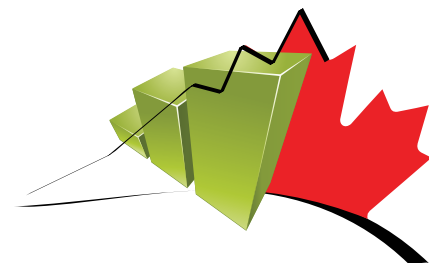**Economic and Social Reports**

Retention of government-assisted refugees in designated destinations: Recent trends and the role of destination characteristics

by Yasmin Gure and Feng Hou

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Abstract

Refugees resettled in Canada as part of the Government-Assisted Refugees (GARs) Program are assigned to designated communities across the country. As the dispersion of refugees across Canada continues to be a key objective of the government's resettlement strategy, it is imperative to understand and identify the factors that may facilitate refugees' retention in their designated community. This study asks if the retention of GARs in their designated destinations has increased since the early 2000s. And if so, to what extent can the change in the retention rate be accounted for by changes in refugees' sociodemographic characteristics and the context of the designated destination, including factors such as the existence of resettlement service agencies, economic conditions, ethnic enclaves and cluster resettlement? The study found that the overall rate of retention among GARs in designated destinations by the end of the first full year after landing has increased considerably from 71% for the 2000 to 2004 cohort to 85% for the 2010 to 2014 and 2015 to 2018 cohorts while it has declined among economic and family class immigrants. The increase in retention rates across GAR cohorts was not a result of changes in their sociodemographic characteristics or the context of their designated destination; rather, the increase in retention rates occurred despite changes in those factors that, on their own, may have contributed to a decline in retention rates. Cross-sectionally, the retention of GARs was strongly associated with the number of GARs resettled in the same community in the same year (cluster resettlement) and the presence of co-ethnic communities. Cities with Resettlement Assistance Program Service Provider Organizations (RAP SPOs) that have been in operation for more than 10 years were associated with high retention rates compared with cities that did not have RAP SPOs.

Keywords: government-assisted refugees, geographic distribution, mobility

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Acknowledgements

Introduction

A key policy objective of Canada's immigration program is to promote a balanced geographic distribution of immigrants and refugees across Canada (IRCC, 2020). This concept of regionalization aims to ensure that the benefits of immigration, including economic growth and ethnocultural diversity, can be shared throughout the country. While Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada (IRCC) continues to invest extensively in various policy tools to help steer the initial settlement of newcomers to medium and small metropolitan areas,[1] the department has a direct role in determining the resettlement destination of refugees. In particular, refugees resettled as part of the Government-Assisted Refugees (GARs) Program are assigned to designated communities across Canada prior to their arrival. Through this program, the specific resettlement needs of GARs are balanced with IRCC's commitment to disperse refugees to cities throughout the country (IRCC, 2011).

The existing literature on the retention and secondary migration of newcomers has focused on immigrants more broadly, with analysis often limited to data at the provincial level. Empirical research that specifically analyzes the retention of refugees and their mobility at the city level is limited (Kaida et al., 2020). This is an important knowledge gap, as analysis on interprovincial mobility cannot capture the migration trends of refugees that may be occurring at a lower geographic level. A more nuanced understanding of secondary migration among refugees is particularly relevant from a policy perspective, as the dispersion of refugees across Canada is a key component of IRCC's overall objective of encouraging a more balanced geographic distribution of newcomers.

This study asks if the retention of GARs in designated destinations[2] has increased since the early 2000s. And if so, to what extent can the change in the retention rate be accounted for by changes in refugees' sociodemographic characteristics and the context of the designated destination, including factors such as the existence of resettlement service agencies, economic conditions, ethnic enclaves and cluster resettlement? Answers to these questions would provide relevant information for the understanding of the factors that may facilitate refugees' retention in their designated community.

Background

The Resettlement Assistance Program

Refugees who are selected abroad for resettlement in Canada are admitted through one of three resettlement streams: GARs, privately sponsored refugees (PSRs) and blended visa office-referred refugees (BVORs). Under the GAR Program, IRCC provides refugees with financial support and

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1. Notable examples of IRCC's recent settlement initiatives include the Atlantic Immigration Pilot and the Rural and Northern Immigration Pilot. The Atlantic Immigration Pilot offers a permanent residence pathway to skilled foreign workers and international graduates from a Canadian institution who want to work and live in one of Canada's four Atlantic provinces. The Atlantic Immigration Pilot Program was replaced with the Atlantic Immigration Program in 2022. The Rural and Northern Immigration Pilot offers a similar pathway to skilled foreign workers who intend to settle in a northern or rural community.
2. In the Longitudinal Immigration Database, this variable is called "intended destination" for immigrants and refugees. For GARs, intended destination is recorded in the landing file prior to arrival. When a client's application for resettlement has been accepted, IRCC's migration office abroad will collaborate with the department's Resettlement Operations Centre in Ottawa to determine where the GAR will be resettled in Canada. These assessments are determined on a variety of factors, such as the presence of family or close friends in Canada, specific settlement services and the availability of housing to accommodate family size.

immediate essential services[3] under the Resettlement Assistance Program (RAP). GARs receive resettlement assistance services within the first four to six weeks of arrival in Canada, with income support being provided for up to one year[4] (IRCC, 2011).

Because of the highly specific needs of GARs, RAP services differ from the federally funded settlement services offered to all newcomers. As such, RAP services are exclusively offered through Resettlement Assistance Program Service Provider Organizations (RAP SPOs), which are located in 23 designated communities across Canada, outside of Quebec[5] (IRCC, 2016a). Prior to their arrival, GARs are "matched" or assigned to resettle in one of the 23 designated communities. The decision about where a GAR may be resettled in Canada is often determined by factors such as whether they have family or friends living in the area; the presence of ethnic, cultural and religious communities; and the availability of specific settlement services. In addition to these considerations, IRCC also determines where to resettle GARs based on discussions with provinces that help inform the department's pre-established annual plans and quotas to resettle refugees across Canada (IRCC, 2016b).

The effectiveness of the destination assignment among GARs depends to a large extent on the match between the preferences articulated by GARs prior to their arrival and where they are assigned to resettle upon landing. In a study of refugees who arrived in 2000 and 2001, Simich et al. (2002) found that over 90% of GARs who changed their destination upon landing at the airport believed that they were not accommodated according to their expressed preferences. Among GARs who moved within the first year of arrival, almost 60% reported that they had stated a preferred destination prior to arrival but were not assigned accordingly. In more recent years, IRCC's evaluation of the GAR Program (IRCC, 2011) was more positive, stating that among GARs who participated in the survey, an estimated 75% were content with their assigned community. This likely indicates that the match between refugees' preferences and their assigned destination may have improved since the early 2000s, and this improvement may increase the retention of refugees in their designated destination.

The effectiveness of the destination assignment of GARs may also be affected by the capacity of RAP SPOs in the designated community. To bolster the efficiency of RAP SPOs, IRCC conducts an annual capacity survey to gather information on the ability of these organizations to provide services to refugees. The results of this annual survey would help to continuously improve matching GARs' preferences with destination communities that can accommodate them.

Factors affecting retention and secondary migration

The ability of a destination city to retain immigrants and refugees can be attributed to a number of factors. One important factor is the size of the destination city. Krahn et al. (2005) found that larger cities have a higher retention rate than small cities. IRCC's evaluation of the GAR Program (IRCC, 2011) also came to a similar conclusion. Specifically, the evaluation found that 30% of GARs who resettled in small communities chose to leave, compared with 14% of those who resettled in large cities. More recently, Kaida et al. (2020) found that the likelihood of GARs undertaking a secondary migration increased when the size of their initial city of settlement decreased.

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3. Essential services include reception services, assistance with temporary and permanent housing, needs assessments and referrals, and information and orientation services.
4. Under exceptional circumstances, resettlement assistance and income support for GARs may be extended up to 24 months after arrival.
5. Under the Canada–Québec Accord, the province of Quebec has exclusive responsibility for the selection of immigrants and refugees destined for the province (with the exception of family reunification and protected persons in Canada), as well as the reception and linguistic and cultural integration of these immigrants. For more information, see the Canada–Québec Accord relating to Immigration and Temporary Admission of Aliens.

