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THE RETENTION OF NEWCOMERS IN SECOND- AND THIRD-TIER CITIES IN CANADA

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and the University of Alberta*

The Canadian government recently announced its intentions to implement a “social contract” that would require skilled workers immigrating to Canada to live outside the country’s largest cities (Toronto, Vancouver, and Montreal) for at least three years. This study examines the geographic mobility of refugees who were destined to second- and third-tier cities in Alberta several years before this policy proposal was announced. The decisions of the refugees in this study to stay in or leave the communities to which they were sent have significant implications for Canadian immigration and settlement policies, and for the proposed social contract. The economic status of municipalities, the existence of compatriot communities, and the recognition of immigrant skills, among other factors, contribute to the retention of newcomers in second- and third-tier cities.

Introduction

Immigration to Canada exists as a means of fulfilling the national objectives of social, economic, and cultural development and family reunification. It also plays a role in satisfying international obligations through the resettlement of refugees. In the first three decades of the 20th century, Canadian immigration policy was geared to the development of agricultural settlements. However, during that same period, many immigrants chose to live and work in cities rather than on farms or in rural communities. Following the Second World War, the overwhelming majority of immigrants to Canada gravitated toward urban areas.

In recent years, the greatest share of immigrants, about 75%, has been claimed by Canada’s three largest cities: Vancouver, Montreal, and particularly Toronto—dubbed by some to be the “capitals of immigrant Canada.” This imbalanced distribution of newcomers raises important questions. At a policy level, a key concern for Citizenship

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and Immigration Canada (CIC) involves regionalizing Canada's immigration flows by sending more immigrants to second- and third-tier cities, as well as to less populated provinces. For example, in the Prairie region, particularly in Manitoba and Saskatchewan, several communities have indicated that they would like to address their long-standing problem of population decline by bringing in more immigrants. The arrival of immigrants in smaller or mid-sized urban centres is also viewed positively by government departments charged with increasing cultural diversity nationwide, globalizing small communities, developing local markets to rejuvenate regional economies, and easing the pressure on the capitals of immigrant Canada.

The central focus of this paper is the settlement experiences and subsequent geographical mobility of refugees who were settled in seven urban centres in Alberta. The survey on which this study is based provides valuable insights into the potential capacity of second- and third-tier cities in Canada to attract and retain immigrants and refugees. This is particularly important in view of the Canadian government's current efforts to geographically disperse immigrants and refugees more widely across the country. While this research has obvious generalizability to refugee immigrants, the findings have significant implications for economic immigrants as well.

The next section of this paper provides a brief historical account of Canadian immigration patterns and policies. Following a description of the design of the study, the core of the paper then profiles the geographic mobility of refugees destined to seven cities of varying size in Alberta. The final section outlines the implications of the findings for government policies related to immigration and regionalization.

Historical Context and Previous Research

Canada's immigration records are available from 1860, when 6,276 newcomers arrived in the country. At that time, most migrants came from northern Europe, looking for economic opportunities. The peak period of immigration in Canada's history occurred early in the next century, a time when the country was actively seeking immigrants to support population growth and to settle the western regions. For example, in 1913, 400,870 immigrants entered Canada. However, there was an abrupt decline in immigration with the start of the First World War the following year, a pattern observed again during the Great Depression of the 1930's and during the Second World War when

Canada limited immigration for economic and social reasons. Following the end of the Second World War, the government again began to actively promote immigration to support the economy. Immigration levels remained reasonably high, although they varied with the strength of the economy, throughout the rest of the 20th century. In recent years, the federal government has set goals of 200,000 - 225,000 immigrants per year. In 2001, 250,346 newcomers arrived in Canada, 11% over the target set for the year.

What is not evident in these aggregate numbers is the pattern of change in newcomers' source countries. In the earliest days of Canadian immigration there were no restrictions, but by 1885 the government established a head tax to ensure that Chinese immigration would be severely limited. Europeans were preferred, and those from northern Europe were preferred over those from eastern and southern Europe. Canada later implemented further discriminatory immigration policies favouring Whites from Europe and the United States. In 1910 a new Immigration Act was introduced which gave the Cabinet the right to refuse "immigrants belonging to any race deemed unsuited to the climate or requirements of Canada" (An Act respecting Immigration, section 38, paragraph "c"). In 1923, Canada formally divided source countries into preferred and non-preferred categories; immigrants from the preferred countries (Britain, US, the Irish Free State, Newfoundland, Australia, New Zealand and South Africa) faced no restrictions, while immigrants from other parts of the world had to meet certain conditions, depending on their country of origin (Green & Green, 1996).

