that may account for the observed gaps between GARs and PSRs. When it comes to official language knowledge, we can see from table 9 how important the difference is between GARs and PSRs aged 25-54 for the period of 2011 to 2016 with a near twenty-point gap between the two in this regard.

TABLE 9: ONLY KNOWLEDGE OF NON-OFFICIAL LANGUAGE BY PERCENTAGE, AGED 25-54, 1980-2016 AND 2011-2016

Knowledge of non-official language only	GARs		PSRs	
	Male	Female	Male	Female
	9.9%	7.7%	34.9%	15.0%

Source: Statistics Canada, 2016

There is a considerable gap in the level of education of those immigrants that Canada selects in the economic category and those that enter the country as refugees. In 2016, some 31% of the Canadian population reported holding a university certificate, diploma or degree at the bachelor level or above. Amongst Canada's economic immigrants, the figure was 60%. By contrast the figure for refugees was just over 20%. As regards the difference in levels of education amongst GARs versus PSRs, table 10 reveals that for those who arrived between 2011 and 2016, PSRs were more inclined to have some post-secondary degree and much more likely to have completed university.

TABLE 10: SELECTED EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT FOR GARS AND PSRS IN CANADA, AGED 25-54, FROM 2011-2016

	GARs	PSRs
Total Refugees	18 425	17 565
No certificate, diploma or degree	10 075 (55%)	5 940 (35%)
University certificate, diploma or degree at bachelor level or above	1 555 (8.5%)	2 850 (16.5%)

Source: Statistics Canada, 2016

WHO ARE THE GARS AND PSRS?

In Table 3 we looked at the countries of birth of the GARs and PSRs. Underlying that data is variation in the respective origins of the GARs and the PSRs. Aside from the difference in official language knowledge between GARs and PSRs, there are also important differences amongst the two groups on the basis of their visible minority status. As observed in Table 11, between 2011 and 2016, the GARs are somewhat more likely to identify as visible minority and far more likely to identify as Arabic.

TABLE 11: SELECTED VISIBLE MINORITY STATUS FOR GARS AND PSRS IN CANADA, AGED 25-54, FROM 1980-2016

Selected Visible Minority Status	1980-2016		2011-2016	
	GARs	PSRs	GARs	PSRs
Not a visible minority	25.5%	29.6%	5.1%	17%
Black	15.2%	14.2%	23.9%	28.0%
West Asian	11.6%	12.0%	9.7%	15.0%
South Asian	4.3%	6.9%	9.9%	4.2%
Arab	9.9%	8.5%	42.5%	28.8%

Source: Statistics Canada, 2016

REFUGEES: OUTCOMES AND EXPECTATIONS

Although the census and RIE findings confirm important economic gaps between the GARs and the PSRs, the RIE nonetheless points out that life satisfaction and sense of belonging on the part of GARs and PSRs is roughly similar. Hence expectations and outcomes for the two categories of refugees merit greater attention than they generally get, given the priority that is often given to economic outcomes as the key gauge of satisfaction.

Some nine in ten Syrian GARs and PSRs reported a somewhat or very strong sense of belonging to Canada. Yet the percentage of GARs with a very strong sense of belonging (72.2%) exceeds by approximately 10% the PSRs with a very strong sense of belonging (62.7%) (Government of Canada 2016b).[3]

TABLE 12: SATISFACTION WITH LIFE IN CANADA FOR SYRIAN REFUGEES

Level of Satisfaction	GARs	PSRs
Not at all and a little bit happy	5.6%	5.5%
Somewhat Happy	17.2%	17.2%
Happy	27.0%	37.2%
Very Happy	50.2%	39.9%

Source: Statistics Canada, 2016

CONCLUSION

As seen above, the 2016 census data confirms some of the findings in IRCC's Rapid Impact Evaluation of the more recent wave of Syrian refugees as regards the differences between GARs and PSRs in terms of economic outcomes. Jennifer Hyndman (2012) maintains that "PSRs may become self-supporting more quickly than GARs, but this may be due to PSRs being pushed into the labour force more rapidly, out of necessity, in turn shaping access to settlement services and official language acquisition."

Vancouver-based immigration lawyer Steven Meurrens notes that:

> 'There's a great deal of thought [by private sponsors] that goes into how to get [refugees] economically established, because they're on the hook. Especially if they know that person, they'll know that person's strengths, where they might be able to work,' he said. 'Settlement agencies reaching out will never have the same impact as someone's friend saying, 'Hey, this is the person we brought over and he'd like to start working.' (Woo and Steuk 2015 para. 22)

Contrary to what might be assumed, both the Government of Canada and private sponsors do offer a support network to refugees. However, the private sponsors are seen as

3 Note: Surveys were only administered to those Syrian refugees 18 years of age and older who arrived between November 4, 2015 and March 1, 2016 and resided outside of Quebec.

extending a more personalized and dedicated type and degree of support to refugees than the government does. But the 2016 census results suggest that the major differences in economic outcomes may have more to do with selection on the part of refugee sponsors than the personalized services they offer. Either way it is an issue that merits greater attention in the evolving process of refugee admission.

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