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***Sharing the Wealth, Spreading the  
"Burden"? The Settlement of Kosovar  
Refugees in Smaller British Columbia Cities***

**ABSTRACT/RÉSUMÉ**

Since World War II, immigration to Canada has predominantly been an urban phenomenon. In the 1990s, 73 percent of all newcomers to Canada settled within three Census Metropolitan Areas: Toronto, Montreal, and Vancouver. The federal government is interested in spreading this immigrant population around to include smaller cities, potentially through policies of dispersed settlement, or regionalization. The research presented here examines an experiment in which one group of government-assisted refugees were settled in small- and medium-sized cities in British Columbia. In May 1999, 905 Kosovar refugees arrived in British Columbia as part of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) humanitarian evacuation from camps in Macedonia. The settlement of the Kosovars is an exceptional case in the context of British Columbia, as it was the first time a large number of government-assisted refugees had been "dispersed" to cities outside the Lower Mainland. Drawing on forty-two individual interviews and seven focus groups conducted between May 2002 and March 2003, this research analyzes the significance and characteristics of location in the settlement of refugees in large and smaller cities in British Columbia. The findings highlight the importance of employment prospects and the presence of family as major factors influencing the success of settlement.

Depuis la Deuxième Guerre mondiale, l'immigration au Canada est surtout un phénomène urbain. Dans les années 1990, 73 pourcent de tous les nouveaux arrivants au Canada se sont établis dans une des trois régions métropolitaines de recensement (RMR) : Toronto, Montréal, et Vancouver. Le gouvernement fédéral cherche à encourager la redistribution géographique de cette population d'immigrants aux centres urbains de petite et moyenne envergure en élaborant des politiques de dispersion ou de régionalisation. Cette étude présente une expérience où un groupe de réfugiés parrainés par le gouvernement se sont établis dans des petites et moyennes villes en Colombie Britannique. En mai 1999, 905 réfugiés kosovars sont arrivés en Colombie Britannique en provenance des camps de Macédoine, dans le cadre du programme d'évacuation des réfugiés du Haut Commissariat des Nations Unies pour les réfugiés (HCR). L'établissement de ces kosovars est un cas exceptionnel en Colombie Britannique, puisqu'il s'agit de la première fois qu'un grand nombre de réfugiés parrainés par le gouvernement fut "dispersé" dans des villes en dehors du Lower Mainland. Fondée sur quarante-deux entrevues individuelles et sept groupes de discussion tenus entre mai 2002 et mars 2003, cette recherche analyse les caractéristiques de répartition spatiale des réfugiés dans les petites et moyennes villes en Colombie Britannique ainsi que leur signification. Ces observations soulignent l'importance du rôle joué par les perspectives d'emploi et la présence de parents en tant que facteurs décisifs quant au succès de l'établissement.

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## INTRODUCTION

As Canada's largest cities grow, many small- and medium-sized cities witness declining populations (Bollman 2000). Swift Current, Saskatchewan—a place that calls itself the “Open Door City”—has had fifteen years of zero population growth and wants to attract newcomers, including immigrants, to rejuvenate the economy (*Globe and Mail* 2003). An organization of local business owners in Swift Current was not happy, then, to hear that the city's population was anything but open to outsiders and tolerant of difference, a finding that emerged from a consultant's report commissioned by the City of Swift Current. The idea of immigrant settlement in such cities is alluring, yet certain conditions must be met if newcomers are to stay.

The federal policy of “regionalization,” or immigrant dispersion, to small- and medium-sized cities outside the three major Census Metropolitan Areas (CMAs: Montreal, Toronto, and Vancouver) has been discussed for some time (CIC 2001a, 2001b). In British Columbia, Kosovar refugees were the first group of government-assisted refugees to be dispersed to smaller centres (“dispersed” or “dispersion” is government terminology that describes the process by which refugees are assigned to particular places). This paper examines the viability of an immigrant regionalization policy in Canada by analyzing the settlement of Kosovar refugees in four centres outside the Greater Vancouver area. We juxtapose the findings of interviews and focus groups in Vernon, Kelowna, Chilliwack, and Abbotsford with those from Kosovars in the municipalities of Surrey, Burnaby, and Vancouver, all part of Greater Vancouver or the Lower Mainland. The principal aim is to consider if and how location matters in the settlement of refugees in smaller centres in British Columbia. Two salient questions framed the research process:

1. How well have Kosovars fared in obtaining housing, employment, and official language proficiency in each of the seven communities (three metropolitan and four smaller centres)?
2. What factors influence the decision of the refugees to stay or leave particular centres?

The paper begins with a brief overview of the regionalization initiative and an outline of research methods. Findings are then presented in relation to the questions articulated above, and a concluding section raises policy implications.

### REGIONALIZATION: A POLICY OF IMMIGRANT DISPERSION

Increasingly, migrants from both within and outside Canada have opted to settle in larger centres, rather than smaller towns and rural areas (Bourne and Rose 2001). Despite accounting for over 50 percent of Canada's population growth, immigration is geographically uneven, with newcomers settling in a few gateway cities. In the 1990s, 73 percent of newcomers to Canada settled in the three CMAs (Statistics Canada 2003a). In 2002, 87 percent of newcomers who came to British Columbia chose to reside in the Greater Vancouver area, 2.2 percent chose Victoria, and 9.8 percent opted to settle in other locations across the province.

Toronto, Vancouver, and Montreal are seen as Canada's economic growth engines. While job growth continues to occur disproportionately in these urban centres, the paring back of the welfare state through neoliberal policies at the provincial and

federal levels has reduced the social and physical infrastructure in Canadian cities (Walton-Roberts 2004). Critics of federal immigration policy have even argued that immigrant concentration in Canadian cities will lead to social tensions or public outbreaks of violence (Collacott 2002), though these predictions have not been substantiated.<sup>1</sup> While we do not subscribe to the idea that the concentration of immigrants in Canada's largest cities is, by definition, a problem, the question of whether the settlement of more immigrants outside the largest cities is a viable option is an important one. It is also important to determine whether immigrants want to go to these smaller urban centres (Hyndman and Schuurman 2004).