These discriminatory policies were in place until 1962, when the federal government started to reform immigration law. In 1978, the Immigration Act was passed. This act, in effect until 2002, explicitly specified Canada's objectives for immigration: in addition to meeting the country's demographic, social, economic, and cultural goals in a non-discriminatory fashion, family reunification and a commitment to bring in refugees were also deemed important. Over the last 40 years, then, visible minorities from a variety of ethno-cultural backgrounds have comprised the majority of immigrants to Canada. The three top source countries in 2001 were the People's Republic of China, India, and Pakistan.

With the exception of government-sponsored refugees and provincial nominees, newcomers to Canada are free to choose where they want to live, and that choice has overwhelmingly been first-tier cities. It is generally acknowledged that locations that offer both economic opportunities and the existence of large ethnic communities draw

immigrants (Choldin, 1973; Golab, 1977, Richmond, 1981). More recently researchers have tried to determine to what extent these and other factors influence immigrants' mobility after arrival in Canada. Using longitudinal survey data from 1969-1974, Nogle (1994) concluded that internal migration, although influenced by economic conditions at the site of arrival, could also be attributed to the age, sex, marital status, and education levels of the immigrants. A young single, educated male is the most likely candidate for a move after arrival in Canada. Furthermore, Nogle found that recent immigrants were likely to seek out large ethnic communities for social support: Toronto, Vancouver and Montreal were therefore most attractive to them.

After examining the inter-provincial mobility of immigrants from 1976-1981, Trovato (1988) found that those most recently arrived were also the most likely to move. In contrast, immigrants who had lived in Canada for ten years or more exhibit similar mobility patterns to the Canadian-born. Trovato concluded that the primary reason immigrants go to large cities is the existence of well-established ethnic communities. Using census data from 1981 and 1986, Moore, Ray and Rosenberg (1990) also found that immigrants are more likely to move than the Canadian-born. They attributed this higher rate of mobility to immigrants' weaker social ties, and to the fact that, as a group, immigrants are younger than the native-born. Although they speculated that cultural factors may influence the mobility of immigrants, in addition to economic considerations, the authors argued that there was insufficient research to determine to what degree the existence of an ethno-cultural community affects immigrants' decisions to move, once in Canada.

Newbold (1996) assessed internal migration patterns of immigrants using data from the 1986 census and argued that "economic effects are not the primary motivation for departure among the foreign-born ... Smaller communities or a lack of reasonable access to ethnic culture may prompt departure in search of more familiar communities" (p. 744). Newbold did not discount the influence of economic factors, but observed that the attraction of Ontario and British Columbia to internal migrants can be attributed to both ethno-cultural and economic opportunities.

In a more recent study of inter-provincial migration among foreign-born Canadians, Edmonston (2002) compared cohorts of immigrants across three time periods to assess variables that contribute to immigrant mobility, and to determine whether, over time, immigrants become more geographically dispersed. As was found

in previous studies, education and age both affect individuals' propensity to move. Edmonston also examined official language abilities and found that immigrants to Quebec who spoke English but no French were very likely to leave that province. Recent immigrants to Quebec who arrived with no proficiency in either official language were also more likely to move than other immigrants. Unemployment rates, wage rates, and labour force size all played a role in inter-provincial mobility. In comparing these cohorts, Edmonston concluded that geographical dispersion is unlikely to occur over time and also posed the question of whether it is actually necessary. He proposed that, from the standpoint of the foreign-born, the economic opportunities and ethno-cultural support in large cities may outweigh any arguments that "geographic concentration may inhibit the process of assimilation" (p. 20).

In fact, with the exception of the Quebec provincial government which makes a strong effort to redirect immigrants to areas outside of Montreal, the federal and provincial governments have not focused the discussion of geographical dispersion in terms of integration, but rather in terms of economic development in the regions, the national decline in population, and resultant labour shortages. For example, the current Minister of Citizenship and Immigration Canada, Denis Coderre, recently stated that: "[w]e will be in a deficit of one million skilled workers and by 2011, our labour force will depend only on immigrants, so we have to find a way to resolve this problem" (Edmonton Journal, 23 June, 2002). The Minister has gone on to propose a "social contract" that would require skilled workers to agree to live in a community specified by the government for a period of at least three years. Regions in Canada undergoing economic decline such as the Atlantic provinces, Saskatchewan, and (to a lesser extent) Manitoba have experienced out-migration of both Canadian-born and immigrants. The provincial nominee program, designed to identify skilled workers destined to a particular region, over and above the normal federal admissions each year, represents a small step towards increasing immigrant populations outside of Canada's largest cities. The proposed new policy of a social contract for skilled workers is based on the belief that, given a critical mass of ethno-cultural compatriots, immigrants might be inclined to stay in smaller communities, rather than moving to large urban centres as they have done in the past.

