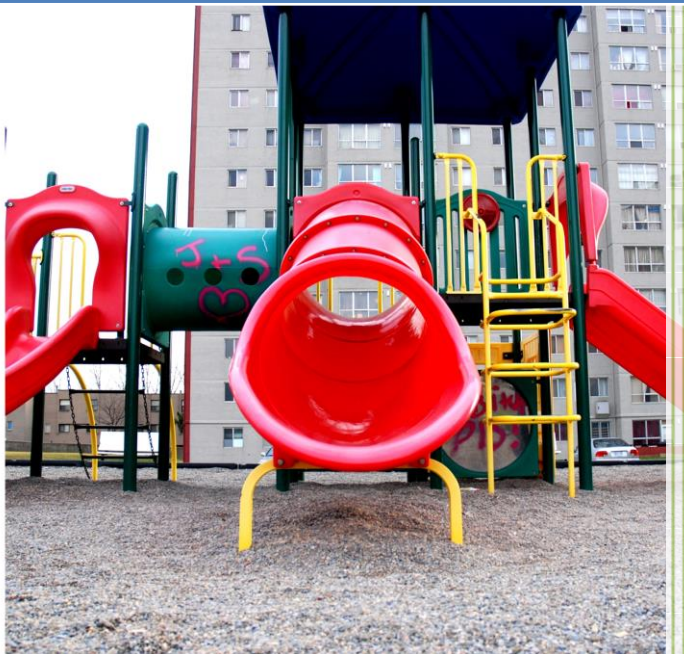


media

Myths about Immigrants and Refugees in Relation to the Canadian Healthcare System



Toronto North Local Immigration
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Table of Contents

- 1. Introduction..... 3
- 2. Myth: Immigrants are a huge fiscal burden on Canadian taxpayers..... 6
- 3. Myth: Refugees in Canada receive greater assistance from the government than Canadian pensioners 14
- 4. Findings..... 20
- 5. Recommendations..... 21
- References 22

1. Introduction

In 2012, Canada admitted 257,887 immigrants – a little more than the average number of immigrants that came for the past 10 years. The high numbers of immigrant intake contributes to Canada’s reputation as a country of demographic openness and multicultural tolerance.

However, when immigrants arrive in Canada, they are often surprised by the hostility, prejudice and discrimination they encounter – especially when they try to find jobs that match their qualifications and skills. Discrimination at the job market, lack of “Canadian experience”, obstacles in recognition of foreign credentials, long hours of exhausting low-paid survival jobs, frustration, insecurity, low income, insufficiency of adequate housing and healthy food keep the level of stress high and affect newcomers’ health. On its website, Statistics Canada posted:

Research has repeatedly found a "healthy immigrant effect"—immigrants' health is generally better than that of the Canadian-born [because only applicants who pass a thorough medical exam can be granted permanent resident status], although it tends to decline as their years in Canada increase.

Permanent residents are eligible for public health insurance a few months after they arrive to Canada. However, in the recent years their access to public services has angered many Canadians who believed a myth created by Herbert Grubel and Patrick Grady of the Fraser Institute, a Canadian think tank. In their reports, regularly published and widely quoted in the media, Grubel and Grady claim that immigration is a huge fiscal burden on Canadian taxpayers. Considering the benefits received over the tax paid, Grubel and Grady insist that every immigrant costs Canadian taxpayer about \$6,051 per year, and that the annual cost of immigration is approximately \$23 billion. To many Canadians, Grubel and Grady’s “calculations” look reliable at first sight, but a more careful analysis, made by professor Krishna Pendakur and Mohsen Javdani of Simon Fraser University and published by Metropolis British Columbia, revealed that the annual cost per immigrant is about \$450 and that the cost of immigration per year is about \$2 billion – numbers much lower than those of the Fraser Institute. Contrary to Grubel and Grady’s claims, Pendakur and Javdani demonstrate that the benefits of immigration exceed the cost. Indeed, immigrants receive lower salaries than Canadians and so they pay fewer taxes, but they work hard and contribute to the Canadian economy in many other ways.

