

# FACTORS ASSOCIATED WITH HIGHER EDUCATION ACCESS FOR FIRST-GENERATION REFUGEES IN CANADA



Martha K. Ferede  
Fair Admissions Conference  
University of Manchester  
July 8, 2011



# Widening Participation

I have crossed an ocean  
I have lost my tongue  
from the root of the old one  
a new one has sprung  
~ Grace Nichols (1984)

Resettled refugees tend to be low-income, be persons of color with limited pre-migration access to education. They stand to gain significantly from accessing and obtaining higher education in permanent resettlement countries such as Canada.

# Agenda

## CONTEXT

- 1) Defining Terms
- 2) Research Impetus: Why should we care about HE for refugees?
- 3) Overview of Canadian Immigration Policy
- 4) Overview of Higher Education System in Canada

## RESEARCH

- 1) Question, Methodology & Aims
- 2) Theoretical Framework
- 3) What does the empirical research tell us?  
Economic, Cultural, Social, Academic Factors
- 4) Comments & Questions

# Definition of terminology

**Refugee:** As defined by 1951 UN Geneva Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees, Article 1 (A) 2).

*A note about refugees & immigrants*

“A refugee is different from an immigrant, in that an immigrant is a person who chooses to settle permanently in another country. Refugees are forced to flee.” All refugees are immigrants but not all immigrants are refugees. (Citizenship & Immigration Canada, [CIC] 2011) \*Unfortunately refugees & immigrants are often combined in education research, due in part, to missing immigration designation info by schools\*

**Access:** As defined in literature as “...[has] at some point been enrolled in post secondary education.” (Finnie & Mueller, 2008, p4). Persistence & graduation, although important, are beyond scope of this particular research.

**First Generation:** Defined as those born outside of Canada (includes 1.5 generation, referring to those entering before age of 15)

# Research Impetus: Why should we care about educating refugees at tertiary level?

- ✓ There are important private and public benefits to higher education including social & economic mobility, better health, higher esteem & increased civic engagement (Bowen, Kurzweil & Tobin, 2005; Baum & Payea, 2004; Mumper, 1996)
- ✓ In growing knowledge-markets and lives requiring complex skills, a focus on higher education for newcomers is part of a responsible resettlement program
- ✓ Refugees are the least educated immigrants at arrival & often unable to return to country of origin; yet, they are the least likely to pursue post secondary education in Canada (Banjarree & Verma, 2009)

# Overview of Canadian Immigration Policy

- 1951 - UN Convention on Status of Refugees drafted
- 1969 - Canada ratifies UN Convention
- 1976 - Immigration Act (private sponsorship, formal process)
- 2001 - Immigration and Refugee Protection Act (IRPA replaces 1976 Act)
- 2002 - Canada & U.S. sign the Safe Third Country Agreement
- 2009 - Visa requirements imposed on Mexico & Czech Republic
- 2010 - Safe Country of Origin List proposed



# Numbers & Facts



- ✓ 10.5 million refugees estimated in the world today
- ✓ Approximately 5.7 million exist in protracted situations
- ✓ Approximately 44% of refugees & asylum-seekers are below 18
- ✓ 100,000 refugees are resettled in 20 countries per year  
(10,000 of them in Canada) Only U.S. & France sponsor more
- ✓ Since WWII, Canada has resettled more than 700,000 refugees  
(200,000= privately sponsored since 1978)
- ✓ Refugees can be sponsored abroad or make an in-country claim

Data Sources: CIC, 2011; Amnesty International, 2010;

Image source: United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees [UNHCR]