The general tendency for immigrants and refugees to prefer larger cities is related to real or perceived economic opportunities (Derwing & Krahn, 2008; Hou, 2007; Hyndman et al., 2006; Newbold, 1996). Sherrell et al. (2005) emphasized that while immigrants and refugees may be encouraged to settle in smaller communities, it is difficult to retain them without suitable employment opportunities. Krahn et al. (2005) observed that among those who chose to leave their initial destination, the most frequently cited reasons for leaving were employment-related. Moreover, these individuals often chose larger cities as their preferred destination to resettle.

Large cities are also where refugees may find existing ethnic communities, a factor frequently cited in the literature as a strong motivation for secondary migration among immigrants (e.g., Hyndman et al., 2006). The role of large ethnic communities can be explained through the group affinity hypothesis that suggests that new immigrants prefer to move to and remain in areas where co-ethnic communities are concentrated (Derwing & Krahn, 2008; Hou, 2007; Nogle, 1994). Simich (2003) argued that refugees have a strong need for community support in their initial period of resettlement. While government support is an integral part of the assistance refugees receive, it can rarely meet all of their support needs. Thus, refugees may be particularly drawn to cities with large co-ethnic communities where they may receive familiar social and emotional support during their resettlement.

To some extent, research suggests social connectedness may play more of a role than economic conditions in the retention of refugees. In the case of PSRs, Kaida et al. (2020) found that unemployment was not significantly associated with leaving the initial destination. PSRs are resettled in communities with their sponsor where they may benefit from increased support in their initial year of arrival, as well as have access to their sponsor's extended social network. Thus, this finding seems to indicate that for PSRs, social supports may supersede poor economic conditions.

Specific to GARs, there are considerable drawbacks if they choose to leave their destination community. For instance, because of limited funds, GARs may be forced to use their RAP income to finance their secondary migration. This leads to subsequent challenges in being able to afford accommodations and other necessities in their new city. Additionally, if GARs were receiving RAP services in their assigned community, they are no longer eligible to receive them when they move to a new city. IRCC's evaluation (IRCC, 2016a) of the resettlement program noted that this rule meant that many GARs who left their destination community were unable to navigate resettlement in their new city.

This study seeks to build on the existing literature by further analyzing the retention and secondary migration patterns of GARs. Specifically, this study focuses on the recent trend and the effect of contextual factors in the retention of GARs in their designated destinations. This study makes several contributions to the literature.

First, this study is among the first to analyze the retention and secondary migration of refugees using census metropolitan areas (CMAs) and census agglomerations (CAs) as the geographic unit of analysis. This study follows the methodology employed by Kaida et al. (2020), who constructed consistent CMA and CA boundaries using data from the Longitudinal Immigration Database (IMDB).

Second, through the use of the IMDB, this study is able to identify refugees at the admission category level. This study compares the retention and secondary migration trends among GARs, PSRs, and economic and family class immigrants.

Lastly, this study examines how the individual sociodemographic characteristics of refugees and the contextual factors of the designated destination, such as economic conditions, presence of ethnic communities, cluster resettlement and resettlement services, are associated with the trend in refugee retention and secondary migration. In particular, this is the first Canadian study that uses the measures of cluster resettlement and resettlement services in analyzing refugee retention.

Data, measures and methods

Data

This study used the IMDB, which combines the landing records and annual tax information of immigrants (Statistics Canada, 2020). Immigrants who have filed at least one tax return since 1982 are included in the database. The landing records contain immigrant characteristics at the time of landing, such as intended destination,[6] admission category (e.g., economic class, family class or refugee), age, education, marital status, source country and official language capabilities. Tax records provide information on annual income, current marital status and place of residence. The IMDB data in this study cover landing information up to 2020 and tax information up to 2019.

The analysis focused on 76,500 GARs who were aged 20 to 54 at the time of immigration and arrived in Canada between 2000 and 2018. The choice of the age range is partly based on the pattern of filing income tax returns. Refugees (and immigrants in general) who arrived as children or seniors tend to have a low rate of filing income tax. Since retention is measured by comparing the intended destination of an individual with the place of residence reported on their income tax return form, the retention status cannot be determined for those who did not file income tax. Furthermore, in the analysis of factors affecting retention, some of those factors do not apply to children (e.g., level of education and employment status). GARs who were aged 20 to 54 at the time of immigration accounted for about 47% of all GARs who arrived during the study period. Descriptive analysis showed that the distribution of intended destinations among GARs who were aged 20 to 54 closely resembled that of all GARs (Appendix Table 1). Since children generally live with their parents, and many senior immigrants and refugees reside with their adult children, it is reasonable to expect the retention pattern observed among GARs who were aged 20 to 54 at the time of immigration to generally apply to all GARs.

Measures

CMAs and CAs were used as the geographic units to measure refugees' intended destinations and subsequent mobility. A CMA or CA consists of one or more adjacent municipalities that are situated around an urban core and have a strong economic connection with the urban core as measured by commuting flows. Some CMA or CA boundaries may change from one census to another, and this change may pose a challenge when using CMAs and CAs to study mobility. In the Immigrant Landing File, the intended destinations are coded following the most recent census boundaries, but the tax file uses concurrent census boundaries for place of residence at the end of a tax year. For instance, for refugees who landed in 2010, their intended destinations are coded with the 2016 Census boundaries in the 2020 version of the IMDB, but their places of residence in the tax file are coded with the 2006 Census boundaries in 2010 and with the 2011 Census boundaries in 2011 to 2016. Such inconsistencies in CMA or CA boundaries between the Immigrant Landing File and the tax file may result in the misclassification of refugees' retention status. To overcome this problem, this study created consistent CMA and CA boundaries in the tax file using 2016 Census boundaries as the base.[7]

The main outcome variable in this study was the retention in the intended destination.[8] For GARs, intended destinations are generally the communities to which they were assigned when they first arrived in Canada. Such an assignment is often based on the match between GARs' characteristics and available resources in a community (settlement supports, family and ethnic community) that would best facilitate

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6. For GARs, this is their designated destination. See footnote 2 for details. For the rest of this article, "intended" and "designated" destinations are used interchangeably.
7. This is based on a longitudinal conversion file created by the Social Analysis and Modelling Division, Statistics Canada.
8. It is possible that some GARs may not settle initially in their intended destination. In that case, they are counted as part of the GARs who are not retained in the intended destination.

GARs' socioeconomic integration. As will be shown, retention in the intended destination among refugees and immigrants decreased the most in the first year after their arrival. After the first year, the decline in the retention rate tended to be small and gradual. Therefore, this study focused on the retention status by the end of the first full year after landing. The retention status was determined by comparing a refugee's intended destination with the CMA or CA where the refugee resided at the end of the calendar year of their arrival (hereafter the "landing year"), if they filed an income tax return in that year. For those who did not file income tax in the year of arrival but filed in the following year, the retention status is measured based on the CMA or CA where refugees resided in the year after the landing year. In the study sample, about 97% of refugees who filed an income tax return for the year after the landing year also did so in the landing year. Therefore, for the majority of the sample, the place of residence used to compare with the intended destination was that recorded in the landing year.

In the multivariate analysis, the focal independent variable was the refugee arrival cohorts, coded in four periods: 2000 to 2004, 2005 to 2009, 2010 to 2014 and 2015 to 2018. There were three sets of explanatory variables that could possibly affect the likelihood of a refugee staying in the intended destination and the change in the retention pattern across arrival cohorts.

The first set was the size of the intended destinations, coded into six groups: the three gateway cities of Toronto, Montréal and Vancouver; medium-sized CMAs with populations over 500,000 (Ottawa, Calgary, Edmonton, Hamilton, Winnipeg and Québec); small CMAs with populations between 100,000 and 500,000 (e.g., Victoria, Saskatoon and Halifax); and small urban areas (CAs). Refugees who initially settled in rural areas were excluded because it is difficult to create consistent boundaries for scattered rural areas. As evidenced in Table 1, very few refugees initially settled in rural areas.

