



REFUGEE POLICY CONTEXT IN CANADA

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This paper provides a brief historical overview of Canada's refugee policies and regulatory frameworks for refugee protection, in order to provide the context for Canada's response to the most recent global refugee crisis. In November 2015, Canada's newly elected Liberal government pledged to resettle 25,000 Syrian refugees by February 2016 and an additional 10,000 by the end of 2016. Thousands of Canadians joined in this effort and mobilized to sponsor over half of these refugees through Canada's unique Private Sponsorship Program. Canada is recognized as a world leader in refugee resettlement and several Western countries are seeking to emulate its Private Sponsorship Program. The paper critically examines the refugee policy context in Canada and discusses the ways in which it shapes the lives and experiences of recent refugees and refugee claimants from the Global South and those from the Middle-East, specifically from Iraq, Afghanistan, and Syria, who are among the highest displaced populations since 2001 following the U.S. led "war on terror." The analysis in this paper particularly focuses on three overarching themes/trends arising from immigration, refugee policy changes in conjunction with Canada's anti-terrorism measures that have been implemented between September 11, 2001 and April 2016. These themes are:

1. Racial profiling, Islamophobia, Xenophobia: It examines federal government policies that have targeted, with disproportionately negative consequences, Arabs and Muslims in Canada post 9/11. The analysis also highlights the racialized and gendered aspects of these policies that limit access to basic human rights, substantive citizenship rights and civic participation of Arabs and Muslims in Canadian society.
2. Increased Precariousness and Insecurity: It analyses the loss of status and denial of rights within various policies and processes such as refugee determination (Bill C-31), loss of permanent residency, cessation of protection, and revocation of citizenship.
3. Criminalization, Detention, and Deportation: It examines how Canada's immigration and asylum system has become deeply intertwined with the criminal code and national security measures resulting in indefinite detentions and deportations of migrants and asylum seekers.

The paper concludes with a discussion of implications for refugee resettlement, integration, and adaptation in Canada. Despite its long history and solid reputation of welcoming refugees, including its recent resettlement of over 25,000 Syrian refugees, Canada's recent policy changes over the past two decades tell quite a different story. Under Canada's new refugee, immigration, citizenship, and national security policies, punitive measures such as indefinite detention without charge, preventive arrests, cessation of protection, loss of status, deportation, and human rights violations are regularly practiced. Moreover, the implementation of neoliberal policies of privatization, cuts to public services, erosion of the social safety net, and changes to settlement funding allocation have severely limited the ability of public sector providers to meet the complex and growing needs of refugee populations. Although, the new liberal government has begun reversing some of the harmful, draconian, rights violating policies, and has engaged in immigration and national security policy consultations with Canadians, many more substantial policy changes and fundamental reforms are needed to facilitate successful refugee resettlement and integration.

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