Unfortunately, the Fraser Institute’s reports have been given much more publicity than the study of Pendakur and Javdani. As a result, many believe that there should be reforms that would

reduce the “huge” cost of immigration and that immigrants’ access to public services should be limited. Physicians and researchers, however, argue that if health benefits of immigrants are limited, many people would not be able to afford preventative care and the number of hospitalizations would increase – due to illnesses not treated on time. So the cost of health care would actually rise significantly. Poor health would also decrease immigrants’ productivity and contribution to the Canadian economy.

The alarming results of the cuts in refugees’ health coverage in 2012 show that physicians’ concerns are grounded. The website of the Canadian Doctors for Refugee Care, as well as many other websites and printed media, inform of numerous cases when critically ill refugees were denied health care because they couldn’t pay. The outcomes can be fatal. In fact, most refugees are poor. When they are hired, they are usually low paid. Very few of them have some savings. In their publication “12 stories. Narratives from new Canadians” Kimberly Williams and Lynn Peterson wrote:

They have often experienced great devastation such as war, torture, or persecution prior to coming to Canada. Many refugees left their homes with nothing but that they could carry – spending many months or years, and in some cases their entire lives within refugee camps prior to coming to Canada.

Yet, in 2004 a myth was created that refugees received more income support and benefits than Canadian pensioners. The myth started with a letter to the editor published in Toronto Star and was quickly spread by a persistent viral email and by media that published and republished the wrong information many times through the years. The myth provoked extremely negative attitude in Canadian society towards refugees and the results were devastating: in 2012, to “ensure fairness to Canadian taxpayers” the federal government significantly cut refugees’ access to health care. Health professionals across the country were, as Maclean’s wrote, “incensed about the changes, saying they amount to an inhumane, public-health disaster.” They organized protests in support of the “poorest and most vulnerable” of their patients; however, the protests didn’t succeed. As for the viral email, it is still circulating.

Since Canada relies to a high extent on immigrants’ contribution, timely and proper health care for immigrants and refugees is consistent with the country’s national interest. This media review is to be used for a campaign that asserts immigrants’ right of public health services, fights discrimination and promotes positive attitude in our society towards newcomers.

To promote positive attitude towards immigrants and refugees, it is crucial to identify the negative beliefs and to examine how they are presented in the media to the Canadian audience. The review focuses on the two most harmful myths about immigrants and refugees in relation to the public services: the myth that the cost of immigration exceeds the benefits, and the myth that refugees receive more social assistance than Canadian seniors.

2. Myth: Immigrants are a huge fiscal burden on Canadian taxpayers

The cost of immigration is one of the most often discussed topics in Canadian media. There are different beliefs on how much money the government spends on newcomers. Also, there are different opinions on whether this money is justified and whether the benefit of integrating immigrants in the country exceeds the costs. While some publications point out that Canada's future depends to a great extent on immigrants' contributions, others claim that the country's economy can do well without immigrants and that immigration is just a huge burden on Canadian taxpayers.

“The truth about immigration is that costs exceed benefits” is an article by James Bissett published in *Vancouver Sun* on September 29, 2008. It was republished the next day on *Immigration Watch International* website and three years later, in 2011, a link to it was posted in *CKA Canadian forums* inviting readers to discuss it. The article stated that “[s]tudies in Canada since the mid-1980s have pointed out that immigration has little impact on the economic welfare...” No particular Canadian study was named. In the same paragraph, the author quotes American economist George Borjas who said that “immigration's only significant impact is to reduce the wages of native workers”. One of the participants in the *CKA Canadian forums* argued that “immigration for Canada and immigration for America (which is what Borjas is an expert on) are very different things, with very different structures and sources of immigrants with very different problems.”

In the next paragraph of Bissett's article, “proof” was again provided by “studies” that were not named:

Immigration does not provide the answer to population aging and there is a multiplicity of studies done in Canada and elsewhere that proves this.

In fact, “studies show”, “studies prove” or “according to recent studies” are convenient - and empty - phrases which are widely used in media to impose certain assumptions without providing real proof.