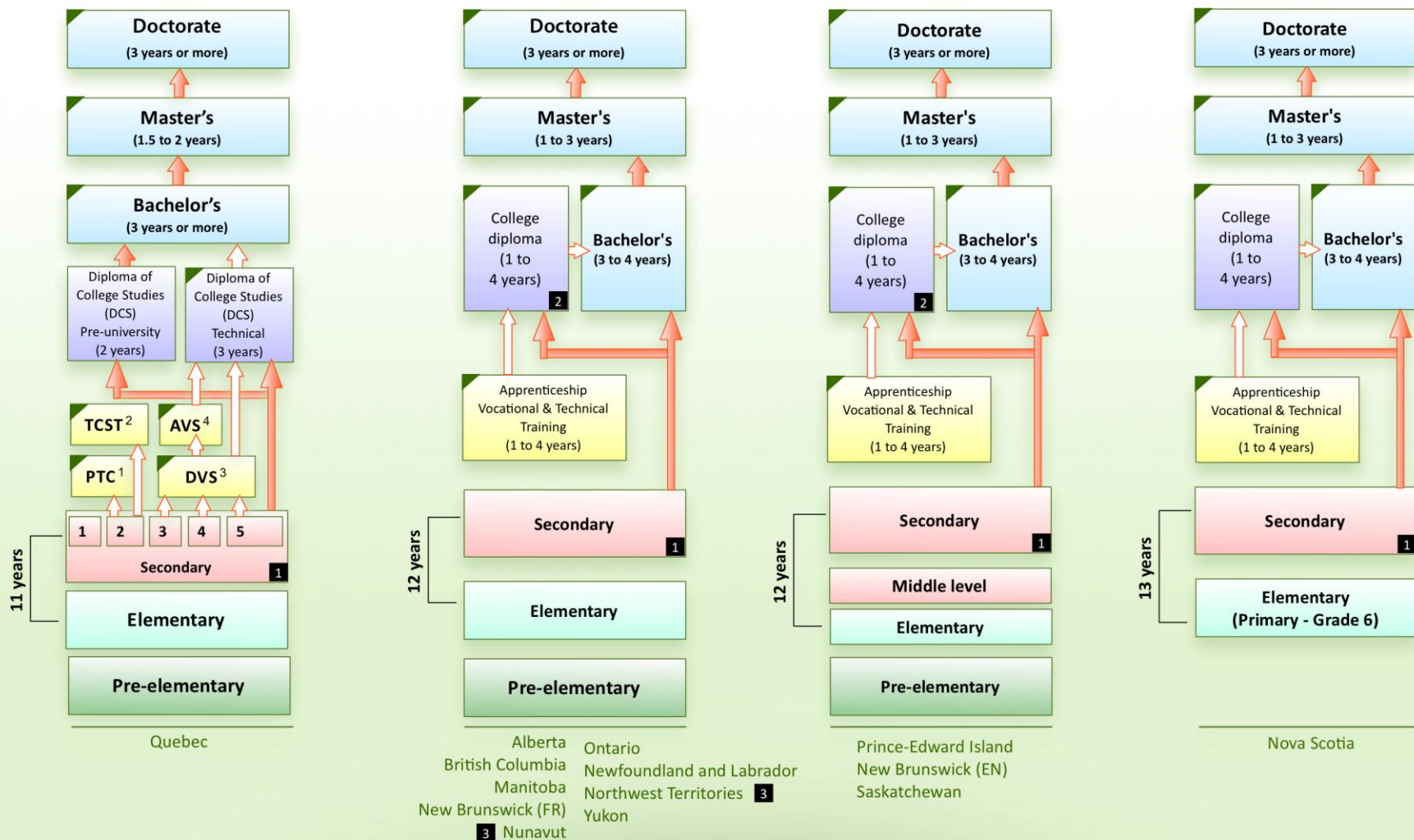
# Top 10 Countries by Refugee Claims Approval Approval Jan 1 - June 30, 2010



Country Source Info: Citizenship & Immigration Canada. Movie Source: Author created



# Canada's Education Systems



1- PTC: Pre-work Training Certificate (3 years, after Secondary II)  
 2- TCST: Training Certificate for a Semi-skilled Trade (1 year, after Secondary II)  
 3- DVS: Diploma of Vocational Studies (600 to 1,800 hours depending on the program)  
 4- AVS: Attestation of Vocational Specialization (300 to 1185 hours depending on the program)

1 In all jurisdictions, a secondary school diploma is issued upon successful completion of the secondary school curriculum.  
 2 Selected institutions in Alberta, British Columbia, Manitoba, Ontario, and Prince Edward Island offer applied degrees.  
 3 The Northwest Territories and Nunavut have no degree-granting institutions. Some degrees are available through partnerships. Students may also access degrees directly from institutions outside the territories.

## Legend

University Education  
 College Education  
 Apprenticeship - Vocational & Technical Training  
 To the job market  
 Typical pathway  
 Alternate pathway

## Notes

(1) All colleges and universities offer certificate programs of variable length. (2) Continuing and adult education programs, while not shown on this chart, may be offered at all levels of instruction. (3) British Columbia's colleges also offer associate degrees.