The second set of explanatory variables included individual-level sociodemographic characteristics: age at the time of landing, gender, marital status, number of children, source region, language at the time of landing, level of education at the time of landing, employment status after landing and school attendance after landing. The source region was coded into nine categories: South America, Southern Europe, Eastern Europe, Africa, Southern Asia, Southeast Asia, East Asia, West Asia or others. Language skills were based on the combination of mother tongue and self-reported knowledge of official languages at the time of landing: English mother tongue, French mother tongue, other mother tongue but spoke English, other mother tongue but spoke French, other mother tongue but spoke English and French, or did not speak English or French. The education variable was coded in four categories: less than high school, high school graduation, some postsecondary education, or bachelor's degree or higher. Employment status was coded as employed (had at least $500 in employment income in the landing year or the year after) versus others. The school attendance variable was coded as 1 if an immigrant attended full-time postsecondary education in the last tax year or as 0 if otherwise.[9]

The third set of explanatory variables was used to measure the context of the intended destinations: the presence of RAP SPOs,[10] the economic conditions, ethnic enclave and cluster resettlement. The RAP SPOs variable was coded in four categories: none, 1 to 5 years in operation, 6 to 10 years in operation or over 10 years in operation. The years in operation were based on the difference between the year a RAP SPO centre was first established and the year when a refugee first arrived in Canada.[11] This variable was used to capture the effects of not just the existence of RAP SPOs but also their cumulated experience, established network and proven capacity as proxied by years in operation.[12] Local economic

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9. This variable was derived from the tax deduction for education in a tax year.
10. This information was provided by IRCC.
11. For instance, an RAP SPO centre established in 2005 would be one year in operation for GARs who arrived in 2007 and five years in operation for GARs who arrived in 2010.
12. RAP SPOs are selected and receive funding based on the strength of their applications in a competitive call-for-proposals process that typically happens every three years. Regardless of the number of years of operation, it is required that all RAP SPOs prove that they possess the ability and capacity to serve GARs in their applications.

conditions were proxied by the percentage of adults (aged 18 to 64) with annual earnings over $500 (i.e., employment incidence in a year) among the Canadian-born population and long-term immigrants (immigrants who arrived in Canada more than 20 years earlier).[13] This variable was included to examine whether the retention rate is higher in local labour markets with more job opportunities.[14]

The ethnic enclave was measured by the percentage of immigrants from the same origin region in the CMAs or CAs where a refugee was assigned to settle.[15] This variable was used to test whether the presence of existing own-ethnic communities is associated with a higher retention of refugees in the intended destination. The cluster resettlement was measured by the number of GARs who arrived at the same intended destination in the same year. Different from ethnic enclave, which is about pre-existing own-ethnic communities, cluster resettlement was used to capture social connections originating from close ties to family and relatives, a shared refugee experience, and common resettlement challenges and opportunities among refugees who arrived in the same community in the same year. In the multivariate analysis, the logarithm transformation of this variable was strongly associated with the retention of refugees in the intended destination, while its original form was not statistically significant.

Methods

The analysis started with descriptive tables showing the distribution of intended destinations and how the distribution changed across arrival cohorts for GARs aged 20 to 54 at the time of landing and, as a comparison, for PSRs and immigrants in the economic and family classes. Descriptive statistics were further produced to show the mobility status of GARs by the end of the first full year after landing and the rate of retention in the intended destination for up to 10 years after arrival.

In multivariate analyses, linear probability models[16] were used to examine changes in retention by cohort in the intended destination and the effects of the selected explanatory variables, particularly contextual variables. Three sequential models were estimated. Model 1 included only arrival cohorts; the coefficients of the cohort variable reflect the observed change in retention in intended destinations. Model 2 added the size categories of the intended destinations and individual-level covariates. The changes in the coefficients of the cohort variable from Model 1 to Model 2 reflect the extent to which the observed change in retention can be accounted for by the differences across arrival cohorts in the distribution of initial destinations and individual-level covariates. Model 3 added community-level contextual variables. The changes in the coefficients of the cohort variable from Model 2 to Model 3

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13. This variable is derived from the linkage between the T1 Family File and the Immigrant Landing File.
14. This study also considered two additional measures of local economic conditions: the percentage of adults whose family received social assistance income and the percentage of those who received employment insurance benefits in a tax year among Canadian-born and long-term immigrant workers. When these two additional variables were added to Model 3 in Table 5 or were used to replace the employment incidence measure, they were not significantly associated with the likelihood of staying in the initial destination, and their inclusion had little impact on the coefficients of other variables in the model. Arguably, none of these measures provide an ideal estimate of job opportunities. Consequently, it is possible that the CMA and CA indicator variables could partially pick up the impact of local economic conditions to the extent that these proxies are correlated with the six areas crystallized in the CMA and CA variables.
15. This is derived from the linkage between the T1 Family File and the Immigrant Landing File. Immigrants identified in the linkage file are grouped into 13 source regions: the United States, Central America, the Caribbean, South America, Northern and Western Europe, Southern Europe, Eastern Europe, Africa, Southern Asia, Southeast Asia, East Asia, West Asia, and others. The percentage of immigrants from each source region in the total CMA and CA population is used as the measure of ethnic enclave and is assigned to GARs from the same source region. A similar measure of ethnic enclave has been used in previous Canadian studies (e.g., Hou et al., 2018).
16. Since the outcome variable is dichotomous, logistic regression models were also estimated with the same covariates. The results were the same in terms of the sign and the statistical significance of explanatory variables. The results from linear probability models are presented here as the coefficients can be straightforwardly compared across models, while it is not appropriate to compare coefficients across non-linear models (Mood, 2010). While Kaida et al. (2020) used a discrete-time event history model to examine retention over many years after immigration, this study focuses on retention in the first full year after immigration, as this is the period when most out-migration occurs among GARs, as will be discussed in the results section.

would indicate the possible effects of changes in the context of initial destinations on the observed cohort differences. Model 3 is multi-level, with individual- and community-level variables. Because dependency among observations within a community (CMA or CA) can underestimate standard errors of regression coefficients, robust variance estimation was used to mitigate possible bias (Steenbergen & Jones, 2002).

Recent changes in retention in intended destinations among government-assisted refugees

Table 1 presents the distribution of GARs, PSRs, and economic and family immigrants aged 20 to 54 at the time of immigration across the size categories of intended destinations.[17]

Unlike economic and family class immigrants, the majority of GARs were intended to settle outside the three gateway centres. For instance, in the 2000 to 2004 landing cohort, 66% of GARs were intended to settle outside the three gateway centres, compared with 57% of PSRs, 20% of economic immigrants and 30% of family immigrants. The share of GARs intended to settle outside the gateway centres remained stable among the 2005 to 2009 and the 2010 to 2014 cohorts but increased to 73% among the 2015 to 2018 arrivals. The share of economic and family class immigrants who intended to settle outside gateway centres also increased across successive cohorts but remained much lower than the corresponding share of GARs in the 2015 to 2018 cohort.

Among GARs intended to settle in non-gateway centres, the majority (85%) went to medium-sized and small CMAs. The share of those intended for small CMAs was slightly smaller than the share of those intended for medium-sized CMAs, particularly among the 2015 to 2018 arrivals. This pattern was different from those for PSRs and economic and family class immigrants, who were primarily attracted to medium-sized CMAs. For each of the four arrival cohorts, less than 0.6% of GARs were intended to settle in rural areas, compared with 2% to 4% of economic and family class immigrants.

The above patterns of distribution among prime-aged refugees and immigrants were generally the same for the population as a whole in each group (Appendix Table 1).

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17. To reduce the number of comparisons, this study did not examine the geographic distribution and retention of BVORs and in-Canada asylum claimants. The annual number of BVORs was generally small in the study period—a few hundred in 2014 and 2015, 4,400 in 2016 and around 1,000 from 2017 to 2019. Since they already lived in Canada, asylum claimants are very different from GARs and PSRs in their initial distribution and retention (Kaida et al., 2020).