This paper does not definitively prove or disprove the viability of regionalizing refugees. Rather, it elucidates which key factors kept people in the communities where they originally settled, and which forced people to consider leaving. No single explanatory factor accounts for positive or negative settlement experiences, but one thing is certain: the vast majority of Kosovars who came to British Columbia will stay, most of them in the original communities in which they settled.

In the British Columbia context, recent work by Walton-Roberts (2004) on immigrants in Squamish and Kelowna, and by Henin and Bennett (2002) on Latin American and African immigrants in Victoria, British Columbia, addresses the settlement experiences of immigrants outside British Columbia's Lower Mainland. Walton-Roberts (2004) examines practices undertaken by regional governments in attracting and retaining immigrants. Her research underscores the importance of the settlement context in facilitating negative or positive settlement experiences. Henin and Bennett (2002) identify several obstacles to inclusion, including obtaining meaningful employment that reflects the education and training of the immigrants as well as finding adequate and affordable housing. Their work provides important insights into non-metropolitan settlement in British Columbia.

In relation to refugee resettlement, Abu-Laban et al. (1999) document the settlement experiences and successive geographic mobility of refugees in seven Alberta cities of varying sizes. A second paper by Krahn, Derwing, and Abu-Laban (2003) extends this analysis by placing it within the current context of debates surrounding regionalization and dispersion. Both studies note a strong correlation between the size of a city and overall retention rates; that is, larger cities have higher retention rates (Abu-Laban et al. 1999; Krahn et al. 2003). For those who chose to leave the settlement cities, the most frequently cited reasons for leaving are the prospects of improved employment and education opportunities in another city. In the context of current debates about regionalization, this research underscores the significance of social and economic conditions in the city of settlement.

### KOSOVARs IN CANADA

Citizenship and Immigration Canada statistics indicate British Columbia had the highest retention rate for Kosovars in Canada (Skelton 2000). In response to the displacement of Kosovars to Macedonia and Albania in 1999, Canada accepted 7,271 Kosovar refugees for immediate settlement (Centre for Refugee Studies [CRS] and Joint Centre of Excellence for Research on Immigration and Settlement [CERIS] 2001; United States Committee for Refugees and Immigrants [USCR]

2000).<sup>2</sup> "Once settled, the evacuated refugees could apply for permanent residence if they wished" (CRS and CERIS 2001, 10). Kosovars were also given a unique option: they had two years to determine if they would like to stay in Canada or return to Kosovo/a;<sup>3</sup> the Federal Government would assume all expenses if they chose to repatriate (Tetrault and Tessier 1999, USCR 2000).

Cities were chosen so that large numbers of Kosovars could be settled together, based on the idea that this strategy would facilitate mutual support and aid in settlement (CRS and CERIS 2001). In May 1999, 905 Kosovars arrived in British Columbia (Kyte and West 2000). The majority were settled in communities outside the Lower Mainland, a unique situation given that other government-assisted refugees settled in British Columbia are normally sent to Vancouver, where services specific to immigrants and refugees are concentrated (Citizenship and Immigration Canada [CIC] 2000).<sup>4</sup>

Research on the settlement of Kosovars in Alberta and Ontario provides more specific insights and possibilities for comparison. In 2001, a *Report on the settlement experiences of Kosovar refugees in Ontario* by the CRS and the CERIS outlined the results of a study that analyzed data from 706 questionnaires completed by Kosovars living in Toronto, Ottawa, Hamilton, Windsor, London, Kitchener, St. Catharines, and Thunder Bay. The research identified a number of difficulties encountered by the refugees, including language acquisition, lack of appropriate housing, and insufficient income. At the time of that research, few of the Kosovars had obtained meaningful employment, and many were experiencing difficulties with the English language.

*Lessons learned: An evaluation of Northern Alberta's experience with Kosovar refugees* documents the settlement of Kosovar refugees in a number of Albertan communities (Abu-Laban, Derwing, Mulder, and Northcott 2001). The researchers interviewed 186 privately-sponsored refugees settled in Northern Alberta, 27 representatives from both governmental and non-governmental decision-makers, 119 sponsors, 15 service-providing organizations (and their 60 representatives), and a sample of Kosovars who had repatriated (Abu-Laban et al. 2001). The three-volume report examines experiences both on Canadian military bases and in Alberta, with a primary focus on the policy implications of Canada's response to the humanitarian evacuation.

### RESEARCH APPROACH

The research presented here is part of a collaboration with the Immigrant Services Society of British Columbia (ISS), the principal agency responsible for facilitating the settlement of government-assisted refugees. The ISS was responsible for establishing contracts with service organizations in smaller British Columbia communities and preparing them to provide appropriate settlement services. The collaborative research relationship established with the ISS was constructive with respect to facilitating access to, and rapport with, the Kosovars. It enabled us to build upon the knowledge and strengths of all parties involved.

The research itself included five focus groups and thirty-five individual interviews with Kosovars, as well as the results of two focus group meetings and

five individual interviews with representatives from immigrant- and refugee-serving agencies and sponsors. The Kosovars interviewed included approximately equal numbers of women and men, aged twenty-one to seventy-eight, from both rural and urban backgrounds. The English language ability of the Kosovar participants varied from those with little ability to speak English to those who claimed fluency. Interpreters were provided during focus groups and individual interviews to ensure people could respond in the language with which they felt the most comfortable. These interviews and focus groups were conducted between May 2002 and March 2003 in seven British Columbia cities: Chilliwack, Abbotsford, Kelowna, Vernon, Vancouver, Burnaby, and Surrey. These cities were selected as sites of study on the basis of the known presence of Kosovar refugees, and subsequently, on the ability to establish rapport with one of the contacts who aided in setting up focus groups and interviews.<sup>5</sup> As part of the Lower Mainland, the largest urban area in British Columbia, Vancouver, Burnaby, and Surrey were included to allow comparisons of the settlement of Kosovars with smaller urban centres.

The Kosovars who participated in this project, whether in interviews or focus groups, represent approximately five percent of the Kosovars who settled in British Columbia in the summer of 1999. As such, the results are not necessarily generalizable to all Kosovars, nor to the wider immigrant and refugee populations. The findings are significant, however, in that they examine settlement processes occurring in the immigrant-receiving cities and offer insights regarding both current and future policy.