Study Design and Research Methods

This study was explicitly designed to answer the question of what it would take to attract newcomers to relatively small urban centres in Alberta and to keep them there. The research questions that guide the discussion and data analyses below are:

- (1) How many refugees remain in the cities to which they are destined, and how many move? Do mobility rates differ by the size of the receiving community? Is the internal mobility rate of refugees similar to that of native-born Canadians? Do mobile refugees tend to leave smaller communities for larger communities?
- (2) What are the factors that influence refugees to stay in or leave different sized urban communities? Why do some leave and others stay?
- (3) What are the policy implications of the findings? Should newcomers be encouraged to settle outside of Vancouver, Toronto and Montreal? If so, how?

Survey Design and Sampling

The refugees who participated in this study arrived in Alberta between 1992 and 1997 and were interviewed in 1998. These interviews were part of a broader multi-phase study of refugee settlement experiences that also included interviews with representatives of government, agencies providing services to refugees, and a public opinion survey of residents of the Alberta cities that hosted these particular refugees (Abu-Laban et al., 1999).

CIC provided a database of contact information for 5,208 government and privately-sponsored refugees destined to Alberta between 1992 and 1997. Excluded were those who had claimed refugee status on arrival in Canada, others who had been sponsored by family members already resident in Canada, and refugees whose addresses were not available in the government database. A systematic sampling design (every n^{th} name) was used to identify a target sample of 956 individuals. Only 47 (5%) of these newcomers could not be located by the interview team.

A large minority of the 909 refugees who were located were living in a range of communities across Canada, making it difficult to interview all of them. In total, 616 refugees, including 91 youth (age 15 to 21), were interviewed.¹ Seventy-four of the 616

interviews were conducted with refugees who had moved to other Canadian provinces. About two-thirds of these out-of-province interviews were conducted by telephone; the remainder were conducted in person by members of the research team. Virtually all of the interviews with refugees still living in Alberta were conducted face-to-face.

A team of 13 trained interviewers, many of whom were refugees themselves, completed the interviews between July and October of 1998. About one-third of the interviews were conducted in English. The remainder were completed in one of 11 different languages. The adult questionnaire was directly translated into languages spoken by people from the former Yugoslavia. For interviews conducted in other languages, interviewers translated while conducting the interviews.

Adult Sample Characteristics

When addressing this article's first set of research questions about refugee mobility rates and patterns within Canada, we draw on information about the residential location in 1998 of the more than 900 refugees in our original target sample. However, as we explain above, we did not interview all of these individuals. Therefore, when examining refugees' reasons for leaving or staying in the community to which they were first sent, we rely on information obtained from the 525 adult refugees in the interview sample.² Almost two-thirds of the interview sample members (63%) were refugees from the former Yugoslavia (a major source country in the mid-1990s), even though this group made up less than half of the CIC database from which the original sample was drawn. This over-sampling reflects the more recent arrival in Alberta of Yugoslavian refugees. By the time the interviews were conducted, former Yugoslavians were somewhat less likely than other members of the 1992-1997 refugee cohort to have left Alberta. In turn, they were also easier to contact and, ultimately, more likely to be interviewed. The remainder of the interview sample came from Middle Eastern countries (16%), Central America (9%), Africa (6%), South East Asia (3%), and Poland (2%).

Nineteen percent of these refugees arrived in Canada in 1992-1993, 44% came in 1994-1995, and 37% arrived even more recently (1996-1997). Only 10% of the participants could not speak English when they were interviewed. However, English was not the first language for most sample members. Four out of five respondents (83%) had taken at least one English as a second language (ESL) course since coming to Canada.

Just over half of these adult interviewees (50.5%) were women.

The average age of all adult respondents was 37 years. Three out of four (76%) were married or living with a partner. Two-thirds (67%) reported children or youth (21 years of age or younger) living at home with them.

One in four (27%) had arrived in Canada with a university degree, and another 16% had completed some other type of trade/vocational post-secondary program in their home country. While 39% had been employed in professional or managerial occupations in their home country, only 11% were working in such jobs when interviewed in 1998, indicating the difficulty many refugees have in “cashing in” their educational credentials in their new home (Krahn et al., 2000).

The study also provided other indications of the labour market difficulties experienced by refugees (Krahn et al., 2000). While the Alberta unemployment rate was under 6% in 1998, the unemployment rate for these adult refugees was much higher (16%). Thirty percent were employed in temporary jobs, compared to about 12% of all employed Canadians, and 28% were working part-time, compared to 19% of all employed Albertans in 1998. Fifty-eight percent reported that they felt over-qualified for their current jobs, compared to about one-quarter of all Canadian workers who feel this way about their jobs.