Table 1
Distribution of intended destinations of immigrants aged 20 to 54 at admission by admission class, 2000 to 2018 arrivals

	Government-assisted refugees	Privately sponsored refugees	Economic class	Family class
		number		
Population counts	76,500	71,000	2,006,600	863,900
		percent		
2000 to 2004 arrivals				
Montréal	6.8	4.8	16.0	11.8
Toronto	16.3	32.4	48.5	43.8
Vancouver	10.8	6.1	15.2	14.3
Medium-sized census metropolitan areas	30.6	39.7	12.1	14.0
Small census metropolitan areas	25.8	14.4	5.5	9.3
Small urban areas	9.2	1.7	1.3	3.4
Rural areas	0.6	1.1	1.5	3.4
2005 to 2009 arrivals				
Montréal	6.8	3.8	19.3	12.6
Toronto	16.2	29.0	34.0	40.2
Vancouver	11.7	6.4	16.3	14.4
Medium-sized census metropolitan areas	30.7	40.2	16.0	15.5
Small census metropolitan areas	24.2	17.4	8.0	9.6
Small urban areas	10.2	2.4	3.7	4.0
Rural areas	0.2	0.8	2.7	3.8
2010 to 2014 arrivals				
Montréal	5.2	4.9	20.8	14.4
Toronto	17.9	29.9	26.4	35.1
Vancouver	11.1	7.4	12.1	12.9
Medium-sized census metropolitan areas	30.9	39.6	21.6	18.7
Small census metropolitan areas	24.7	14.8	9.5	9.7
Small urban areas	9.9	2.4	5.8	4.9
Rural areas	0.3	1.0	3.7	4.4
2015 to 2018 arrivals				
Montréal	4.0	19.9	15.4	12.8
Toronto	13.9	26.6	29.8	32.4
Vancouver	9.5	5.1	11.5	12.9
Medium-sized census metropolitan areas	30.9	31.1	21.0	21.4
Small census metropolitan areas	30.8	13.8	11.3	10.6
Small urban areas	10.9	2.3	6.8	5.7
Rural areas	0.1	1.3	4.3	4.2

Source: 2020 Longitudinal Immigration Database.

Table 2 presents the tax filing status and the rate of retention in the intended destination among GARs, PSRs, and economic and family class immigrants who were aged 20 to 54 at the time of landing and filed an income tax return by the end of their first full year after landing (as discussed, mobility status can be determined only among tax filers).

About 97% of prime-aged GARs filed an income tax return for the landing year or the first full year after the landing year for all the selected cohorts (Table 2). The tax-filing rates of GARs were similar to the rates of PSRs but much higher than those of economic and family class immigrants. In particular, the overall tax-filing rates among economic immigrants ranged from 83% to 90%, depending on arrival cohorts. Previous studies show that among prime-aged individuals who did not file income tax in the initial years after arrival, some remained in Canada and would file income tax in later years, but most might have left Canada. Economic immigrants tended to have a higher emigration rate than refugees (Aydemir & Robinson, 2008). Note that when the population of all ages at the time of landing was considered, tax-filing rates were much lower than those of prime-aged arrivals, and GARs had lower rates than the other three groups of refugees and immigrants (Appendix Table 2). This highlights the importance of restricting the examination of retention and mobility to prime-aged individuals.

Among prime-aged individuals who filed income tax for the landing year or the first full year after landing, there were several salient patterns in the rate of retention in intended destinations among GARs relative to PSRs and immigrants.

First, the overall retention rate among GARs increased considerably from 71% for the 2000 to 2004 cohort to 79% for the 2005 to 2009 cohort and further to about 85% for the 2010 to 2014 and 2015 to 2018 cohorts. In comparison, the overall retention rate among PSRs rose only marginally from 74% for the 2000 to 2004 cohort to 76% for the 2015 to 2018 cohort and decreased among economic and family class immigrants.

Second, the retention rate among GARs was not related to the size of the intended destination but was generally lower in smaller destinations among PSRs and economic and family class immigrants. The retention rate of GARs tended to be highest in Vancouver and medium-sized CMAs, followed by small CMAs, with Montréal having the lowest rates for most arrival cohorts. In comparison, economic and family immigrants had the lowest retention rates in small urban centres and the highest retention rates in the three gateway centres (except for Montréal, which had a lower retention rate than medium-sized CMAs for economic immigrants who arrived in the 2010s).

Third, as their retention rates increased across successive cohorts, GARs had higher retention rates than PSRs and the two immigrant groups in small CMAs and small urban areas among those who arrived in the 2010s. GARs who arrived in the 2010s also had a higher retention rate in medium-sized CMAs than PSRs and economic immigrants. High retention rates in non-gateway areas are pertinent to the geographic balance of immigrant distribution.

Table 2
Rates of filing income tax and retention in intended destinations by the end of the first full year after admission among immigrants aged 20 to 54 at admission by immigration class, 2000 to 2018 arrivals

Intended destination	Government-assisted refugees		Privately sponsored refugees		Economic class		Family class	
	Tax filing rate	Retention among tax filers	Tax filing rate	Retention among tax filers	Tax filing rate	Retention among tax filers	Tax filing rate	Retention among tax filers
	percent							
2000 to 2004 arrivals								
All intended destinations	97.5	71.2	95.4	73.7	86.7	80.3	90.9	89.9
Montréal	98.1	62.2	96.1	84.7	89.7	84.3	93.2	93.8
Toronto	97.3	63.6	95.9	78.6	86.1	84.0	90.6	95.0
Vancouver	97.2	84.9	96.1	84.4	84.2	81.1	91.8	92.8
Medium-sized census metropolitan areas	97.0	77.4	95.2	71.0	89.0	73.6	90.6	89.5
Small census metropolitan areas	97.9	68.4	94.7	66.5	84.4	66.6	89.2	82.8
Small urban areas	98.1	65.7	95.5	65.5	89.5	59.7	90.6	72.2
2005 to 2009 arrivals								
All intended destinations	97.8	79.3	96.4	73.8	83.2	85.4	92.4	90.6
Montréal	98.1	70.4	96.8	75.9	86.8	88.2	94.3	94.4
Toronto	97.7	72.3	96.6	83.5	79.9	89.9	92.0	95.3
Vancouver	97.3	90.4	97.4	83.4	79.3	91.1	92.8	94.1
Medium-sized census metropolitan areas	97.6	86.8	96.4	67.4	87.8	85.4	92.5	90.8
Small census metropolitan areas	98.3	73.0	96.1	71.5	83.6	74.3	91.5	85.0
Small urban areas	97.6	77.5	94.6	67.5	90.0	69.0	91.9	76.7
2010 to 2014 arrivals								
All intended destinations	96.8	85.4	97.0	74.6	87.5	82.7	92.6	89.8
Montréal	96.8	80.8	96.4	82.5	86.7	81.7	94.6	95.1
Toronto	96.2	83.5	96.8	83.3	83.5	89.1	92.1	95.0
Vancouver	97.3	91.3	98.1	85.0	84.5	89.2	92.0	94.3
Medium-sized census metropolitan areas	96.3	88.1	97.0	66.1	91.1	87.1	92.9	90.6
Small census metropolitan areas	97.9	84.7	97.1	76.6	90.2	75.8	91.7	83.8
Small urban areas	96.3	80.2	94.7	67.3	93.4	70.0	92.6	75.6
2015 to 2018 arrivals								
All intended destinations	98.3	84.8	97.9	76.0	90.4	77.1	93.5	88.3
Montréal	99.1	69.1	98.1	83.6	88.5	73.9	95.6	94.1
Toronto	98.3	87.1	97.8	81.2	87.6	86.1	92.9	93.2
Vancouver	97.9	90.3	97.9	83.3	90.3	86.1	92.1	93.2
Medium-sized census metropolitan areas	98.2	88.8	98.0	67.8	92.9	79.0	94.0	88.3
Small census metropolitan areas	98.2	83.9	97.9	76.1	91.2	66.1	93.0	81.7
Small urban areas	98.5	74.2	97.4	66.1	94.4	64.2	94.1	72.9

Source: 2020 Longitudinal Immigration Database.

An important question related to the retention of refugees or immigrants in their intended destinations is, where did they move to when they left their intended destinations? Did the majority of them move to gateway centres or did the majority of them move to other areas outside gateway centres? To answer this question, Table 3 presents the cross-tabulation of intended destinations and new destinations for refugees and immigrants who left their intended destinations by the end of the first year after their landing year.