### LOCATION MATTERS

In considering if and how location matters in the settlement of refugees, this section examines how settlement outcomes vary across cities. After examining how Kosovars fared in obtaining housing, employment, and official language proficiency in each of the seven communities, the section concludes with a discussion of what factors influenced the decision of refugees to stay or leave particular centres. For the purposes of this paper, "integration" denotes official language acquisition and employment status (Frith 2003).

Three years after their arrival, the vast majority of the Kosovars interviewed (29 of 34) intended to settle permanently in Canada, with most remaining in their original host city.<sup>6</sup> This finding is consistent with research on Kosovars in both Alberta and Ontario (Abu-Laban et al. 2001; CRS and CERIS 2001), as well as with the LSIC (*Longitudinal Survey of Immigrants to Canada*), which found that 91 percent of newcomers to Canada intend to settle here permanently and obtain Canadian citizenship (Statistics Canada 2003b).<sup>7</sup> Although there is some evidence of secondary migration both to and from British Columbia, a significant majority of Kosovars (24 of 34) are still living in their original host city three years after their arrival. Their continued presence in these cities, however, may relate as much to a lack of financial resources needed to move as it does to satisfaction with their host city. Our study could not definitively prove either case.

Although these numbers suggest that many of the respondents were satisfied with their resettlement in Canada, focus groups and interview findings imply that older people are most likely to repatriate. In a sample of 120 Kosovars who had repatriated, Abu-Laban et al. (2001) found similar results—28 percent of those who

repatriated were aged 45 and older. This rare opportunity—to have one's way paid to return home—made the difficulties of resettlement a choice not taken for those who chose to go back to Kosovo/a. Elderly people, in particular, seemed to have experienced the greatest difficulties adjusting to their new circumstances:

They'd rather go back to a land that... wasn't in harmony at that point, rather than go through with the new culture... In [their] wildest dreams, [they] never thought [they'd] be coming to another land, and then, suddenly, [they're] here. There's a real culture shock... The older people really had a hard time with it... they just couldn't adjust to the changes. (service provider, Kelowna) \*

Reasons given for repatriation involved a desire or need to return home, rather than a dislike of Canada. The primary reasons for leaving cited in both our study and that of Abu-Laban et al. (2001) related to factors in Kosovo/a (that is, family obligations, the search for loved ones, homesickness, and/or the need to rebuild) as opposed to factors in the host city. In some cases, exigency made repatriation the only option:

[My cousin] didn't want to go [back to Kosovo/a]. But... he had to go back to take care of [his parents]... He had five children... [and they were] doing, ah, really [well in] school... but he had to go back. I know they're missing here.

Of those who left Canada, many wish to come back. Every one of them would want to return to Canada. Every one of the ones who I know, anyhow." According to our interviewees, all of the people who returned to Kosovo/a did so within the two-year window in which the Government of Canada would finance the costs of repatriation. Many, we heard second-hand, came to regret this decision.<sup>8</sup>

### **Regionalization: A Strategy that Could?**

When the Kosovars settled in Canada, they benefited from an expanded definition of family (expanded as compared to other government-assisted refugees) that included parents, adult children, and siblings. A decision was made to settle extended families in the same city in an effort to enhance settlement and reduce secondary migration (CRS and CERIS 2001). Eight of the ten families who settled in Vernon, for example, are related. This settlement strategy enabled family members to support one another during the transition. The presence of family members as well as other Kosovars reduces feelings of isolation and begins to rebuild networks disrupted during flight.

The LSIC report corroborates the finding that the presence of family and friends significantly shapes immigrants' destination experiences upon arrival in Canada. Of immigrants who settled outside the CMAs, 35.6 percent chose their destination based on the presence of family or friends; another 32.3 percent picked their destination based on job prospects, while 5.5 percent based their decision on business prospects. In Vancouver, 41.3 percent chose the city because of family or friends residing there;

\* **Editorial Note:** This is the first of numerous quotes from the interviews and from focus group transcripts with individual Kosovar immigrants and with the service providers at immigrant and refugee-serving agencies. They are included to illustrate, in their own words, the issues as immigrant service providers and the Kosovars themselves understand them. We have not cited them in the usual fashion, as all the quotes in this article are taken from the same sources. Complete source information is available from the authors.

in contrast, only 6 percent selected the city on the basis of job prospects (Statistics Canada 2003b). In light of our findings and the statistically significant results of the survey, the strategy of settling extended families together is an important one that may well shape the likelihood of staying in a small- or medium-sized city. Family and friends provide networks of support during the initial stages of settlement as well as on-going contacts and resources, at least in principle, thereafter.

The conscious residential concentration of Kosovars is evident in Surrey and Vernon, and was also apparent in Abbotsford on a short-term basis during the initial settlement period. In Abbotsford, a number of families lived together in an apartment building, in part because of the affordable rents, but also to lend support to one another during that initial period. Once they began establishing themselves in jobs, however, the families dispersed to other areas of Abbotsford. In Vernon, six parts of an extended family lived in one apartment building, while in Surrey, fifteen families lived in one complex. Anecdotal evidence indicates some families have already chosen to move out of these buildings. Living in such a concentrated fashion enabled respondents in Surrey to develop a "small Kosovar community" that helped reduce feelings of isolation for at least some of the respondents. For some, however, these newly formed connections do not necessarily replace the networks they had in Kosovo/a. One Kosovar who moved to Surrey for the sake of his parents stated that "they've lived with other [Kosovar families] in this complex, but still you don't ... really get what you had. Especially the extent of the friends ... but it's better."

Nevertheless, the concentration of larger groups of Kosovars, particularly extended family groupings, may increase the level of comfort and encourage people to depend on one another for social support during settlement. For others, it was proximity to family that was salient, despite the availability of more affordable housing elsewhere in the Lower Mainland. "I told them Vancouver is very expensive with your government assistance. At least in the first year, until you get jobs, you should go to Surrey. But nope. They like to stay close ... They feel more secure."

The proximity of family or other Kosovars appears to be a significant factor in determining where people live. According to the LSIC, such sentiments are evident for all immigrants, since 63 percent of newcomers indicated "all or most of their new friends were from the same ethnic group" (Statistics Canada 2003b).