Host City Characteristics

Between 1992 and 1997, 5208 refugees, including the 956 in our target sample, were sent to seven Alberta cities, the goal being that these communities would become their new home in Canada. The seven cities varied considerably, most noticeably in size. In 1996, the population of Calgary was around 768,000 and Edmonton’s population was approximately 616,000.³ If the large communities adjacent to both cities were included in the count, the greater Edmonton and Calgary populations were both around 850,000. While these are the largest urban centres in Alberta, they would be considered second-tier cities in the national context, with Toronto, Montreal, and Vancouver being ranked as first-tier cities. The populations of the other five (third-tier) Alberta cities were much smaller, namely, Lethbridge (63,000), Red Deer (60,000), Medicine Hat (47,000), Fort McMurray (33,000), and Grande Prairie (31,000).

Both Edmonton and Calgary have a mixed industrial base, but with significant differences. Calgary is the home base for many large oil companies and other large corporations, while Edmonton, being the provincial capital, has many

more government employees. Lethbridge, Medicine Hat, and Red Deer are trading centres serving large agricultural regions, while Fort McMurray and Grande Prairie are northern cities largely dependent on the oil and natural gas extraction industries. The unemployment rate in 1996 in these seven cities ranged from around 9% in Edmonton and Red Deer to less than 7% in Calgary and Lethbridge. Edmonton, Calgary, and Lethbridge all contain universities, the first two much larger than the third. The other four cities all contain community colleges.

Lethbridge and Medicine Hat had a considerably older population base in 1996, with large numbers of retirees living in these cities. In contrast, Fort McMurray and Grande Prairie had relatively young populations, reflecting the in-migration of single workers and young families attracted by possible employment opportunities. Over 20% of the residents of Edmonton and Calgary in 1996 were immigrants, compared to 14% of Lethbridge residents, and 10% or fewer of the residents of the four smaller cities. About one in six Calgary and Edmonton residents were members of visible minority groups in 1996, compared to 8% of Lethbridge and Fort McMurray residents, and 5% or fewer of the inhabitants of the other three Alberta cities.

Geographic Mobility of Refugees Destined to Alberta

Sixty percent of the original target sample of 956 refugees who were destined to these seven Alberta cities between 1992 and 1997 were still living in the city to which they were sent when located by the interview team in 1998 (Figure 1). However, the retention rate varied considerably across these seven communities. Seven out of ten (69%) of the refugees sent to Edmonton were still living there, while the retention rate in Calgary was even higher (77%). In contrast to these high retention rates in the province's two largest cities, only about one-third of the refugees sent to the smallest cities, Grande Prairie (31%) and Fort McMurray (35%), had stayed. The mid-size communities of Lethbridge, Red Deer and Medicine Hat had retention rates of 43%, 55%, and 59%, respectively. Thus, we observe a strong correlation between city size and retention rates, with Lethbridge, the largest of the three mid-sized communities, being the exception to this otherwise clear pattern.

Perhaps these different retention rates simply reflect the fact that most of the refugees destined to the smaller communities arrived early in the 1992-1997

Figure 1: Retention Rates for Refugees Destined to Seven Alberta Cities

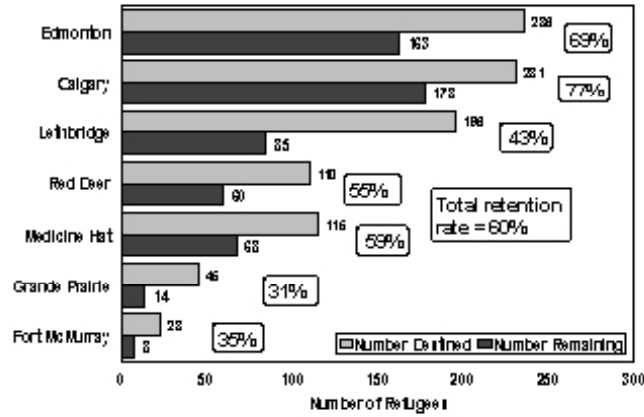
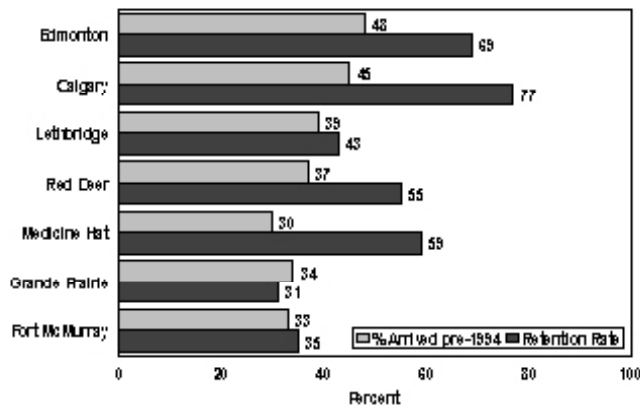


Figure 2: Refugee Arrival Times and Retention Rates by Host City



study period, while most of those sent to the larger cities arrived in the middle of the decade? In other words, the “time at risk” for leaving a host community might vary across cities, leading to the pattern of retention rates seen in Figure 1.