The results show that when GARs left their intended destination, the majority moved to a location outside the three gateway centres. Specifically, 93% of GARs who moved from Toronto moved to a non-gateway location. The corresponding rates for GARs who moved from Montréal and Vancouver were 84% and 77%, respectively. The rates of staying out of gateway centres were lower for GARs who moved from non-gateway locations, ranging from 65% to 72%, but these rates were much higher than the corresponding rates for economic and family immigrants. For instance, among economic immigrants who moved from medium-sized and small CMAs, 40% to 47% stayed outside gateway centres.

One possible reason why GARs who moved were more likely to stay outside gateway centres than economic and family immigrants could be that GARs might tend to move to a city with RAP SPOs, and these are mostly located in medium-sized or small CMAs (although Toronto and Vancouver have had RAP SPOs since 1999).[18] For instance, about 93% of GARs who moved from Toronto moved to a location with RAP SPOs. The corresponding rates for those who moved from Vancouver, medium-sized CMAs and small CMAs were 78%, 83% and 69%, respectively. The number of medium-sized or small CMAs with RAP SPOs in a province could also be a reason why a much higher share of GARs who moved from Toronto stayed away from gateway centres than their counterparts from Vancouver. In Ontario, there were 10 medium-sized or small CMAs with RAP SPOs, many of which have been in operation for several years. In comparison, there have been only two small CMAs with RAP SPOs in British Columbia since 2016.

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18 Because the province of Quebec manages its own refugee settlement services, RAP SPO information is not available for CMAs and CA in Quebec in this study.

Table 3
Distribution of new destinations among refugees and immigrants aged 20 to 54 at admission and who left their intended destination by the size of intended destinations

Intended destinations	New destinations							
	Montréal	**Toronto**	**Vancouver**	**Medium-sized census metropolitan areas**	**Small census metropolitan areas**	**Small urban areas**	**Rural areas**	**Total**
	percent							
Government-assisted refugees								
Montréal	…	13.5	2.6	39.7	21.4	21.7	1.1	100
Toronto	1.2	…	5.9	47.4	40.3	4.9	0.3	100
Vancouver	2.4	20.4	…	36.6	24.2	15.5	0.8	100
Medium-sized census metropolitan areas	7.3	21.1	6.7	28.4	20.7	14.6	1.3	100
Small census metropolitan areas	5.9	24.2	5.3	36.0	17.4	9.9	1.3	100
Small urban areas	12.2	11.1	5.0	36.5	21.4	12.5	1.2	100
Privately sponsored refugees								
Montréal	…	38.9	3.2	32.6	21.2	2.8	1.4	100
Toronto	8.0	…	3.6	36.0	45.5	6.0	1.0	100
Vancouver	2.0	31.3	…	27.5	25.1	12.5	1.7	100
Medium-sized census metropolitan areas	3.8	15.7	3.7	37.9	14.5	22.7	1.8	100
Small census metropolitan areas	16.0	31.2	3.1	21.0	19.5	8.1	1.2	100
Small urban areas	6.4	10.9	8.4	43.1	17.7	9.8	3.7	100
Economic immigrants								
Montréal	…	38.4	20.2	25.4	9.0	4.4	2.7	100
Toronto	14.6	…	19.1	32.7	26.3	5.1	2.3	100
Vancouver	7.3	45.3	…	22.1	14.7	6.8	3.8	100
Medium-sized census metropolitan areas	13.8	33.7	12.3	17.1	8.7	9.1	5.4	100
Small census metropolitan areas	7.5	37.3	12.0	17.1	13.8	7.4	5.0	100
Small urban areas	5.6	18.5	14.6	25.4	14.3	9.8	11.9	100
Family immigrants								
Montréal	…	28.9	6.6	31.2	11.8	10.4	11.2	100
Toronto	6.8	…	11.7	30.8	37.3	8.2	5.2	100
Vancouver	3.7	26.4	…	24.3	24.3	13.3	8.1	100
Medium-sized census metropolitan areas	8.4	26.5	10.5	18.3	12.1	13.0	11.2	100
Small census metropolitan areas	4.4	32.5	13.7	16.7	12.6	10.1	10.1	100
Small urban areas	7.9	9.5	10.2	21.5	14.6	12.8	23.5	100

… not applicable

Note: New destinations are the locations of residence at the end of the landing year among those who filed income tax in the landing year or the locations of residence at the end of the first full year after landing among those who did not file income tax in the landing year.

Source: 2020 Longitudinal Immigration Database.

The results so far show that 15% to 30% of GARs left their intended destinations by the end of the first full year after the landing year. This observation raises an important question about whether GARs would continue to move away from intended destinations at a similar pace in subsequent years. If this is the case, efforts that are aimed at retaining GARs in their intended destination would need to be sustained for several years. Conversely, if the high mobility was limited to the first year, efforts of retention could be confined to improving the initial settlement experiences.

To answer the above question, Chart 1 plots the proportion of GARs who were aged 20 to 54 at the time of admission, who arrived between 2000 and 2009, and for whom 10 years of mobility history was observed in their intended destinations by size of the intended destination and the number of years since

landing. The chart shows that regardless of the size of the intended destination, the majority of out-migration occurred in the landing year (zero years since immigration) and the year after the landing year (one year since immigration). For instance, among GARs intended for medium-sized CMAs, 24% left by the end of the year after the landing year, but it took the subsequent nine years for another 11% to leave. For those who were assigned to small urban areas, where the lowest long-term retention rate was observed, 37% of GARs left by the end of the year after the landing year, and it took the subsequent nine years for another 24% to leave.[19]

These results suggest that the period from landing to the end of the year after the landing year is the most critical in terms of understanding the retention of GARs in their intended destinations. Accordingly, the following multivariate analyses focus on retention in this initial period.

Chart 1
Percentage staying in intended destination by size of intended destination and years since immigration, government-assisted refugees aged 20 to 54 at admission who arrived between 2000 and 2009
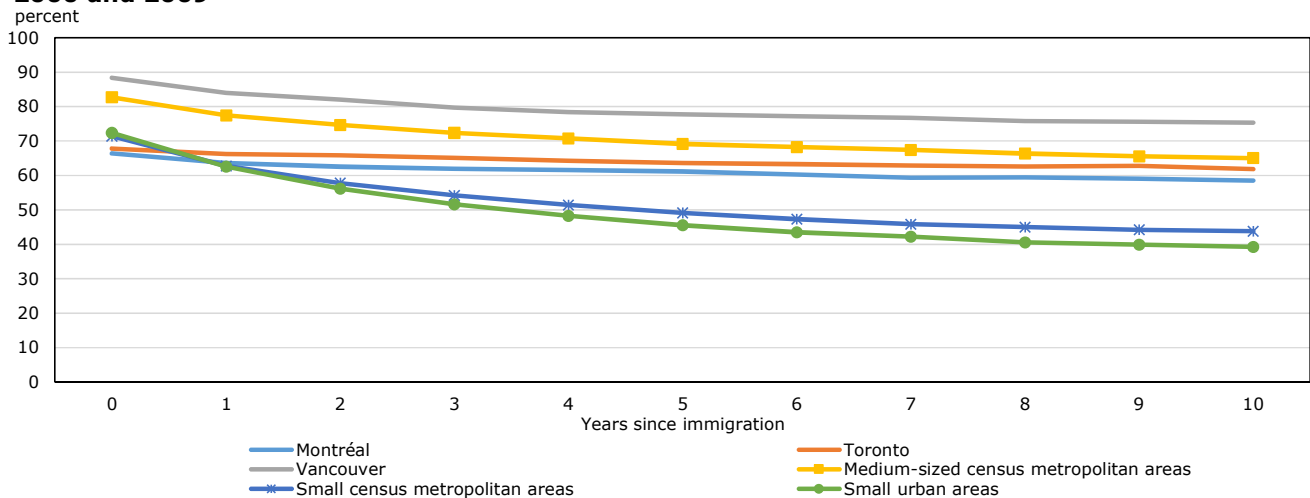
Source: 2020 Longitudinal Immigration Database.

Results of multivariate analyses

This section first examines whether differences in sociodemographic characteristics and the context of intended destinations can account for some of the observed increase in retention rates across arrival cohorts of GARs. This is followed by analyses of the associations between the context of intended destinations and the retention of GARs.