### **Livelihoods: Official Language Acquisition and Employment Prospects**

"For me it's not just lack of income but it's lack of self-respect."

The inability to speak English presents a significant barrier to obtaining employment for Kosovars and other immigrant groups. Barriers to participation in language classes need to be examined and addressed, as English language ability is intimately related to the ability to obtain high quality employment opportunities (Creese and Kammerer 2002). Consequently, immigrant and refugee-serving agencies voiced a need for increased access to English language classes:

They must let us provide language training to a higher level ... Level 3 ... doesn't give anyone enough English to even get a job ... I think they should go to level 6, and that still isn't fluent, but [it] is [enough] ... to be able to get ... an entry level job.

Manitoba funds English Language Services for Adults (ELSA) up to level 8 (university-ready), and Ontario provides funding to level 6 (British Columbia Coalition for Immigrant Integration 2002; Hyndman and Friesen 2002). Results from the "Inter-Provincial Report Card on Immigrant Settlement and Labour Market Integration Services" (British Columbia Coalition for Immigrant Integration 2002) indicate that British Columbia lags behind the rest of Canada (including the Yukon) in relation to the provision of English language services for adults. Immigrant and refugee-serving agencies in Vancouver note that British Columbia has long waiting lists, a lack of childcare spaces for parents seeking language training, and has recently been subjected to sector-wide cuts and an increased emphasis on accountability. As such, some suggest there is a need for increased capacity for English language instruction. One service provider noted that in the Lower Mainland it can take almost a year to get an assessment, and then the person must wait for a spot to become available. Further, the service provider stated that waiting lists for daycare (so that parents may attend school) is even longer. Reducing barriers to language acquisition may facilitate access to employment. Increased provision and capacity would ensure more timely completion of English language training to a level that would enable newcomers to enter the competitive job market.

Despite these deficiencies, the majority of Kosovars interviewed for this study (29 of 34, or 85%) received English language training since their arrival. Similarly, 45 percent of respondents in the first wave of the LSIC pursued some type of educational training within six months of arrival. Of these, 58 percent took English training (Statistics Canada 2003b). Of the Kosovars who took language classes, eight completed advanced English training (that is, above level 3) through adult learning centres and local colleges. Many of the Kosovars seeking advanced language training are professionals who believe better language skills will facilitate access to employment in their previous occupations.<sup>9</sup> Of the five Kosovars who did not receive English language training, three claimed to already be fluent in English, and two cited old age as their reason for not participating.

The degree to which Kosovars obtained employment and acquired English proficiency has not been consistent either within or between centres. Although other indicators of integration include political participation in Canadian society, the Kosovars are a relatively recent groups of newcomers for whom livelihood and employment prospects are paramount. One sponsor noted a correlation between geography, education, and success in settling: "Those who were educated were from the big cities like Prishtina... have done much better. Those that come with little education... from the village, have a much tougher time."

Kosovars in Kelowna and Vernon, many of whom are from smaller villages in Kosovo/a, experienced significant difficulties obtaining employment, while those in Chilliwack, Abbotsford, Vancouver, and Surrey have, on average, experienced more success. Significant variations exist between Kosovars interviewed in terms of education and profession. Sixteen of the twenty-eight participants in Vancouver, Surrey, Chilliwack, and Abbotsford were university students in Kosovo/a or hold university degrees or professional diplomas, compared to two of the eight participants in Kelowna and Vernon.

Three years after settlement, 43 percent (15 of 35) of the Kosovars interviewed were employed on either a full-time or a part-time basis, 11 percent (4 of 35) were full-time post-secondary students (none of whom were employed), and 46 percent (16 of 35) were unemployed. A larger proportion of Kosovars had obtained employment than in the study done much earlier by CRS and CERIS (2001), a finding that is not surprising, given the different time periods when the studies were conducted. In the earlier study, only 13 percent of the heads of families and 3 percent of spouses had obtained either full- or part-time employment. Over one-third of participants in the CRS and CERIS (2001) study had made no efforts to obtain employment.

Significant geographic variations exist among centres in relation to both unemployment and the degree to which Kosovars obtained Canadian work experience. In Chilliwack and Abbotsford, for example, one of the nine (11%) Kosovars interviewed is unemployed, compared with eight of the eighteen (44%) participants in Vancouver and Surrey, and seven of the eight (87.5%) participants in Kelowna and Vernon. Some Kosovars, particularly in the Lower Mainland, spoke of fairly constant attachment to the labour force, albeit in a variety of jobs, while those in Kelowna and Vernon spoke of a more transient or fleeting attachment.

In Vancouver, Surrey, Chilliwack, and Abbotsford, the majority of Kosovars interviewed had at least some Canadian work experience. Many of these jobs, however, were part-time or temporary, particularly in service industries such as tourism. A number of the women and one of the men in Surrey and Abbotsford reported having been employed either as interpreters for Citizenship and Immigration Canada or as Kosovar settlement counsellors at various settlement service organizations. While these jobs provide much-needed Canadian experience, they were tied to the immediate settlement of the Kosovars and the two-year federal funding window. As such, many of them no longer exist.

In Kelowna and Vernon, the majority of participants reported having worked for as little as one or two months since coming to Canada, with many of them reporting no Canadian work experience at all. Anecdotal evidence from six women (five in Vernon and one in Kelowna) and one other man in Kelowna indicates that only one was working at the time of the interviews. Immigrant and refugee-serving agencies in Vernon, however, indicated that some of the Kosovars have obtained stable, and in at least one case, full-time, employment. One person is upgrading her credentials.

The high unemployment levels among Kosovars in Kelowna and Vernon also reflect wider unemployment trends in the region. During the period in which the Kosovars were settled in the Okanogan, the jobless rate in the Thompson-Okanogan was 2 percent above the provincial average, a statistic that remains largely unchanged (*Okanogan Saturday* 1999). According to the 2001 Census, both Kelowna and Vernon had unemployment rates significantly above the provincial average, while all of the other areas studied had unemployment rates that were slightly below the provincial average.<sup>10</sup> The unemployment of Kosovars in these centres may well reflect wider economic issues in the region. Research by Walton-Roberts (2004) reaffirms the difficulties faced by newcomers in obtaining employment in Kelowna. Although the unemployment rate in Vernon declined from 12.1 percent to 10.2 percent between 1996 and 2001, the labour force growth rate (or the number of

people who became employed) and the employment growth rate (or the number of jobs that were created) actually declined by 6 percent and 4 percent respectively. These findings contrast with Abbotsford, which experienced labour force growth rates and employment growth rates of 11 percent and 13 percent respectively.