An examination of the CIC database from which our target sample was drawn reveals that the two largest cities, with the highest retention rates, also received the highest proportion of their destined refugees in the early years (pre-1994) of the 1992-1997 period under examination (Figure 2). Thus, the higher proportion of “leavers” among refugees destined to smaller Alberta cities cannot be explained by arguing that they arrived earlier and, hence, had more time to leave. In fact, Figure 2 demonstrates the opposite pattern. Even though two-thirds of the refugees sent to Grande Prairie and Fort McMurray came in 1994 or later, two-thirds had also left by 1998.

We have observed that 40% of the 956 refugees in our original target sample were “leavers” (including 47 individuals who could not be located). How does this figure compare to the mobility rates of non-refugee Alberta residents during the time period? A directly comparable statistic is not available, but the 1996 Census does report that 21% of Albertans had been living in a different city, different province, or different country five years earlier (in 1991). While covering a slightly different time period, and measuring “new arrivals” rather than “leavers,” this statistic suggests that, in their first few years in Canada, refugees to Alberta are about twice as likely to be geographically mobile than the population as a whole.

Table 1 presents a more detailed picture of the patterns of geographic mobility among the 956 refugees in our target sample. The two largest cities in the province, Edmonton and Calgary, do not appear to “trade” refugees. Only 10 individuals destined to Edmonton had moved to Calgary, and only 7 of those sent to Calgary had subsequently moved to Edmonton. But one in four refugees destined to Lethbridge had moved to Calgary, the nearest large city, and one-third of the refugees originally sent to Grande Prairie and Fort McMurray had chosen to live in Edmonton, the closest large city to these two natural-resource based communities. Thus to some extent, “leavers” tend to head for the nearest of the two largest cities in the province.

However, large cities in other provinces are also very attractive. Thirteen percent of all the refugees destined to Alberta between 1992 and 1997 had moved to Ontario (many to Toronto) by the time this study was undertaken in 1998. Another 5% had moved to British Columbia (most to Vancouver). Provinces and metropolitan centres with high proportions of immigrants and greater cultural

Table 1
Refugee Mobility Patterns; Original Target Sample

Current Residence	Destined Community							TOTAL
	Edmonton	Calgary	Lethbridge	Red Deer	Medicine Hat	Grande Prairie	Fort McMurray	
Edmonton	163	7	1	7	--	16	7	201
Calgary	10	178	49	17	6	3	3	266
Lethbridge	--	4	85	--	--	--	--	89
Red Deer	1	--	--	60	--	--	--	61
Medicine Hat	--	--	1	--	68	--	3	72
Grande Prairie	--	--	--	--	--	14	--	14
Fort McMurray	2	--	--	--	2	2	8	14
Other Alberta	--	3	--	--	1	--	--	4
Ontario	37	14	22	20	22	9	2	126
British Columbia	3	14	18	3	5	--	--	43
Other [#]	1	1	8	3	6	--	--	19
Not located	19	10	12	--	5	1	--	47
TOTAL	237	231	196	109	115	45	23	956
Retention rate (%)	69%	77%	43%	55%	59%	31%	35%	60%

[#] Includes 4 individuals who had moved to eastern Canada, 7 who had left for other prairie provinces, 6 who had returned to their home country, and 2 who had died.

diversity appear to be most attractive to refugees who decide to leave Alberta.

How long do refugees who leave their first city in Alberta typically stay before moving? Based on the smaller interview sample (525 adult refugees), our study suggests that about one in five “leavers” (22%) had left within the first three months. Two in five (40%) had left within the first six months of arrival in the first host city, and a majority of three in five (61%) had left within the first year. The sweeping majority of the “leavers,” five out of six, had chosen to move to another community within two years of arriving in their first destined community.

Refugees interviewed in this study were also asked how long they planned to live in their current city of residence. Over half (56%) answered that they had no intention of leaving or used phrases such as “for good” or “for life” (Table 2). One in six (17%) indicated that they did not know how long they would stay, 14% gave answers up to and including five years, and the remaining 13% mentioned a longer period of time.