Table 4 presents the sociodemographic characteristics and the context of the intended destinations for four arrival cohorts of GARs. One clear change across successive cohorts was the decrease in the level of education.[20] The share of those with less than a high school education increased from 66% among the

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19. The overall rate of retention in small urban areas as the intended destination by the 10th year after landing was 39% for adult GARs. This rate was higher than the rate of PSRs (33%), similar to the rate of economic immigrants (40%), but lower than the rate of family class immigrants (48%).

20. There are data quality issues with the education variable because of changes in the reporting pattern in the Immigrant Landing File for immigrants who have landed since 2011. The IMDB imputed this variable for some observations for 2011 to 2018 arrivals (Statistics Canada, 2020). The imputation works well up to 2015, but a large proportion of missing values remains for adult immigrants who have arrived since 2016. For example, about 16% of adult economic immigrants who were aged 20 to 64 at the time of landing and who landed in 2018 had a missing value in the imputed variable. Among adult GARs included in this study, about 2.8% in the 2015 to 2018 cohort had missing education. They were assigned as a high-school

2000 to 2004 cohort to 83% among the 2015 to 2018 cohort, and the share of those with a university degree decreased from 13% to 6%. Another clear trend was the decrease in the share of GARs who were employed (with at least $500 earnings in a tax year) in the landing year or in the year after the landing year, from 17% for the 2000 to 2004 cohort to 10% for the 2015 to 2018 cohort. Both changes are consistent with the shift in refugee selection criteria from adaptability to vulnerability (Kaida et al., 2021). The source region composition of GARs varied considerably and became more concentrated across arrival cohorts. In the 2000 to 2004 cohort, West Asia, Africa, Eastern Europe and South America were the four major regions, accounting for 93% of the cohort population. In the 2005 to 2009 cohort, Southeast Asia replaced Eastern Europe as one of the four top source regions. In the 2010 to 2014 cohort, West Asia, Africa and South Asia accounted for 91% of GARs. Among the 2015 to 2018 arrivals, 67% came from West Asia (mostly Syria) and 27% came from Africa.

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graduate if their mother tongue was not English or French (2%) and as having some postsecondary education if their mother tongue was English or French (0.8%).

Table 4

Sociodemographic characteristics and the context of intended destinations among government-assisted refugees aged 20 to 54 at landing and who filed tax by the end of the first full year after landing, by arrival cohort

	2000 to 2004	2005 to 2009	2010 to 2014	2015 to 2018
		number		
Age at landing	32.9	32.9	33.4	33.7
Number of kids	1.6	1.7	1.7	2.6
Log of number of GARs arrived in the same year	8.3	7.8	7.2	6.6
		percent		
Female	47.9	51.3	52.3	50.3
Employed after landing	17.1	14.9	10.4	9.6
Employment incidence among adults aged 18 to 64	82.7	83.7	82.9	83.0
Percentage of own-group immigrants in the region	1.2	1.7	2.2	2.4
Marital status				
Single	31.5	31.9	35.0	24.2
Separated, divorced or widowed	6.2	8.6	8.3	5.0
Married	62.3	59.5	56.7	70.7
Source region				
Other world regions	4.7	0.7	1.0	0.5
South America	13.5	19.9	3.7	1.7
Eastern Europe	16.6	1.6	0.2	0.2
Africa	29.5	31.8	30.6	26.7
South Asia	0.7	3.7	17.5	2.3
Southeast Asia	1.7	11.4	4.1	1.4
West Asia	33.4	30.9	43.0	67.3
Official language				
Not speaking English or French	66.3	70.1	64.6	78.4
Other mother tongue, bilingual	4.4	3.6	2.2	0.9
Other mother tongue, French	4.4	4.8	4.2	2.2
Other mother tongue, English	23.5	19.1	24.4	14.1
Mother tongue French or English	1.4	2.4	4.7	4.4
Education at landing				
Less than high school	65.8	74.1	80.7	83.2
High school graduation	15.6	10.0	7.4	8.1
Some postsecondary education	6.1	5.7	3.6	2.9
University degree	12.5	10.1	8.3	5.7
RAP SPOs				
None	27.6	25.9	19.6	13.6
1 to 5 years in operation	61.7	1.3	2.8	4.6
6 to 10 years in operation	10.7	59.9	1.5	4.4
Over 10 years in operation	…	12.9	76.1	77.3

… not applicable

Note: RAP SPO refers to Resettlement Assistance Program Service Provider Organization and GARs referes to Government-Assisted Refugee.

Source: 2020 Longitudinal Immigration Database.

The changes in contextual variables show a gradual increase in the size of ethnic enclave (percentage of own-group immigrants in the region), reduced cluster resettlement (log of number of GARs who arrived in the same year) and more established RAP SPOs. The share of own-group immigrants in the CMA or CA's population (as a measure of ethnic enclave) increased on average from 1.2% for the 2000 to 2004

cohort to 2.4% for the 2015 to 2018 cohort, reflecting the growing size of immigrant populations from regions where refugees originated. The log of the number of GARs who arrived in the same community in the same year decreased across arrival cohorts. This decrease was a result of the decline in the number of GARs admitted annually from 10,700 in 2000 to fewer than 6,000 in 2012 and 2013 and 7,600 in 2014. The number of GARs increased considerably from 2015 to 2018, particularly in 2016 (23,600), when a large wave of Syrian refugees arrived. However, GARs in this period were much more likely to be assigned to small and medium-sized CMAs, where, each year, the average number of GARs was much smaller than the number in each gateway centre.

The majority (over 76%) of GARs who arrived in the 2010s were assigned to cities with RAP SPOs that had been in operation for over 10 years, while 62% of the 2000 to 2004 arrivals were resettled in cities with RAP SPOs that had been in operation for 1 to 5 years.[21] Across successive cohorts, the share of GARs who were destined to CMAs or CAs without RAP SPOs decreased from 28% to 14% as more cities established RAP SPOs.

To what extent were the above changes in GARs' sociodemographic characteristics and the context of the intended destinations associated with the observed trend in the rate of retention in intended destinations? This question is addressed by multivariate models in Table 5.

Model 1 in Table 5 replicated the observed cohort differences in the retention rate as in Table 2. The observed retention rate increased by 7.9 percentage points from the 2000 to 2004 cohort to the 2005 to 2009 cohort, and increased another 6.2 percentage points for the 2010 to 2014 cohort, then changed little for the 2015 to 2018 cohort. In Model 2, after changes in the distribution of initial destinations and sociodemographic characteristics were controlled for, the trend of rising retention rates across successive cohorts became stronger. In particular, the difference in retention rates between the 2015 to 2018 cohort and the 2000 to 2004 cohort increased to 15.0 percentage points, a 1.7 percentage point increase from the observed difference in Model 1. Further decomposition analysis[22] showed that the increase in the coefficient of the 2015 to 2018 cohort was related primarily to changes in source regions of GARs. Specifically, GARs who came from Eastern Europe and South America tended to have relatively high retention rates, but very few of them were in the 2015 to 2018 cohort. The results suggest that holding the source region constant would increase the retention rate more than the observed pattern for the 2015 to 2018 cohort.

The retention rate increased another 0.6 percentage points for the 2015 to 2018 cohort in Model 3. Further decomposition analysis showed that this increase related primarily to the decrease in cluster resettlement, i.e., the average number of GARs assigned to a city in a year. Put differently, since a higher level of cluster resettlement was significantly associated with a higher retention rate, a cohort with a lower level of cluster resettlement would be expected to have a lower retention rate.

Since the cluster resettlement variable was strongly correlated with the size of the intended destinations, the control of the cluster resettlement variable also changed the coefficients of the size categories of the intended destinations from Model 2 to Model 3. With similar levels of cluster resettlement, non-gateway centres would have much higher retention rates than Toronto and Montréal.