The majority of Kosovars who obtained jobs are employed in lower-paying jobs that do not necessarily reflect their educational background, credentials, experience, or skills, a finding consistent with those of Kosovars in Northern Alberta (Abu-Laban et al. 2001). Sixty percent of the newcomers surveyed in the LSIC are working in an occupational field different from the field worked in before coming to Canada (Statistics Canada 2003b).

The Kosovars who participated in our study echoed a number of all-too-familiar barriers to obtaining meaningful employment (Abu-Laban et al. 1999; Abu-Laban et al. 2001; CRS and CERIS 2001). These include lack of English language ability, unfamiliarity with Canadian job-finding skills, the absence of networks useful in obtaining employment, lack of Canadian experience, and in some cases, no recognition of credentials (Bai 1991; Ferris 2001; Lo et al. 2001; Waxman 2001). These factors all contribute to un(der)employment and downward occupational mobility (Abu-Laban et al. 1999). "No one is accepting experience from back home ...I know it is not the case only with us, it's with all immigrants. Especially if you don't know [the] language."

Looking for work in Canada and Kosovo/a differs. One Kosovar, for example, talked about his unfamiliarity with resumes and the need to learn to "sell" yourself in Canada. Similar findings were reported by Bauder and Cameron (2002), who noted immigrants from the former Yugoslavia (although not necessarily from Kosovo/a) had differing assumptions about hiring practices that were acquired in the country of origin but did not necessarily work in Canada. Further, Bauder and Cameron's findings indicate immigrants from the former Yugoslavia expressed a lack of familiarity with interviews, as well as networking based on personal and social contacts. Rather, job finding in the former Yugoslavia was based on formal qualifications and institutional networks; people are chosen based on their qualifications without being interviewed.

For some newcomers, ageism was also believed to be a factor in their failure to obtain employment. "When it comes time to hire someone to work, it's not only language, but also age. They hire someone younger."

For people with professional or technical skills, the difficulties of obtaining employment are amplified by professional licensing bodies that do not recognize foreign credentials (Abu-Laban et al. 1999). The majority of professionals in this sample have not obtained employment in their previous field: of the eleven professionals interviewed, two are employed in their previous field but at a much lower level, three are employed in an occupation at a lower level, two are upgrading their qualifications, and four are unemployed. Since the interviews, two people have obtained employment in their field at a level comparable to their previous employment.

Professionals in Kelowna expressed the greatest difficulties in obtaining employment. They were the most likely to speak of moving to a larger centre where

they believed meaningful employment could be obtained, and had resisted coming to Kelowna in the first place. "Some of them say that you are over qualified, some of them don't like me because they know that if I find better job, I will leave."

Despite their inability to obtain employment in their own fields, two professionals talked about the reluctance on the part of employers to hire them because they are overqualified. Another Kosovar talked about the difficulties of obtaining recognition for her medical credentials, despite having passed the evaluation exams that recognize her medical knowledge and training as being equivalent to that of Canadian graduates. When applying for residency, the next step in becoming a Canadian doctor, foreign-trained doctors have the lowest priority. Further, the requirements state that "advantage is given to...physicians who are practicing or [have] recently [practiced]. But [the] longer it takes to get into a residency, [we] are losing these advantages. Over four years I have been out of practice now."

Thus, multiple barriers exist to credential recognition. Canada is seen by some Kosovars as having systemic barriers that limit opportunities for immigrants and newcomers to obtain meaningful employment:

Like, you need to do, like, elementary jobs. They don't give you chance to do...business, or to have good job in government position... You need to...really develop your stuff or...have [good] luck.

For one Kosovar, the "luck factor," or recognition of his "foreign" work experience, was important in gaining meaningful employment in his previous field:

I went to apply...as a production labourer...and I was just lucky enough to hand off my resume to a factory manager... When he saw my resume...he said, why don't you apply for IT manager position? They called my counterpart from U.S. to interview me... and I got the job.

Without such recognition, or being in the right place at the right time, these Kosovars felt it was difficult to obtain "good" jobs. Language barriers, the lack of credential recognition, and age discrimination compound the difficulties of finding employment.

The inability to obtain employment may have ramifications that extend beyond the economic impacts:

I was disappointed with finding jobs... sometimes I blame myself [because] I don't know how to find them... It is kind of frustrating for us... I thought I would do better... I'm not satisfied with part-time jobs and [jobs that last for] two months... [At] first I [thought I would be] working in my field, but since I am here, it is not possible without training.

The emotional distress that results from prolonged unemployment may have repercussions for the entire family. "Right now, we are in a big problem about [work]... My [partner] is in stress, and it affects the family."

Recent provincial cuts that limit welfare to two out of five years and reduce monthly support may make settlement and integration more tenuous for those still unable to obtain stable employment. In one city, the immigrant and refugee-serving agency related the difficulties of settling two different people who are unable to obtain employment due to medical problems, yet do not qualify for disability under

government regulations. Simich et al. (2001, 5) caution that “[f]or refugees ... [the] social support of friends and relatives may be necessary but insufficient for successful resettlement if the means to become self-sufficient, such as employment, are not also present.”

### **Mismatching Skill and Place: Manufacturing Experience Versus Service Jobs**

One theme that emerged in the interviews is a spatial mismatch between the jobs available in a city and the job experience and skills of the refugees. A lack of factory jobs was mentioned in a number of interviews, suggesting a mismatch between the job skills of some of the refugees (for example, in manufacturing) and the types of jobs available (in service industries such as tourism, for example): “[In] Gjakova we had... seven or eight [factories]. It was a very industrial town... there were big factories: 5,000 people in one [factory].”