The only Canadian study the article named was that of Herbert Grubel, professor of Simon Fraser University and senior fellow of the Fraser Institute. In one of his publications in 2008 Grubel claimed that “the 2.5 million immigrants who came to Canada between 1990 and 2002 received

\$18.3 billion more in government services and benefits in 2002 than they paid in taxes ...this amount is more than what the federal government spent on health care and twice what was spent on defence in the fiscal year 2000/2001.” When *Immigration Watch International* reprinted “The truth about immigration is that costs exceed benefits”, it highlighted Grubel’s statement using red colour.

The studies, reports and articles of Herbert Grubel and other fellows of the Fraser Institute, a conservative think tank, received in the recent years significant media attention, made headlines, were republished, quoted, widely discussed and became the main source of myths about the cost of immigration and its role in the Canadian economy.

In his article, “The invisible price tag of immigration”, published in *National Post* on May 5, 2011, Herbert Grubel stated:

...the benefits to immigrants come at the expense of Canadian taxpayers. Unfortunately, these costs do not show up in government budgets but are hidden behind the provisions of the welfare state and driven by low average incomes of recent immigrants.

New data and studies show the extent of this fiscal burden; recent immigrants remit lower average incomes and tax payments than other Canadians, even 10 years after their arrival. At the same time, these immigrants on average absorb at least the same amount of social benefits as other Canadians.

As a result, \$6,000 is annually transferred to the average immigrant at the expense of Canadian taxpayers. In 2006, the value of these transfers to all 2.7 million immigrants who arrived between 1987 and 2004 and still live in Canada came to \$16.3-billion. Taking account of the 1.5 million immigrants who arrived since 2004, the fiscal burden comes to \$25-billion in 2010. These costs represent a significant portion of the federal government’s \$55-billion deficit projected for the fiscal year 2011.

Naturally, these shockingly high numbers filled many Canadian taxpayers with indignation, which showed in blogs and forums. The situation was aggravated by the Fraser Institute’s report “Immigration and the Canadian Welfare State” that was published the same month. It was also written by Herbert Grubel and co-authored by Patrick Grady. Using the 2006 Census database Grubel and Grady said:

In the year 2005 the immigrants in the Census database, who arrived in Canada over the period of 18 years from 1987 to 2004, had an average income of \$25,396, on which they paid an average of \$3,438 in income taxes. The comparable figures for all Canadians were \$35,057 for income and \$5,995, for taxes based on the entire sample of individuals. The data thus implies that, on average, immigrants’ incomes were only 72, 4% of the income earned by all Canadians and they paid only \$57, 3 % of taxes.

The study also took account of other taxes paid by immigrants and Canadians, such as sales and property taxes. It found that immigrants on average paid \$10,340 while all Canadians paid \$16,501 in income and other taxes. The study also considered the amount received as government benefits by the average immigrant and all Canadians, concluding that immigrants received \$110 less in benefits than all Canadians. The combination of average tax payments and benefits received resulted in the basic finding of the paper: in the 2005/2006 fiscal year, the average net fiscal transfer per immigrant came to \$6,051 due to \$6,161 less taxes paid and \$110 less in benefit received by the average immigrant compared with the averages of all Canadians.

This report quickly hit the headlines. “Immigration cost \$23B a year: Fraser Institute report” was the headline in *National Post* on May 17, 2011. Although the author, Kathrin Blaze Carlson, admitted that the report “was immediately criticised as telling only part of the story”, she didn’t doubt the reliability of Grubel and Grady’s calculation. On the contrary, she reinforced its believability by quoting Rudyard Griffiths, co-founder of the Dominion Institute, who said: “I’m sure the data behind the numbers is sound...”

The article highlighted Grubel’s positions that “immigrants should ‘pay their way in the welfare state.’” and “newcomers should also have to post a bond to cover payments for health-care and social services before their parents and grandparents are admitted as landed immigrants.”