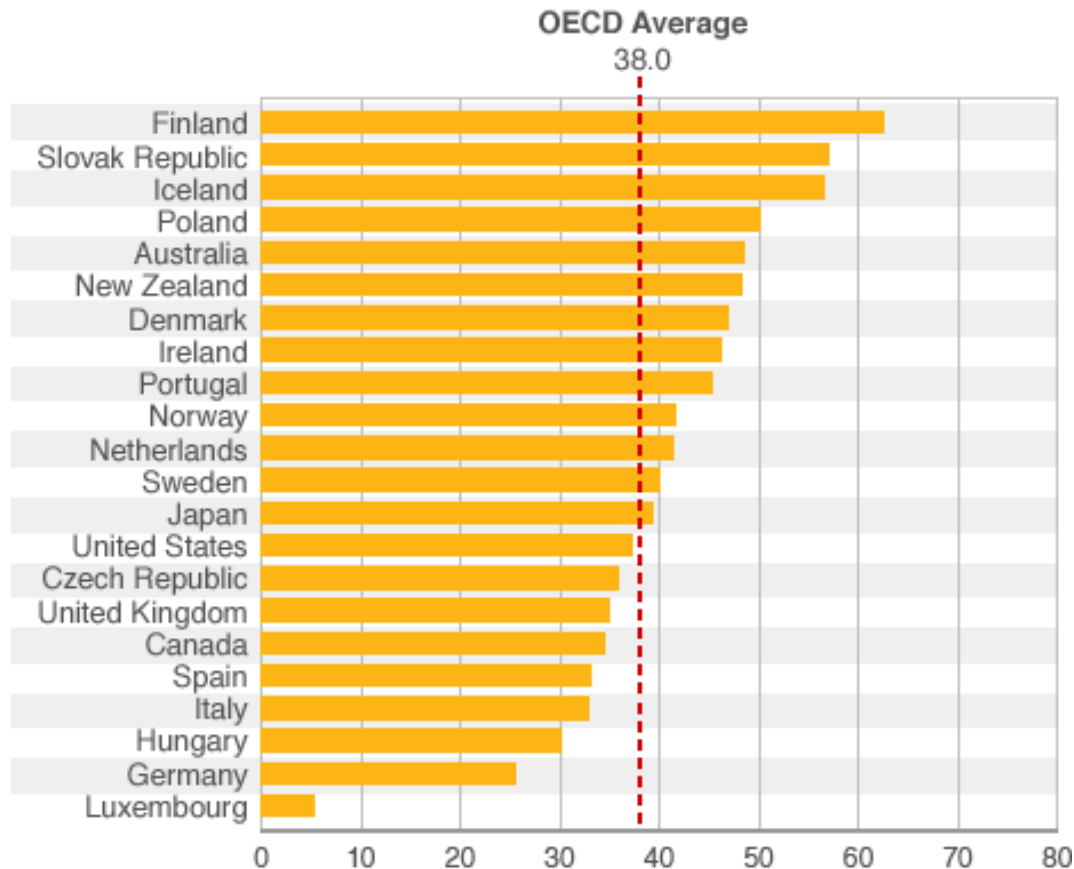
# Higher Education in Canada

- Education is a provincial responsibility (Constitutional Act of 1867)
- 163 recognized public & private universities
- Well regarded universities are public: McGill, U of T, UBC
- 183 recognized colleges and institutes
- 2010-11 average university tuition average = C\$5,138  
(Range: \$C2,624 in Newfoundland to \$C6,307 in Ontario)
- HE admissions differs by province  
(Example: centralized system in Ontario vs. decentralized in Alberta)
- Women make up 58% of undergraduates (2010)

Sources: Statistics Canada, 2011; Association of Universities & Colleges Canada, 2010

# University Graduation Rates in OECD countries

Graduation rates in OECD countries



Source: OECD

# Research & Methodology

## *Research Question*

What factors are associated with university access for first-generation refugees in Canada?