These factories were an important source of employment. This mismatch was most evident in Kelowna and Vernon, where the economies are predominantly based on forestry and agriculture with a large service sector, including tourism (Economic Development Commission 2002). Clearly, front-line jobs in tourism are out of reach for those without fluent official language skills. In Vernon, one Kosovar reported that “it’s hard to find jobs. There are not a lot of jobs and the town is small. There are no factories. People just come here for tourism.” Another lamented that: “Kelowna is tourist place; it is not for engineers.” While this mismatch certainly exists in many cities as a result of the rise of the service economy, the predominant economic base as well as the size of the city may exacerbate the dislocation of Kosovars with factory experience.

This spatial mismatch was also evident in relation to hi-tech and information technology sectors. In Kelowna, for example, hi-tech companies have been diversifying the traditional agricultural base, prompting the local Economic Development Commission to promote the region as the Silicon Vineyard (Walton-Roberts 2004). One respondent, however, suggested that:

the promotion of Kelowna like Silicon Vineyard is highly exaggerated. Hi-tech companies usually are small. Very small. And they are able to employ up to ten people. And no industry, no big manufacturing companies ... Here, generally, I believe it’s mainly hospitality industry ... [The] highly promoted bridges.com ... does do very well, but still not big enough to be big employer. Only manufacturer is Sunrype, food processing kind of company. But I’m afraid they don’t need any hi-tech personnel so far.

Similar concerns arose in Abbotsford:

[Information technology] is considered more of a service industry, and those industries in Abbotsford are rather small, therefore they don’t hire a lot of people in IT. In Vancouver, for example, on the other hand, is bigger market for those types of jobs.

Employment has understandably emerged as a major concern for Kosovars during settlement. Of those who obtained employment, many are in occupations

unrelated to their previous training or experience. Others reported little, if any, work experience. The ability to obtain employment is influenced by age (with older people citing more difficulty), educational background (professionals have little success in obtaining employment based on previous credentials), and location (people settled in Kelowna and Vernon had the least success in obtaining employment, a pattern potentially related to weak economic trends in the region).

### **“Give us a Job, Not a Cheque”: The Search for Employment**

While Kosovars appreciated the assistance that was provided by the government, some expressed frustration with the method of assistance. “The Government of Canada didn’t need to support us with money, they [should have] support[ed] us to find some kind of ... jobs.”

The biggest demand was for employment placement services. Sponsors, key informants, and Kosovars all identified a need for employment training and job services. Although Kyte and West (2000) identified a similar need among Kosovars in British Columbia, access to health care was a primary concern in that study.<sup>11</sup> Unlike Abu-Laban et al. (1999), who spoke to Kosovar respondents requesting more ESL instruction, and Abu-Laban et al. (2001), who canvassed Kosovars expressing a need for psychological testing, respondents in this study were uniform in their desire for improved employment training and job finding services. The increased focus on employment may well reflect the later stage of settlement (year four in Canada for most respondents), with initial supports already in place.<sup>12</sup>

Participants often expressed a desire for jobs or job placement programs, as the practical, hands-on assistance of job placement programs was seen to be much more beneficial than courses related to resume-writing. Working with employers is an important part of job placement. “We do a lot of work with employers, too ... so, employers in Kamloops are getting a little better ... They have hired some of our clients, and now they actually call us when they have an opening.”

Once again, the preparation of a host city and its employers emerges as crucial to attracting and keeping newcomers. Job finding services need to be flexible and geared to meet the varied skills levels and backgrounds of individuals. A number of Kosovars spoke of the need for expanded job services geared to meeting the needs of refugees and professionals:

I believe that the critical point is WHO is your client or agency? ... People who looked for general labour are different from people who are looking for professional employment ... Government funds are usually oriented towards labour and not towards professional. Or they ... label you: [you] are [a] newcomer, you are an immigrant ... you’re English as second language—so let’s put you with all [the other] immigrants ... It doesn’t mean that if the only common thing we have is immigration, new country. It still can be ... the only similarity between us. We are different ... Canadian newcomers can be considered with more specificity ... In term[s] of the background, education, circumstances under which this newcomer came to Canada, and motives, reasons why they came to Canada.

Employment and job-finding courses have to be tailored to immigrants, but they should also recognize the differing needs of professionals. One service provider related a story about two engineers he had met at a job-search meeting:

One ... would shovel coal ... He liked working with his buddies in the yard. And the other fellow, he was an executive, and he had this persona that he must be a professional, and there was no way that he could change to go take another job that had menial work involved in it. Yet these fellows worked side by side in the same job. They were both professional engineers, but you couldn't find the same jobs for them. One of them was prepared to take any job.

While some people are willing to take any job in order to obtain Canadian experience, others retain their identity as professionals. One Kosovar related how becoming a refugee meant losing her home and country. In being offered a job at Tim Hortons or McDonalds, she was asked to give up the only thing she had left—her identity as a professional.

### CONCLUSION: WILL THEY STAY OR WILL THEY GO?

During the initial resettlement of Kosovars from Macedonia to Canada, a decision was made not to settle Kosovars in Toronto due to the perception that settlement services were saturated by the demands placed on them by the increasing concentration of immigrants and refugees in that region (Ley and Hiebert 2001).

When we decided to come [to Vancouver], we should like to be in Toronto because it's a little bit more near our, uh, Kosovo. And another thing, it's more keep like more industrial place, probably more easy for jobs. And it's more big community with Kosovars, where ... we can adjust more easy.

Although the majority of Kosovars plan to stay in their original host cities, those who intend to move speak of leaving for larger centres in British Columbia, Alberta, and Ontario, echoing the findings of Abu-Laban et al. (1999, 2001). When asked if they would consider leaving Vernon, one said,

Maybe Edmonton or Toronto ... It is a central location, it is closer to go back to Kosovo from Toronto, and there is more work there ... And there is more of our people. They have Albanian clubs, they have Albanian activities, schools, music. Children can go two days a week to Albanian classes.

Toronto, in particular, was identified by participants as being very well-suited to Kosovars, given the perception that it has a more industrial economic base and a larger Albanian-speaking community.

