The Refugee Research Cluster

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Exploring the Plight of Refugees
Since 9/11, the movement of refugees across the global landscape has become an increasingly important issue to many countries. As negative perceptions of refugees have increased, North American borders have tightened, slowing the flow of refugees into Canada and the United States. It’s an alarming trend that has had a harsh impact on the lives of people trying to flee persecution, poverty, war-torn countries and worse.

11.3 million people are currently living in segregated settlements or refugee camps worldwide and 7.3 million of them have been there for 10 years or more. A further 23.6 million are internally displaced in their own countries, which means that they are not recognized as refugees under the UN Convention. Many, if not all, of these people live in poverty under the threat of violence without basic human rights such as freedom of movement and opportunities for education and employment. 41,575 people made refugee claims in Canada in 2003 alone; on average we accept 40%.

A Better Shared Understanding
The Refugee Research Cluster (RRC) is a major collaborative and interdisciplinary research project based at York University’s Centre for Refugee Studies (CRS). It will bring together five renowned researchers from across Canada to explore the complex issues surrounding all levels of the refugee experience. These include the years that many refugees spend in limbo, waiting for legal status, to the difficulties they encounter as they try to settle, learn a new language, seek employment and reunite with their families. In the process, the RRC will examine our perceptions and misconceptions of refugees, and how Canada can potentially build on its strengths in refugee protection and humanitarian aid.

The RRC will not only change the way we think about refugees, but also help to contribute to the development of public policy. This will improve lives by creating fairer and faster processes of determination while providing increased assistance for settlement and integration.

A Sound Investment in Our Future
The social issues affecting our world today are highly complex. Solving them requires an interdisciplinary and collaborative approach that incorporates many perspectives such as economics, sociology and history. York’s research delves deeper, providing the kind of comprehensive insights that provoke meaningful social change. A sound investment in our future. The Refugee Research Cluster will partner with academic and community-based researchers from across disciplines in Canada with links around the world; practitioners from settlement agencies, refugee associations, ethnicultural groups, advocacy organizations and lawyers; and policymakers at the federal, provincial and municipal levels. It will share its findings with the public through papers, conferences and face-to-face consultations.

Canada’s leading umbrella organization of refugee agencies, the Canadian Council of Refugees (CCR) is participating, along with regional networks such as the Ontario Coalition of Agencies Serving Immigrants (OCASI), the Alberta Association of Immigrant Serving Agencies (AAISA) and the Table de concertation des organismes au service des personnes réfugiées et immigrantes (TCRI) in Quebec. The Atlantic Region Association of Immigrant Serving Agencies (ARAISA) is also involved, as well as a list serve on refugee research hosted by CRS with over 120 participants. This will provide an ongoing vehicle for dissemination and consultation.

The Cost of Not Acting
Without the opportunity for dialogue and collaboration facilitated by networks like the RRC, traditional barriers to sharing knowledge will remain as obstacles. By not exploring the many complexities inherent to the refugee experience throughout the migration process, Canadians will be at a serious disadvantage when it comes to formulating policy solutions. These solutions could improve the determination and settlement of refugees in Canada and meet our obligations for refugee protection and humanitarian aid abroad.

Real-World Solutions to Real-World Challenges
Real-world challenges demand different angles, different approaches, and different attitudes. Interdisciplinary and collaborative, York University research delivers relevant insights and meaningful solutions that address today’s complex social issues.