Another article from May 17, 2011, “*National Post* editorial board: Reduce the welfare state, not immigration”, informed of the two main “solutions” to the “burden” the Fraser Institute suggested: first, to replace the current immigration system with a one that would issue only temporary renewable two-year work visas to people who had received legitimate offers from Canadian employers prior to coming to Canada; and second, to eliminate the family class of immigrants – who are regarded as useless and costly. However, when it comes to public services, the article pointed out some consequences that would follow if eligibility to benefits depended only on the taxes one pays:

What of the many people born in Canada who never pay any taxes, yet use our health-care system? By the logic at play in the Fraser study, a stay-at-home mother or elderly married woman who was born in Canada but never worked outside the home should also be regarded as a drain on our economy. In fact, if state benefits were tied to income taxes, 40% of Canadians would not receive them, because they don’t pay any. Yet these Canadians generally contribute to society in other ways — by raising children, doing unpaid work inside households, or as future taxpayers.

Many native-born Canadians wonder how it is that new immigrants can work 16-hour shifts at a convenience store or balance multiple full-time jobs, even though they have small children. The answer, in many cases, is the caregiving grandmother or grandfather living at home — the very folks who immigration hawks ask us to regard as an economic nullity.

The benefits of having at home caregiving parents and grandparents – the same category that immigrant opponents treat as “useless” and “burden” that should be kept out of the country – come to mind when reading an article on child care in *Toronto Metro* on October 15, 2013. The article “Ottawa urged to account for child-care benefit” discussed “severe shortage of child care in Canada, where more than three-quarters of mothers with young families work and where there are licensed spots for only 21 per cent of kids under age 12.” In many cases grandparents take care of their grandchildren, which allows the parents to work, earn income and contribute to the country’s economy.

As an alternative to the Fraser Institute’s “solutions”, the authors of “*National Post* editorial board: Reduce the welfare state, not immigration” suggested that the policy makers should not limit the number of immigrants and end family reunions – instead, they should “downsize our bloated welfare state, a change that would not only address the \$25-billion shortfall described by the Fraser Institute, but that would benefit all Canadians, both new and old alike.” Of course, the authors, who didn’t put their names, could easily anticipate that many Canadians would get angry with the idea of reducing the welfare state so that immigrants would continue their family reunions...

When the Fraser Institute’s report was published, most media considered Grubel and Grady’s claims about the estimated cost of immigration true and either supported their proposals for changes in the immigration system and for limiting immigrants’ access to public services or tried to justify the expenses by pointing out the immigrants’ contribution to Canada. However, such justification was difficult considering the sky-high numbers in the Fraser Institute’s report.

A careful examination, however, proved that these numbers were very far from the truth and that the Fraser Institute’s report contained calculation errors, intentionally wrongly chosen sample sizes, misleading arguments and exaggerated numbers. On July 26, 2011, *CTV News* reported:

Two months after the Fraser Institute estimated that each immigrant on average costs the Canadian government \$6,051 per year – a total cost of as much as \$23 billion – Mohsen Javdani and Krishna Pendakur of Metropolis British Columbia took another look at their numbers.

Using a wider sample size of immigrants, correcting calculation errors, and using data where it was available rather than estimates, the pair found a far lower annual cost of about \$450 per immigrant, or about \$2 billion per year.

The new report *CTV News* informed about was “Fiscal Transfers to Immigrants in Canada”, published in July 2011. In it Javdani and Pendakur explained the errors and inconsistencies in Grady and Grubel’s analysis chose a proper representative sample size and gave a corrected estimate of the fiscal transfer to immigrants in Canada:

Grady and Grubel present results on the fiscal transfer between all Canadian residents and recent immigrants, as defined as the difference in taxes paid between these groups less the difference in benefits received. They find essentially no difference in benefits received between all Canadian residents and immigrants. We also find that immigrants who arrived between 1987 and 2004 received similar benefits on average to those received by all Canadian residents. Since benefits are found to be similar between groups, their result hinges on the large estimate of the difference in taxes paid, which is \$6,161 per immigrant. However, the results presented by Grady and Grubel on taxes paid have arithmetic errors (apparently typographical in origin). Correcting these arithmetic errors results in a difference of 5,473 in taxes paid per immigrant.