Recognizing that current intentions may not translate into reality, the fact that only 14% expected to leave their current community within five years is interesting, particularly given the 40% “leaver” rate observed for the first few years in Canada for this cohort, and in comparison to the 21% “mover” rate among non-refugee Albertans. Even if we add the 17% who answered “don’t know” to the “0 - 5 years” category (see Table 2), the total of 31% still does not seem all that high. In fact, this finding suggests that, after a few years in the country and some internal geographic mobility, most refugees start to “put down roots.” However, Table 3 still highlights the clear finding already observed in Figures 1 and 2—the larger the city, the greater the retention of refugees. While two-thirds or more of the refugees currently living in Calgary (66%) and Edmonton (74%) had no intention of moving, smaller proportions of refugees living in the smaller cities indicated that they did not plan to move.

Factors Influencing the Geographic Mobility of Refugees

We asked the “leavers” in our sample an open-ended question about why they had left the Alberta city to which they had originally been destined. Some refugees answered with a single reason while others gave several. In total, the 135 “leavers” provided 184 different answers to this question. Table 3 displays the distribution of responses, sorted into four general categories, for the total sub-sample of 135 “leavers.” Results are not shown for the two smallest cities because of small sub-sample sizes.

Table 2
Refugee Mobility Plans by Current City of Residence; Interview Sample

<u>Current Residence</u> *	<u>"How long do you plan to live in this city?"</u>				<u>Total</u>
	<u>0-5 years</u>	<u>6 + years</u>	<u>"for good"</u>	<u>Don't know</u>	
Edmonton	8%	5%	74%	13%	100%
Calgary	6	13	66	15	100
Lethbridge	30	5	35	30	100
Red Deer	11	33	52	4	100
Medicine Hat	22	30	20	28	100
TOTAL	14	13	56	17	100

* Results not presented for Grande Prairie and Fort McMurray because of small sub-sample sizes. However, answers provided by the refugees still living in these two cities are included in the Total results.

Table 3
Refugees' Reasons for Leaving their First Community by Destined City:
Interview Sample

Destined City #	"Why did you leave (name of first city in Alberta)?" (% of responses) *					To be near Friends/Family Total
	No. of "leavers" City	for Better City	Services Inadequate	Employment/ Education	10%	
Edmonton (24)	28%	10%	52%	10%	100%	
Calgary (22)	38	0	34	28	100%	
Lethbridge (36)	13	24	54	9	100%	
Red Deer (23)	14	7	65	14	100%	
Medicine Hat (15)	15	0	80	5	100%	
TOTAL (135)	21	11	54	14	100%	

* The 135 refugees who moved from their destined city provided a total of 184 reasons for leaving. Percentages in this table are based on the total number of responses, not respondents.

Results not presented for Grande Prairie and Fort McMurray because of small sub-sample sizes. However, answers provided by "leavers" from these two cities are included in the Total results.

Over one-half (54%) of the answers given by the total sub-sample of “leavers” focused on insufficient or inadequate employment and/or educational opportunities in their first Canadian city of residence. In many instances, these refugees were speaking of opportunities for themselves, but sometimes they also answered with respect to opportunities for their children. About one in five responses (21%) had a more general “quality of life” emphasis, focusing on the size of the community (e.g., too small), the reception received from residents (e.g., impersonal and not welcoming), the cost and/or quality of housing, and sometimes the climate (e.g., too cold).

Fourteen percent of all answers to the “why did you leave?” question commented on a desire to be closer to family and friends or to live in a community where others from the same ethnic and/or racial group were living. The remainder of the responses (11% in all) focused on the inadequacy or non-availability of settlement and English language services for refugees. Table 4 contains examples of the types of answers included in each of these four broad categories, in the refugees’ own words.

Gender differences in responses to this question about reasons for leaving were not large (results not shown), although women were somewhat less likely than men to comment on employment/education opportunities (47% of all female responses, compared to 60% of all male responses) and somewhat more likely to mention wanting to be near friends and family (19% versus 11%). Table 3 shows, as we would expect given Calgary’s strong economy, that refugees who left Calgary were much less likely to provide employment/education reasons (only 34% of their responses) than were “leavers” from Red Deer (65%) and Medicine Hat (80%).

Thus, overall, better employment/education opportunities elsewhere were the most common reason for refugees deciding to leave their original destined community, followed by more general quality of life issues, the desire to be closer to family and friends, and dissatisfaction with community services. If we combine employment/education opportunities and a desire to be close to family and/or friends into a pull factor category (68% of all responses), it is apparent that the attractions of other communities outweigh push factors (32% of all responses), that is, dissatisfaction with the destined community. With respect to the latter, noteworthy by its absence is a category of explanations emphasizing host city residents’ hostility to refugees or the widespread experience of racism or discrimination by refugees. While a few of the answers in the “leaving for a better city” category mentioned these issues, such concerns did not surface often enough to warrant their own category.