This experiment in regionalizing refugee settlement to smaller centres met with mixed results. On the one hand, Kosovars in Kelowna and Vernon were more likely to talk about moving to larger centres across Canada than were Kosovars settled elsewhere. On the other hand, they liked the communities in which they found themselves, but lacked sufficient employment prospects or family and friends to keep them there (Abu-Laban et al. 1999). With the exception of a number of young,

single women from Surrey who spoke of moving to Toronto and Ottawa to pursue education and careers, the majority of people in the centres in and around the Lower Mainland (including Chilliwack and Abbotsford) were content to stay in British Columbia, whether in the initial host city or by moving to the Lower Mainland. Unlike Abu-Laban et al. (1999), however, none of the respondents spoke of moving because they were dissatisfied with the services being received in the host city. A Kosovar in Vernon lamented that "it's all because of work. Like this, we cannot continue. We must have something. [We are] looking at... [a] bigger city where we can find work, where there are factories or something." Bigger centres like Edmonton, Calgary, Ottawa, and Toronto are believed to offer better paying jobs in industries such as manufacturing that are better suited to the employment experiences and skills of the Kosovars.

The settlement of Kosovars in British Columbia can be regarded as a qualified success. This is borne out by the fact that the vast majority of Kosovars settled in British Columbia communities have stayed. Integration, assessed as language acquisition and employment in Canada, has been mixed within and among host cities. Geographic differences emerge: Kosovars who settled farthest from Greater Vancouver are experiencing the most difficulties in acquiring official language skills and obtaining employment. Kosovars with professional backgrounds in all centres are least likely to settle, particularly those in Kelowna who feel their skills are unsuited to employment demands.

Finding meaningful employment is central to the decision to stay or leave particular centres. For the most part, people are satisfied with their host cities; they appreciate the amenities such as schools, parks, and recreation centres, but without jobs, they cannot fully settle. Larger centres offer a wider range of services and co-ethnic communities. Smaller centres, however, may force immigrants and refugees to integrate faster in a "sink or swim" environment.

Do smaller centers facilitate faster integration? While we certainly heard this argument made, we did not find evidence to support it in this study. Kosovars interviewed in Vernon, for example, experienced significant difficulties in obtaining official language training and employment, while those in Abbotsford met with far more success. Their sponsors aside, Kosovars in all centres talked about friendships being almost exclusively with other Kosovars or other immigrants.

Reflecting on the future of refugee settlement in British Columbia, one service provider noted:

So much of the receptiveness has to do with factors related to our economy, or our job market, media, and the communities they are destined to... I think that [given] the cuts in Provincial income support, welfare, and so forth, I think it's going to be increasingly challenging to retain refugees in British Columbia regardless of which community they are initially settled in... Unless they are able to find work, unless the wait list for ESL classes drops, unless they have the best opportunity and support to attach themselves to the labour market, it is going to impact their success and retention.

These insights reflect the difficulties Kosovars face, particularly in Vernon. If government interest in regionalization continues, research is needed to ensure adequate supports exist to facilitate settlement outside of the large cities where services are concentrated:

[Agencies in smaller centres] did make it through the Kosovar [settlement] ... but they're not ready for an ongoing system ... unless very low numbers [are sent] to those communities. (service provider)

Those who come to Canada as refugees may require services that other immigrants do not need, i.e., trauma and torture-related counselling. Currently, immigrant and refugee-serving agencies in Vancouver are funded to provide these services. Spreading these services across British Columbia would certainly cost more than providing them in one place. Even if communities were willing to accept refugees, structures would need to be in place to assist immigrants, as one service provider articulated:

There might be some communities that would be ready to receive refugees, but I think that there would have to be some more mapping and inventory of capacity within those communities ... to deal with some of the needs that arise ... that are ... currently handled in various degrees within the Lower Mainland ... Also, the provincial government, over the course of the last year and a bit, has cut funding to the ... immigrant serving sector overall so I think that a number of communities have lost their capacity, and continue to lose their capacity, to work with immigrants and refugees.

Assessing the capacity of small- and medium-sized cities to settle immigrants requires a comprehensive approach, including measurement of people's attitudes toward newcomers, specifically refugees, an inventory of immigrant- and refugee-specific services (not all immigrant classes will utilize such services equally), and an evaluation of employment prospects for prospective arrivals. Housing, education, and other considerations would follow. Firm offers of employment and open minds may prove to be the winning combination in making one place more desirable than another, as smaller cities in British Columbia and those like Swift Current seek to attract more people. The success of these municipalities will be measured, not only by their ability to attract immigrants from various backgrounds, but also by their skill in assisting in their transition to becoming full participants in Canadian society, thereby keeping them.

Should government-assisted refugees continue to be "directed" to smaller British Columbia centres? Not without consultation with the immigrant and refugee-serving sector. Specialized services for refugees exist in the Lower Mainland, so assessing whether these are needed by an incoming group of refugees is key before they are settled outside this area. Coordination and consultation with the municipalities and citizen groups in potential host communities are also important: Are there many jobs available? Is the community open to newcomers from other countries? How can these smaller cities make themselves attractive to all immigrants, including refugees?

The idea of regionalization is controversial, partly because it restricts the mobility rights of immigrants upon their arrival in Canada. Refugees as an immigrant class are generally the most vulnerable, least affluent, and easiest to relocate. Because of their

initial reliance on government support, they can be more readily “dispersed” to smaller cities than more affluent immigrants. Without job placements and other social supports to facilitate links with the cities in which they find themselves, however, such experiments remain costly and risky, and the outcomes, dubious.

In 2004, services for immigrants and refugees were put out to tender in a competitive call for proposals. The competition had the effect of eliminating many small organizations that provided services, many of which are located outside of the Lower Mainland. This approach to service delivery favours the largest and most experienced immigrant-serving agencies, most of which are based in Vancouver. For regionalization to work in British Columbia or elsewhere, services for immigrants and refugees will have to be carefully calibrated geographically to correspond to the destinations of immigrants. Official language classes, employment-related language training, and employment-related programs to assist immigrants in getting jobs are disproportionately urban. To apply dispersion policies to immigrants will require applying dispersion policies to services as well, rather than reducing them as is currently the case.

While the idea of encouraging immigrants and refugees to settle outside the CMAs may be appealing as a way to repopulate smaller centres, sending refugees to repopulate low employment cities does not enhance the economic well-being of either party. Government-assisted refugees arrive in Canada with fewer financial resources and educational credentials, on average, than their economic counterparts. They normally do not bring significant investment capital or scarce skill sets with them, yet they are eager to work. Swift Current wants economic investment and population gain, not warm bodies anxious to fill jobs that do not exist.