Further, Grady and Grubel use an educated guess for the amount of property taxes paid by immigrants. However, data are available on the property values of immigrant households, and use of this data results in a difference of 5,089 in average per capita taxes per immigrant.

Grady and Grubel investigate only recent immigrants, who are younger than the immigrant population as a whole. To the extent that their youth results in lower incomes, and their lower incomes result in lower tax revenues, it would be revealing to examine the entire immigrant population, so as to capture their entire life cycle of incomes. If one investigates the taxes paid by immigrants who entered Canada between 1970 and 2004 (instead of between 1987 and 2004), we see a difference of \$2,470 per immigrant. We also find that immigrants who entered Canada between 1970 and 2004 receive an average of \$345 less in benefits than do all Canadian residents.

We also argue that comparing the taxes paid by immigrants to those of all Canadian residents and computing a fiscal transfer is somewhat misleading because the group of all Canadian residents includes immigrants, therefore it is not a transfer from one group to another. Apart from Canadian-born residents and immigrants who entered Canada between 1987 and 2004, the sample of all Canadian residents also includes non-immigrant residents, immigrants who entered Canada before 1987, and immigrants who entered Canada in 2005 (with incomplete reported income and income tax). These people are irrelevant to the calculation of fiscal transfer and serve only to bias the results. A more relevant comparison would be between taxes paid by Canadian-born people and those paid by immigrants. For immigrants who entered Canada between 1970 and 2004, this difference is \$2,696 per immigrant. Turning to the benefit received, we find that these immigrants received and average \$554 less in benefit than did the Canadian-born.

Finally, some tax revenue goes to support pure public goods, such as National Defence and basic research. For public goods, the tax revenue generated from immigrants is essentially “free money” for the Canadian born. Previous estimates of how much revenue goes to public goods range from about 5% to 20%. Our preferred estimate, which assumes that public goods account for 10% of revenue, reduces the fiscal transfer to immigrants by \$1692.

Adding all of this together, we find a fiscal transfer from Canadian-born people to immigrants of \$450 per immigrant.

Having this number, immigrant services agency SUCCESS CEO Thomas Tam declared on *CTV News* that “the \$450 per immigrant is an investment that pays off...”

Metropolis British Columbia’s report, however, didn’t receive as much media attention as the Fraser Institute’s one. Several publications mentioned Javdani and Pendakur’s report and informed about their findings, but few of them explained how the final amount of \$450 per immigrant had been calculated. More media coverage received Grubel and Grady’s reply to Javdani and Pendakur’s report. In “Fiscal transfers to immigrants in Canada: responding to critics and a revised estimate” published on March 15, 2012, Grubel and Grady rejected Javdani and Pendakur’s arguments. They didn’t widen the sample groups and stuck to the misleading comparison between the incomes of the newcomers who came between 1987 and 2004 (and who, as Javdani and Pendakur pointed out, were younger and logically earned less) and the whole Canadian population (that included older age groups who earned more and also immigrants who had established themselves in Canada before 1987 and have already reached higher positions and higher incomes). Without any proof about the future, Grubel and Grady declared that “the lower incomes and tax payments of recent immigrants relative to those of other Canadians are likely to persist over all stages of their lives, which invalidates Javdani and Pendakur’s criticism of our estimates.” So Grubel and Grady simply repeated the exaggerated numbers, with very slight changes, and made more headlines.

Like the previous studies of the Fraser Institute, the 2012 one received media coverage in Canada and abroad. For example, a press release asserting Grubel and Grady’s statements was sent and published on Reuters’ website. However, just below the title, “Fraser Institute: Recent Immigrants Not Faring as Well as Those Who Arrived Before 1987, Costing Taxpayers More Than \$16 Billion A”, the international news agency noted: “*Reuters is not responsible for the content in this press release.”

In the 2012 study Grubel and Grady also declared:

This study also rejects arguments made by J&P [Javdani and Pendakur] that immigrants are needed to meet labour shortages, that they bring productivity-increasing economies of scale, and that their children will repay the fiscal burden. New evidence does not provide any grounds for optimism that the offspring of recent immigrants are going to be able to earn enough to compensate current and future generations of Canadians for the fiscal transfers made to their parents by existing Canadians.