Table 4
Adult Refugees' Reasons for Leaving their First Community; Selected Quotations

Response Category *	"Why did you leave?" [Destined city & current city]
<i>For a better city</i>	<p>* Sick of small-town living. Toronto is where everything is happening. [Edmonton to Toronto]</p> <p>* That's a closed community. Not good for young, ambitious people. [Grande Prairie to Calgary]</p> <p>* Living costs and housing were very high. [Fort McMurray to Edmonton]</p> <p>* It was too cold. I escaped from winter. [Calgary to Ontario]</p>
<i>Services Inadequate</i>	<p>* Frustrated with Immigration Office's conduct. [Lethbridge to British Columbia]</p> <p>* Very dissatisfied with ESL programs in schools; very dissatisfied with treatment received from settlement agencies [Lethbridge to British Columbia]</p> <p>* Nobody wanted to help us. [Grande Prairie to Ontario]</p>
<i>Employment / Education</i>	<p>* We applied everywhere to do just about anything; cleaning, dishwashing. We didn't get hired anywhere so we moved. [Edmonton to Ontario]</p> <p>* We didn't want to stay because GP is a small town without a University or Technical School for our children. [Grande Prairie to Calgary]</p> <p>* I did not have any possibilities to find a job and to survive except to spend all the time on social assistance. [Grande Prairie to Calgary]</p> <p>* Because of school system. Calgary has a better post-secondary school system. [Red Deer to Calgary]</p>
<i>Near to Family / Friends</i>	<p>* Because there were no people from our home country and we felt very alone. [Fort McMurray to Edmonton]</p> <p>* My daughter was destined to Halifax. I wanted to be together with her and her family. [Lethbridge to Halifax]</p> <p>* I felt lonely. There were only two Iraqi people there. [Lethbridge to Calgary]</p> <p>* Inter-ethnic hostilities within immigrant community from the former Yugoslavia. [Red Deer to Ontario]</p>

* See Table 3.

All of the 135 “leavers” interviewed in this study were asked to think back to when they left their destined city, and to indicate whether they now thought that “this was the right thing to do?” Almost nine out of ten (87%) answered “yes” to this question. The same sub-sample of “leavers” was also asked whether others in their family had wanted to stay in the first Alberta city in which they had lived. Only 10% of the adult “leavers” indicated that other family members had wanted to stay. Thus, in general, these survey results demonstrate that a large majority of refugees who had moved on to a second (or third) community in Alberta (or elsewhere in Canada) were satisfied with their decision to leave their first host community.

Implications for a Regionalization of Immigration Policy

To summarize the answers to our research questions, the majority of refugees destined to the second-tier cities of Edmonton and Calgary stayed there, while those who went to smaller (third-tier) cities were less likely to remain. Even so, two of the smaller communities were able to retain more than half of the refugees they received. The primary factors that caused refugees to move were employment and educational opportunities. The refugees in this study exhibited a higher mobility rate than Canadian-born individuals, and they tended to make their decisions to move quite soon after arrival. Those who left smaller communities were drawn to the closest larger city—either Calgary or Edmonton. Fewer than a fifth of the refugees left Alberta for another province, but those who did leave generally chose Toronto and, to a lesser degree, Vancouver as their destinations.

These findings are particularly noteworthy, given the current governmental interest in regional development in Canada. The recent proposal by the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration Canada for a social contract to create a more equitable distribution of newcomers across the country has resulted in heated public debate in media and public policy circles. Although the idea is not new (in 1977, Hawkins suggested that immigration be used to encourage development in less populated regions), it appears that several provincial governments and also the federal government now see a more even distribution of refugees and economic immigrants as a tool to address population decline in some regions as well as regional economic disparities.

However, several concerns have been raised in response to the social contract proposal. First, it is unclear exactly where newcomers would be destined. Would they be sent to second-tier cities, such as Edmonton, Calgary, Halifax, Ottawa, Victoria and Winnipeg, or does the federal government also intend to send newcomers to smaller cities, or even to rural communities? Descriptions such as “remote parts of Canada” and “rural areas” have been used in the popular media but, as yet, there does not appear to be a specific plan beyond sending individuals to places outside Toronto, Vancouver, and Montreal. Second, it has been argued that the proposed social contract would violate the individual mobility rights guaranteed under the Charter of Rights and Freedoms. Furthermore, since settlement services are not readily available in many smaller centres, newcomers sent to these communities might undergo undue hardship. Finally, as one might expect, there has also been debate about the enforceability of such a policy.