As mentioned earlier, the cluster resettlement variable was statistically significant in its logarithm form but not in its actual level. This indicates that the association between cluster resettlement and retention was not linear and became smaller as the number of GARs assigned to a city increased. Chart 2 illustrates the estimated relationship between retention rates and the number of GARs who arrived in a city in a given year, based on the results from Model 3. The chart shows that the retention rate increased

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21. The earliest RAP SPOs were established in 1999.
22. The decomposition technique is explained by Hou (2014).

quickly before the number of GARs assigned to a city reached 500 but grew more slowly as the number of GARs reached beyond 500. For instance, the retention rate would increase 14.9 percentage points from 59.2% to 74.1% when the number of GARs in a city increased from 20 to 500 but would only increase another 4.1 percentage points when the number of GARs in a city increased from 500 to 1,000.

In addition to the cluster resettlement variable, an ethnic enclave was also significantly associated with GARs' retention rate in a city. The estimate in Model 3 shows that a 1 percentage point increase in the share of immigrants from the same source region in the city's population was associated with a 1.9 percentage point increase in the retention rate. The regional economic conditions variable (employment incidence among Canadian-born citizens and long-term immigrants) was not statistically significant.

The results for the fourth contextual variable regarding RAP SPOs show that the mere presence of RAP SPOs was not necessarily associated with a higher retention rate. However, cities with RAP SPOs that had been in operation for over 10 years were associated with a 4.2 percentage point higher retention rate than cities without RAP SPOs.[23]

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23. This coefficient is significant only in an ordinary least square regression, but not significant when the robust standard error was estimated to take into consideration dependence among observations within a CMA or a CA.

Table 5
Linear probability model predicting the likelihood of staying in the intended destination among government-assisted refugees aged 20 to 54 at admission

	Model 1		Model 2		Model 3	
	coefficient	standard error	coefficient	standard error	coefficient	standard error
Intercept	0.715 ‡‡	0.003	0.649 ‡‡	0.017	-0.100	0.236
Arrival cohort (ref: 2000 to 2004)						
2005 to 2009 cohort	0.079 ‡‡	0.004	0.087 ‡‡	0.004	0.078 ‡‡	0.017
2010 to 2014 cohort	0.141 ‡‡	0.004	0.145 ‡‡	0.005	0.136 ‡‡	0.027
2015 to 2018 cohort	0.133 ‡‡	0.004	0.150 ‡‡	0.004	0.156 ‡‡	0.029
Intended destination (ref: Toronto)						
Montréal	…	…	-0.075 ‡‡	0.007	0.005	0.015
Vancouver	…	...	0.137 ‡‡	0.006	0.182 ‡‡	0.007
Medium-sized census metropolitan areas	…	…	0.090 ‡‡	0.005	0.170 ‡‡	0.014
Small census metropolitan areas	…	…	0.010 ‡	0.005	0.156 ‡‡	0.015
Small urban areas	…	…	-0.037 ‡‡	0.006	0.184 ‡‡	0.028
Sex (ref: male)						
Female	…	…	0.002	0.003	0.002	0.002
Age at admission	…	…	0.001 ‡‡	0.000	0.001 ‡‡	0.000
Marital status (ref: married)						
Single	…	…	0.012 ††	0.004	0.015 ‡	0.006
Separated, divorced or widowed	…	…	0.003	0.006	0.006	0.008
Number of kids	…	…	0.005 ‡‡	0.001	0.005	0.003
Source region (ref: West Asia)						
Other world region	…	…	-0.011	0.011	-0.001	0.035
South America	…	…	0.060 ‡‡	0.006	0.086 ‡	0.038
Eastern Europe	…	…	0.129 ‡‡	0.007	0.123 ‡‡	0.021
Africa	…	…	-0.044 ‡‡	0.004	-0.031	0.039
South Asia	…	…	0.083 ‡‡	0.007	0.067	0.045
Southeast Asia	…	…	0.031 ‡‡	0.007	0.005	0.039
Official language (ref: mother tongue English)						
Not speaking English or French	…	…	-0.032 ‡	0.014	-0.036	0.022
Other mother tongue, bilingual	…	…	-0.009	0.016	-0.008	0.023
Other mother tongue, French	…	…	0.024	0.016	0.020	0.027
Other mother tongue, English	…	…	-0.003	0.014	-0.009	0.020
Mother tongue French	…	…	0.074 ‡‡	0.017	0.081 ††	0.023
Education (ref: university degree)						
Less than high school	…	…	-0.001	0.005	-0.002	0.008
High school graduation	…	…	-0.011	0.007	-0.015	0.008
Some postsecondary education	…	…	-0.009	0.008	-0.012	0.006
Employed after landing	…	…	-0.059 ‡‡	0.004	-0.061 ‡‡	0.011
Attended school after landing	…	…	0.026	0.017	0.029	0.029
RAP SPOs (ref: none)						
1 to 5 years in operation	…	…	…	…	-0.023	0.030
6 to 10 years in operation	…	…	…	…	0.001	0.018
Over 10 years in operation	…	…	…	…	0.042	0.021
Employment incidence among adults	…	…	…	…	0.003	0.002
Percentage of own-group immigrants in the region	…	…	…	…	0.019 ‡‡	0.004
Log of number of GARs arrived in the same year	…	…	…	…	0.046 ‡‡	0.010

… not applicable
‡ significantly different from 0 (p < 0.05)
†† significantly different from 0 (p < 0.01)
‡‡ significantly different from 0 (p < 0.001)
Notes: RAP SPO refers to Resettlement Assistance Program Service Provider Organization and GAR refers to Government-Assisted Refugee. The model R-squared value is 0.021 for Model 1, 0.057 for Model 2 and 0.072 for Model 3.
Source: 2020 Longitudinal Immigration Database.

Chart 2
Estimated relationship between retention rates and number of government-assisted refugees who arrived in a city in a given year

percent

Number of government-assisted refugees who arrived in a location in a year
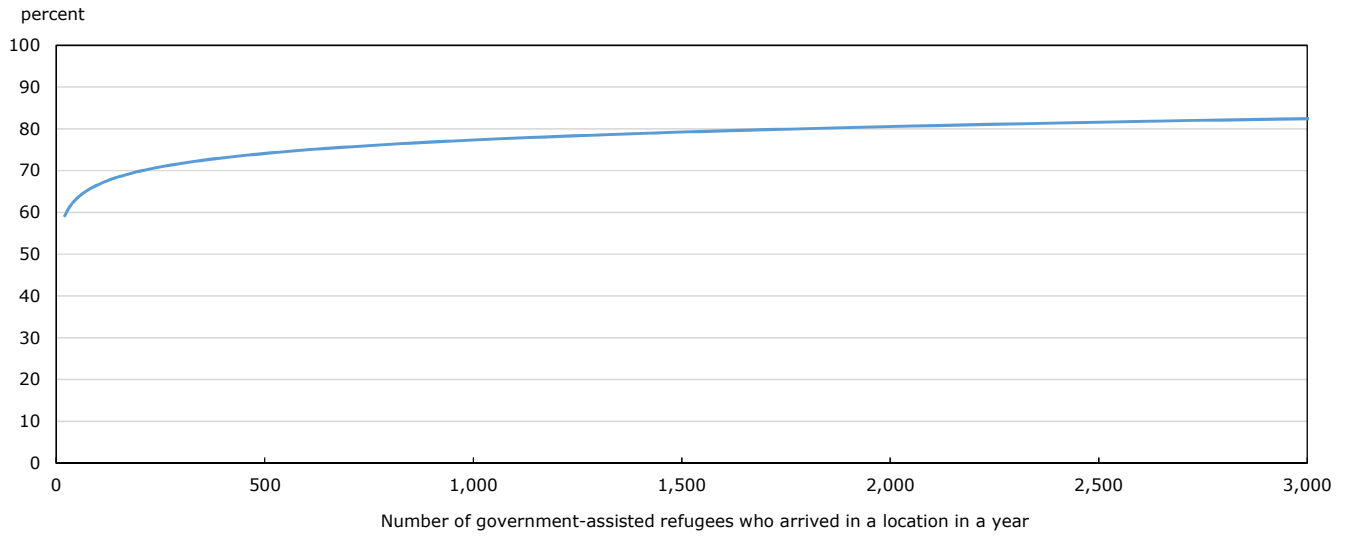
Source: 2020 Longitudinal Immigration Database.