These statements of Grubel and Grady about the labour shortages and the immigrants' offspring contrasted with the information published in *The Globe and Mail* on May 4, 2012. In the article "Why Canada needs a flood of immigrants", Joe Friesen reported:

The shortage of skilled labour in the Alberta oil sands and Saskatchewan potash mines has become a national issue. But a similar lack of people power is plaguing the ambitious but underdeveloped secondary cities of Ontario, and in Atlantic Canada a third of the population will be over 65 in less than two decades. The Conference Board of Canada estimates that over the next 10 years, there will be a million jobs going wanting across the country. This shortage is a drag on Canada's potential to innovate and compete into the future.

As for the immigrants and their children, the article informed:

Among those in their prime working years, immigrants are nearly 60 per cent more likely to have a university degree than those born here (37 per cent compared with 22).

And their children have become perhaps this country's greatest asset: One of the best indicators of whether a Canadian child will go to university, says economist Ross Finnie, is not the parents' levels of education but their countries of birth, since the children of almost every immigrant group outperform kids with parents born in Canada.

In August 2013 the Fraser Institute was in the news again. This time because of Grubel's study "Canada's Immigrant Selection Policies: Recent Record, Marginal Changes and Needed Reforms". The study, announced like "new", was a repetition of the previous reports. The following statement was not a surprise:

This paper reviews the history of Canadian immigration policies and documents that the present policies impose on Canadians a fiscal burden of \$20 billion annually. The existence of this burden is attributed to flaws in the current immigrant selection process... The paper proposes more radical reforms to the selection system to eliminate the fiscal burden in the future.

The words "fiscal burden" and "\$20 billion" were again in the headlines in many printed newspapers and online media. They again commented on Grubel's recommendations for changes in the selection system and for ending the immigration of parents and grandparents. Javdani and Pendakur's calculations and arguments were no more quoted. Few publications tried to argue with Grubel's new study. On September 3, 2013, in a *Broadbent Institute* blog post, University of Ottawa professor Patti Tamara Lenard exposed, as *Toronto Star* wrote, "the shoddy logic of the Fraser Institute's figures and proposals." Her post "Indecent proposals: why the Fraser Institute is wrong on immigration" was also published on September 12, 2013, in the B.C. online magazine *The Tyee*. The title there was "Immigrants Are Staggeringly Costly? Nice Try, Fraser Institute."

Regarding Grubel's proposal to end the admittance of parent and grandparents, Lenard pointed out Gurbel's erroneous claim about the dependents admitted in Canada:

The report claims that admitted dependents are mainly parents and grandparents, those with limited working years and large medical costs ahead of them. It also claims that in 2011 over 50,000 of this type of immigrants entered Canada, a claim that is false. The actual number is 14,000 [according to Citizenship and Immigration Canada]. The Institute's number represents the *full number* of immigrants admitted as dependents, which includes spouses and children. Much of the Fraser Institute's case rests on this erroneous number since the burden imposed by parents and grandparents is said to make up a significant portion of the undue tax burden shouldered by Canadians.

The report offers other misleading comparisons too. It implies that, since the average age of parent and grandparent entrants is 65, we should expect their health care costs to mimic those of Canadians aged over 65. It suggests that they will rely heavily and unduly on the healthcare system. What it fails to mention is that under our current system the health care costs of parents and grandparent entrants are already to a considerable extent borne by the sponsor, not the tax payer, for 10 years after arrival.

Just like in the previous Fraser Institute's reports, in "Canada's Immigrant Selection Policies: Recent Record, Marginal Changes and Needed Reforms", the myth about the huge economic burden of immigration on Canadian taxpayers served to justify the Institute's proposal for changes in the immigrant selection policy. To "eliminate the fiscal burden" according to Grubel, Canada should drop the point system and accept only migrants on temporary visas who have been offered contracts by Canadian employers. The article in *The Tyee* explained what dangers lay behind this proposal:

Any fair-minded evaluation of temporary labour migration programs in Canada – which are explicitly intended to favour the employers' stated economic interests – illustrates how employers have an interest in suppressing wages to the detriment of the Canadian public. Employers have shown themselves willing to exploit workers, even where the oversight and sanctioning mechanisms the report proposes already exist. Temporary labour migrants are subjected to lower wages and often forced to labour in unsafe and unsanitary conditions, all of which enables the displacement of Canadian workers. Clearly, there are significant risks to leaving the selection of immigrants to employers.