Regionalization as a federal objective in relation to immigrant settlement must be rethought. For the relatively small numbers of refugees who arrive in British Columbia, the logic of dispersion is questionable. Rather than sending refugees to these smaller cities from the outset or applying punitive measures to other migrants whose status would require them to settle outside of CMAs before gaining permanent residency, a voluntary incentive approach would be more constructive. Options for future family reunification could be offered to families willing to settle outside of the big cities. Provincial governments, in concert with interested municipalities, could offer tax breaks to refugees and other immigrants who were willing to locate in smaller centres. Such an approach respects the mobility rights of immigrants while allowing refugee groups like the Kosovars time to access the key services they need where they exist, and then consider their options.

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*NOTES*

1. Walton-Roberts (2004) notes that the argument that newcomers should be encouraged to settle and remain in smaller centres in order to reduce pressures on Canada's largest cities should be questioned, as it rests on the assumption that newcomers, rather than the settlement context, are at fault. In so doing, the regionalization debate fails to consider why Canadians are leaving smaller centres for larger cities. As Bollman (2000) demonstrates, the Canadian population continues to grow in census divisions where the workforce can access large cities. Alternatively, the argument can be made that if Montreal, Toronto, and Vancouver are experiencing "absorptive capacity" issues, then the logical policy solution is to reduce levels, not regionalization. As smaller centres across Canada deal with the effects of rural depopulation and a changing economy, however, there is increasing recognition that immigrants, particularly business class and skilled workers, can contribute much needed skills and capital to these communities.
2. Of the 7,271 Kosovar refugees accepted for settlement in Canada, 5,051 were accepted for immediate resettlement as part of the Kosovar Refugees Emergency Evacuation (KOS) program, and 2,200 arrived as part of Canada's Kosovo Family Reunion (KOF) program (CRS and CERIS 2001; USCR 2000). Kosovo Family Reunion (or fast track) "refugees either had relatives in Canada or were defined as 'special needs,' highly traumatized individuals who were judged to be in need of immediate resettlement ... [While the KOS or] parasol group was brought to Canada via emergency air lifts and housed at military bases in eastern Canada for several weeks prior to moving to resettlement communities. While they were on the bases, sponsors willing to help the refugees were located ... The refugees then traveled from the base to the communities" (Kyte and West 2000, 2). Although the Kosovars were sponsored under the Joint Assistance Sponsorship Program (JAS), the federal government elected to assume all financial responsibility for a period of two years (Abu-Laban et al. 2001; CIC 1999). Normally, living expenses and medical and dental expenses for government-assisted refugees (GARs) are a provincial responsibility for one year, funded through a cost-sharing agreement with the federal government (Abu-Laban et al. 2001). For the Kosovars, provision was made for up to two years of income support, as well as coverage under the Interim Federal Health Plan (IFHP) (Abu-Laban et al. 2001; CIC 1999).
3. In Kosovo/a, ethnic Albanian Kosovars and Serbians have different names for some places and different spellings for others. These differences speak to different representations and understandings of these places. While this research focuses on people's settlement in Canada, these differing representations of place have implications for this research. When talking to people, the names and spellings employed reinscribe particular histories, understandings, and ways of knowing, and

they ultimately affect the information obtained. During one interview, a Kosovar asserted, "I thought you were saying Kosovo. Kosovo is more Serbian, and Kosova or Kosove is okay." Others, however, felt our use of Kosova was unnecessary as the province is internationally recognized as Kosovo. During the interview process, Kosovars were asked to use whichever name they preferred. We elected to use Kosovo/a so as not to privilege either representation or way of knowing these places.

4. Personal communications with C. Friesen (Vancouver, December 2001) and T. Welsh (Vancouver, January 2002). While it is true that many Vietnamese refugees settled outside of Vancouver in the late 1970s and early 1980s, these groups were privately-sponsored, not government-assisted.
5. It should be noted that there is no Kosovar association in British Columbia to which Kosovars from the 1999 exodus might belong.
6. While we recognize our numbers are not statistically significant, some percentages have been included to provide a general overview of patterns.
7. Within a six-month period of the refugees' arrival, the LSIC surveyed approximately 12,000 of the 164,000 newcomers to Canada (age fifteen and over) who arrived in the period between October 2000 and September 2001 (Statistics Canada 2003b).
8. This finding echoes that of Abu-Laban et al. (2001), who found that 53 percent of those who repatriated reported being unsatisfied with their decision to do so; family and friends remaining in Canada believed many wanted to return to Canada.
9. For the purpose of this research, professional occupations are those that require post-secondary education, including teachers, doctors, nurses, engineers, architects, and people involved in information technology and other hi-tech sectors.
10. According to the 2001 Census, the unemployment rates for the total population fifteen years and over were: Canada, 7.4 percent; British Columbia, 8.5 percent; Chilliwack, 8.3 percent; Abbotsford, 8.2 percent; Surrey, 7.4 percent; Vancouver, 8.3 percent; Burnaby, 8.3 percent; Kelowna, 9.1 percent; and Vernon, 10.7 percent (Statistics Canada 2003c).
11. Kyte and West (2000) prepared a report entitled *Kosovar settlement in British Columbia* in which they present findings based on 195 interviews of the 220 adult Kosovar refugees remaining in British Columbia approximately six months after their arrival, as well as 55 sponsors and 42 key informants. The purpose of this study was to assess how well the Kosovars were establishing themselves; whether funding needed to continue for the full 24 month period; whether the Kosovars required additional services; and whether British Columbia's response to the Kosovar refugees was appropriate, given the possibility of future crises. The report identified several problem areas, including health issues, interpretation, child support, and employment.
12. Recognition that the demand for specific services changes throughout the settlement period may necessitate the creation of a continuum of settlement services that address both initial immigrant-specific services (e.g., emotional counseling, housing, English language instruction) and longer-term, "mainstream" services (e.g., employment and skills recognition). Currently, immigrant and refugee-serving agencies in British Columbia are only funded to provide these services during the first three years of settlement, a period that may not be sufficient to facilitate full integration into Canadian society.

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