## *Research Methodology*

Review of Canada-based empirical research

*(Due to dearth of research, no exclusion by article date, refugees' country of origin, country of asylum, age, gender, ethnicity, race & sponsored or claim)*

## *Research Purpose*

To identify knowledge base, gaps & urgent areas for research

# Theoretical Frameworks



## Segmented Assimilation Theory

(Portes & Zhou, 1993)

## Cultural Ecological Theory

(Ogbu & Simon, 1998)

## Immigrant Optimism Theory

(Kao & Tienda, 1995)

# Economic Factors

*Refugees constitute a segment of Canada's low-income population*

- Refugees are low-income at arrival (Piche, Renaud & Gingras, 1999). They have high unemployment rates (DeVoretz, D., Pivnenko, S., & Beiser, M., 2004), are likely to be on social assistance (Statistics Canada, 2005) and tend toward downward occupational mobility (Krahn, Derwing, Mulder & Wilkinson, 2000).

*The literature indicates that low-income Canadians tend to be:*

- Less likely to attend university (Corak, Lipps & Zhao, 2003; Usher, 2005).
- More likely to overestimate university costs and underestimate its benefits (Usher, 2005) \*no evidence found of sticker-price shock for Canadians\*
- Negatively impacted by actual university tuition increases. This is true for university but not other HE options (Coelli, 2005).

# Cultural Factors

## *Parental Education*

- For Canadian-born, parental education is a better predictor of university attendance than parental income. If 1 parent is educated = child is 3x more likely to attend. Immigrants with educated parents are also more likely to attend university - there is value to tertiary education outside of Canada (Drolet, 2005; Frenette, 2009)

## *Language*

- Adult immigrants who did not speak English or French are less likely to participate when compared to proficient speakers (Adamuti-Trache, 2011)
- Immigrant youth who speak English in addition to their native language are more likely to attend university. (Dinovitzer, Hagan, & Parker, 2003).

## *Aspiration*

- Aspiration positively influences the decision to apply to and attend university (Finnie, Mueller, Sweetman, & Usher, 2008; Christofides, Hoy, & Li, 2008). Immigrants, especially visible minorities, have high aspirations (Krahn & Taylor, 2005). Aspiration is important but not sufficient for access.

# Social Factors

- ‘Bonding’ social capital refers to relationships among family, friends, and neighbors while ‘bridging’ social capital refers to more distant ties transcending communities (Putnam, 1993).

## *Family structure*

- A father’s presence in the household led to significantly better academic performance (Chow, 2000).
- Family separation has negative impact; study on African refugees living alone or with a single parent found negative impact on high school academic progress (Kanu, 2008).

## *External organization membership*

- One study found that for Canadian immigrants aged 18-34, organizational involvement was positively correlated to university education attainment (Abada & Tenkorang, 2009).



# Academic Factors

*Refugees face significant pre-migration disadvantages in schooling.*

- Refugee children and youth often arrive to Canada without formal education experience, interrupted education due to the outbreak of war or violence, or having undergone inadequate schooling within under-resourced refugee camps (Kaprielian-Churchill, 1994; 1996).

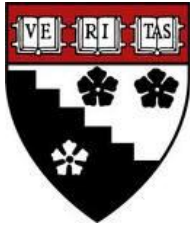
*Despite setbacks, some refugees do well in the Canadian education system*

- Some studies find that refugees from Yugoslavia origins do well (Wilkinson, 2002), while other studies find that not all refugees are successful; evidence of high school drop-out rates in excess of 30% for those with Latin American origin (Kaprielian-Churchill (1994; 1996).
- Immigrants from war-zone countries - a population closely related to refugees - also exhibit high academic achievement in several subject areas (Stermac, Elgie, Dunlap, and Kelly, 2010).

# Final Points

- Higher education (and in particular a bachelor degree) offers robust public and private advantages.
- Refugees are the least educated, yet the least likely to pursue higher education in Canada.
- As the world's refugee population grows, higher education access must become a policy priority, not just for Canada, but for all resettlement countries.

# Thank you



Dr. Lawrence-Lightfoot, Advisor  
Dr. Reuben, Dr. Louie & Dr. Willett  
Higher Education Concentration, Harvard GSE



William Lyon Mackenzie King Canada Program  
Weatherhead Center for International Affairs



University of Manchester, 2011 Fair Admissions Conference

# Contact

## Presenter Contact Details:

Martha K. Ferede

Email: [mkf673@mail.harvard.edu](mailto:mkf673@mail.harvard.edu)

Cambridge, MA: (617) 372-3416

France: +33 628910502

*Reference list of presentation & paper available upon request*