Discussion and conclusion

This study analyzed the retention and secondary migration patterns of GARs. In particular, the study examined whether retention rates had increased among successive landing cohorts since the early 2000s. Moreover, the study aimed to understand the extent to which the sociodemographic characteristics of GARs, as well as the context of their intended destination, influenced their decision to undertake a secondary migration.

The study observed that the overall retention rate among GARs increased considerably among successive cohorts, while it declined among economic and family class immigrants. The increase in retention rates occurred despite changes in sociodemographic factors and the context of the intended destinations that, on their own, may have contributed to a decline in retention rates. Thus, the increase in the retention rate was related to factors that could not be examined in this study. For instance, some unobserved characteristics (e.g., experiences of violence, physical disabilities, mental illness and extended time in refugee camps) of more recent cohorts may increase their tendency to stay in their designated destination. Rising housing costs in major metropolitan areas would make it less affordable for GARs to move away from smaller urban areas. In resettling GARs, the government might have taken better consideration of their preferences. It is also possible that resettlement services have been improved to meet refugees' needs in intended destinations.

The study found that regardless of the size of the intended destination, the rate of out-migration was highest in the year of arrival and the following year but drastically tapered off following this period. For example, it was observed that among GARs destined for medium-sized CMAs, about one-quarter had left by the first year after landing, but it took a subsequent nine years for an additional 11% to leave.

The results of the multivariate analysis showed that the number of GARs who resettled in the same community in the same year was strongly correlated with an increase in retention. However, this association was not linear. Simply put, the positive association became smaller as the number of GARs assigned to a city in a year increased beyond a few hundred.

As supported by the existing literature, this study found that the presence of co-ethnic communities was significantly associated with GARs' retention rate in their intended destination. Lastly, while the mere presence of RAP SPOs did not necessarily increase retention rates, cities with RAP SPOs that have been in operation for more than 10 years were associated with high retention rates compared with cities that did not have RAP SPOs.

The findings in this study inform policy discussions in several ways. This study showed that about two-thirds of refugees who were assigned to medium-sized CMAs ultimately stayed, and 39% to 44% of those who were assigned to small CMAs and small urban areas stayed 10 years after immigration. These rates may not seem high, but they were similar to those of economic immigrants whose initial destinations were not assigned by the government. Moreover, it is particularly salient that even when GARs leave their intended destination, the majority do not choose to resettle in Canada's large gateway cities. This study's observation that the majority of secondary migration occurs within the landing year or the year after is an important consideration for improving GARs' initial settlement experiences. In terms of future resettlement, the analysis about cluster resettlement is specifically integral when considering retention rates. The findings indicate that resettling a sizable number of GARs in the same community in the same year is strongly associated with increased retention, but this association starts to diminish when the size of the cluster resettlement increases beyond a few hundred.

Appendix Table 1

Distribution of intended destinations of immigrants by admission class, all ages at admission, 2000 to 2018 arrivals

	Government-assisted refugees	Privately sponsored refugees	Economic class	Family class
		number		
Total counts	162,391	124,494	2,898,545	1,334,685
		percent		
2000 to 2004 arrivals				
Montréal	6.9	5.1	14.7	11.1
Toronto	15.8	34.4	49.1	45.9
Vancouver	10.3	6.8	15.2	13.9
Medium-sized census metropolitan areas	31.3	36.5	12.2	13.6
Small census metropolitan areas	25.5	14.5	5.6	8.9
Small urban areas	9.5	1.7	1.5	3.3
Rural areas	0.6	1.1	1.7	3.3
2005 to 2009 arrivals				
Montréal	6.8	4.4	17.7	11.6
Toronto	15.2	30.6	34.5	42.0
Vancouver	11.0	6.7	16.5	14.3
Medium-sized census metropolitan areas	31.5	36.2	16.2	15.3
Small census metropolitan areas	24.6	18.9	8.1	9.3
Small urban areas	10.6	2.4	3.9	3.9
Rural areas	0.3	0.9	3.1	3.7
2010 to 2014 arrivals				
Montréal	5.3	5.3	19.8	13.0
Toronto	16.8	30.8	26.8	37.7
Vancouver	9.9	7.8	12.0	13.5
Medium-sized census metropolitan areas	32.4	36.8	22.0	18.5
Small census metropolitan areas	25.0	16.1	9.5	9.2
Small urban areas	10.3	2.2	6.0	4.3
Rural areas	0.4	1.0	3.8	3.8
2015 to 2018 arrivals				
Montréal	3.9	20.8	16.0	12.3
Toronto	12.8	27.2	28.6	34.0
Vancouver	8.8	4.9	10.8	12.8
Medium-sized census metropolitan areas	31.4	29.0	21.5	21.6
Small census metropolitan areas	31.6	14.4	11.6	10.1
Small urban areas	11.5	2.3	7.1	5.4
Rural areas	0.1	1.4	4.5	3.9

Source: 2020 Longitudinal Immigration Database.

Appendix Table 2

Rates of filing income tax and retention in intended destinations by the end of the first full year after admission among immigrants, all ages at admission, by immigration class, 2000 to 2018 arrivals

Intended destination	Government-assisted refugees		Privately sponsored refugees		Economic class		Family class	
	Tax filing rate	Retention among tax filers	Tax filing rate	Retention among tax filers	Tax filing rate	Retention among tax filers	Tax filing rate	Retention among tax filers
	percent							
2000 to 2004 arrivals								
All intended destinations	60.4	71.5	67.2	74.8	62.9	80.3	77.2	90.6
Montréal	59.4	63.1	67.8	85.4	69.4	83.7	74.5	93.6
Toronto	63.2	64.8	65.4	79.6	61.5	84.2	76.8	95.3
Vancouver	62.8	84.9	62.8	84.0	61.1	81.6	82.7	93.5
Medium-sized CMAs	59.3	77.4	70.1	72.3	64.1	73.9	78.0	90.1
Small CMAs	60.2	68.5	66.6	67.2	60.9	66.7	75.9	83.5
Small urban areas	58.4	66.0	65.0	66.3	62.0	60.3	74.1	72.5
2005 to 2009 arrivals								
All intended destinations	58.8	79.8	69.3	75.3	61.0	85.3	80.8	91.2
Montréal	58.1	69.7	62.3	77.7	66.7	88.0	80.4	94.5
Toronto	61.9	71.8	69.3	84.5	57.7	89.9	80.6	95.7
Vancouver	60.7	90.5	68.0	84.2	58.8	91.2	84.3	94.6
Medium-sized CMAs	58.1	87.2	72.2	68.8	63.8	85.6	80.9	91.3
Small CMAs	57.7	74.5	66.5	72.5	61.0	74.6	79.9	85.5
Small urban areas	58.0	78.3	65.7	69.1	64.0	69.1	78.0	77.5
2010 to 2014 arrivals								
All intended destinations	61.1	85.8	70.2	76.0	64.6	82.6	81.6	91.0
Montréal	58.4	81.7	68.1	83.6	65.4	81.1	80.5	95.3
Toronto	67.0	83.3	71.3	84.4	60.6	89.1	81.7	95.6
Vancouver	66.3	91.1	72.3	85.7	64.1	89.3	84.3	95.1
Medium-sized CMAs	57.8	88.5	70.1	67.2	66.1	87.1	81.4	91.3
Small CMAs	61.2	85.3	68.6	77.1	66.8	76.0	81.4	85.0
Small urban areas	58.2	81.6	66.6	67.4	68.7	70.2	79.7	76.2
2015 to 2018 arrivals								
All intended destinations	50.4	84.8	68.2	77.0	70.2	77.1	80.7	89.0
Montréal	52.7	69.6	68.9	84.4	65.9	72.8	80.2	94.3
Toronto	54.5	87.3	68.6	81.5	69.9	86.3	80.2	93.5
Vancouver	53.3	90.1	70.4	83.6	75.2	86.4	83.3	93.5
Medium-sized CMAs	49.8	88.8	68.3	68.5	70.8	79.5	81.0	88.9
Small CMAs	49.0	84.0	67.0	77.5	69.2	66.4	81.4	82.3
Small urban areas	48.2	74.3	64.7	67.6	71.5	64.7	79.2	72.9

Note: CMA refers to census metropolitan area.

Source: 2020 Longitudinal Immigration Database.

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