

This study explores Canada's response to the humanitarian crises in Afghanistan (2021) and Ukraine (2022), which resulted in significant displacement of refugees and internally displaced persons. The research analyzes the extent to which Canada is adhering to the non-discrimination norms of the international refugee framework. The research compares the two distinct special administrative measures established by the Government of Canada for Afghans and Ukrainians in need of protection. In particular, the study assesses the accessibility, transparency, and responsiveness of both frameworks and explains observed variations.

The study looks at the experiences of those subject to the special measures program for Afghans who worked as interpreters, human and women's rights advocates, and other locally engaged staff with the Canadian Forces and other parts of the Government of Canada in Afghanistan. The study compares and contrasts the experiences of Afghans and their families with those of displaced Ukrainians and who immigrated to Canada under the special measures for Ukraine. This comparative analysis seeks to test theories of racialization and the extent to which federal refugee and immigration policies reflect social racialization and securitization processes applicable to refugees from a Muslim-majority country, like Afghanistan, versus a primarily Caucasian population of Ukrainians displaced from Europe. The study aims to give voice to the members of Afghan community, who advocate strongly to bring their families members to safety in Canada, while Ukrainian refugees similarly raise questions about their settlement in Canada. More research on this topic may empower members of these respective communities to advocate for their greater support and benefits. The research will assess whether Canada has adhered to the non-discrimination norms of international protection regimes, as well as look at the role of unconscious bias towards, and the racialization and securitization of refugees from a Muslim-majority country.

Participatory research methods are employed to center the voices of Afghan refugees, document their experiences with the Canadian refugee system, and serve the public interest by supporting public policy advocacy for a more equitable refugee and immigration system that respects Canada's normative international obligations.

The study includes a review of the migration studies literature on the question of racialization of public policy. It performs a content analysis of public statements made by Government of Canada officials, media reports and polling data to identify "unconscious bias" in federal policy and public opinion generally associated with these two crises. It employs participatory research methods that will include the voices of newly arrived Afghan interpreters, Afghan interpreters who resettled in Canada a decade ago and have been trying to bring over extended family members, as well as other Afghan refugees more broadly. As a trusted member of the Afghan community in Ottawa, who speaks Dari and Pashto, I converse with local interlocutors, give voice to their lived experience and help empower those most affected by the Canadian refugee and immigration policy. In addition, I have attempted to identify, engage and document the lived experiences of newly arrived displaced Ukrainian newcomers fleeing the war. The participatory research is designed in collaboration with these interlocutors, so that it can serve the needs of the community, particularly through policy advocacy. Refugees can often be viewed as vulnerable individuals. However, experience often reveals them to be resilient and endowing them with unique lived experiences due to overcoming many difficulties on their way to safety. Their voices and experiences are critical to understanding the complexity of the immigration system. All too often, the voices of refugees do not inform public policy formulation.