In view of the anticipated problems, several alternatives to the mandatory destining of highly skilled workers have been suggested. The provision of extra points for those immigrant applicants willing to locate outside Canada’s first-tier cities, tax incentives (either for the immigrants themselves or for businesses willing to attract immigrant workers as is currently done in Quebec), and clustering of particular ethnic groups to provide social support have been proposed. Improved promotion in the newcomers’ countries of origin of a wider range of Canadian communities may also encourage immigrants to choose to live in second- and third-tier Canadian cities. Others have recommended a broadening of the provincial nominee program, which, with the exception of Manitoba, has not been utilized extensively (the program allows provinces to identify skilled individuals who can be brought to Canada over and above the federal government allotment of immigrants to meet specific economic needs). The Government of British Columbia recently introduced a “fast-track” process to allow international students under the existing nominee program to obtain permanent resident status within six months of application. BC is seeking skilled individuals in pure and applied sciences, computer sciences and several fields of engineering and sees foreign students as an ideal source (Doyle, 2002). Finally, it has also been suggested that various levels of government put pressure on provincial regulatory bodies to deal with the problem of credential recognition for highly qualified immigrants, thereby making Canada a more attractive destination.

While the federal government may consider some of these alternatives to supplement the proposed policy, there seems to be a strong impetus to put the social contract in practice. It is advisable, then, that following a consultation with stakeholders as requested by the Canadian Council for Refugees (2002), a pilot project be carried out, to determine the feasibility of the social contract, and to identify and solve serious problems associated with the new policy before it is implemented on a large scale. For example, what would the ramifications be if a worker who has been sent to a particular community is laid off and cannot find other work? Will CIC send that individual elsewhere? What if the only suitable jobs available happen to be in a nearby large city or in Canada's three first-tier cities? Furthermore, given a number of serious cases of employer exploitation of foreign live-in caregivers in the past, how will the government ensure that similar situations of exploitation will not occur under the proposed social contract?

The findings of the current study indicate that employment and educational opportunities should be available in the centres to which immigrants are destined. It is clear that skilled workers will not stay in economically depressed areas. A viable economic plan should be in place in regions in need of population growth if newcomers are to be expected to stay. If Canadian-born workers are unwilling to live in a community because of lack of economic opportunity, that location will be even less attractive to immigrants. Matching skilled workers and professionals to appropriate jobs is key to the retention of newcomers in second- and third-tier cities. The success of the provincial nominee program in Manitoba is a case in point. According to CIC, the provincial nominees are staying, whereas there is an overall decline in the province's immigrant population each year (Citizenship and Immigration Canada, 2001). The situation in Medicine Hat, as documented in this study, is another example of the importance of available jobs. Although it is a relatively small city with limited services, Medicine Hat had a refugee retention rate of 59%, a figure attributable to the fact that newcomers to the city could readily find work.

Another factor that affected retention of refugees in this study was the "quality of life" in the community, particularly the presence or absence of friends and family. The strategy of clustering newcomers to ensure a compatriot community has assured refugee retention in smaller cities in Britain. Robinson and Coleman (2001) report that Bosnian refugees were destined in large groups to locations outside London. An

extensive settlement program was established in each "cluster community" to provide needed support. Ultimately, the number of Bosnians who left their first community for London, the traditional magnet for refugees, was very small. Similarly, in this study, the high refugee retention rates in Calgary and Edmonton suggest that, in cities where there are adequate services, widespread employment opportunities, and a critical mass of people from similar ethnic backgrounds, the majority of newcomers will stay.

But if skilled workers are to be destined to significantly smaller third-tier centres, the lack of a compatriot community is a drawback. Grande Prairie, the smallest of the cities in the current study, is a good example. Prior to 1999, a small number of refugees from a variety of cultural backgrounds were destined to Grande Prairie each year. In 1999, CIC stopped destining refugees to Grande Prairie, in part because of the low retention rate. However, in 2000, over 30 Kosovar refugees (all relatives or close friends) were sent to Grande Prairie because several had a relative already living there. Unlike previous refugees sent to this third-tier city, the Kosovars had a well-established social network. Consequently, most have stayed in Grande Prairie, thus replicating the British results reported by Robinson and Coleman (2001)

The proposed social contract could, if implemented carefully, contribute to a more balanced distribution of immigrants in Canada. The current study indicates that second-tier cities are certainly capable of retaining the majority of the people destined to them, given that employment and educational opportunities are present. Even smaller third-tier cities appear to be able to retain a significant proportion of refugees, given the right employment and social conditions.

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Notes

1. A total of 648 individuals were asked if they would participate in the study. Only 32 refused. Hence, while the "interview rate" is 64%, the "response rate" for those asked to participate was 98%.
2. See Wilkinson (2002) for an analysis of the educational experiences of refugee youth in Canada, based on this study, and Lamba (forthcoming) for additional analyses of the employment experiences of the adult refugees in this study.
3. All of the community-level statistics highlighted in this section are from the 1996 national Census, and are discussed in more detail in Abu-Laban et al. (1999, Ch. 4).

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