The tendency of bringing migrant workers to Canada is already a fact. On its website, The Canadian Council for Refugees informed:

In 2008 for the first time, the number of temporary foreign workers in Canada exceeded the total number of permanent residents admitted in the same year. This is a dramatic change in policy, and there has been little public debate. Migrant workers are especially vulnerable to exploitation and abuse because of their lack of status, their isolation and

their lack of access to information on their rights, and because the Canadian and most provincial governments don't ensure monitoring of their workplaces.

What consequences would this practice of using foreign workers have for those who are already in Canada (both permanent residents and Canadians) was mentioned by Marco Campana in his article on Maytree's website published on September 4, 2013, "Choosing the right new Canadian – it's more than just money":

Core to the Fraser Institute report is its proposal that employers play a pre-eminent role in selecting new immigrants. However, as Economist Arthur Sweetman has pointed out, there could be unintended consequences about of this type of policy shift: "As you give more authority, more power to employers, it could be that that increases competition between people who are already here and people who are arriving, especially on the temporary foreign worker side.

The Fraser Institute's reports clearly match the desire of greedy employers to import cheaper labour without much commitment to it. These preferences refer not only to agricultural and low skill workers, but also to high skill professionals. As Campana's article implied, however, the lower wages of these foreign workers would decrease the compatibility of immigrants AND Canadians at the job market.

By producing and eagerly supporting the myth that immigration is a huge burden on Canadian taxpayers, and by convincing Canadians that immigrants have no significant contribution to Canadian economy and society, the Fraser Institute is insisting on changes in the immigration system that would benefit employers allowing them to bring cheap labour from outside Canada. For immigrants and Canadians, that would mean less jobs and lower wages. And if immigrants, as the Fraser Institute suggested, have to pay additionally for health services, that would make their situation even more difficult.

3. Myth: Refugees in Canada receive greater assistance from the government than Canadian pensioners

Since 2004 a persistent chain email has been circulating claiming that refugees receive more income support and benefits than Canadian pensioners. Even though the information was

declared false by Citizenship and Immigration Canada, the rumours continue until now and have a devastating impact on society's attitude and tolerance towards refugees.

The myth was born in March 2004 when *Toronto Star* published a feature about the plans of the government to encourage refugees to settle in smaller Canadian cities rather than in Vancouver, Toronto and Montreal. The article informed about the amount of financial assistance the Canadian government would be providing to these refugees:

A single person receives \$1,890 from the federal government as start-up allowance, along with \$580 monthly social assistance, depending on how soon the person is able to find employment. They also each receive a night lamp, table, a chair and a single bed from the government.

The \$1,890 "start-up allowance" was one-time payment for basic household needs – furniture, linens, pots, etc., and the \$580 monthly was payable only until refugees found stable employment.

A reader of the article, however, erroneously assumed that refugees collect \$2,470 per month which is more than the social assistance that pensioners in Canada receive. He sent a polemic e-mail to Nicholas Keung, the reporter who wrote the article, and copied it to 100 other people who forwarded it to more recipients.

What greatly contributed to spreading the rumour, however, was *Toronto Star* itself. The day after Keung's article was published, on March 12, 2004, a letter to the editor appeared in the newspaper re-stating the wrong figured and saying:

I also find it interesting that the federal government provides a single refugee with a monthly allowance of \$1,890 and each can also get an additional \$580 in social assistance for a total of \$2,470. This compares very well to a single pensioner who after contributing to the growth and development of Canada for 40 years can only receive a monthly maximum of \$1,012 in old age pension and Guaranteed Income Supplement. Maybe our pensioners should apply as refugees?

The letter sparked outrage in Canadian society. Since *Toronto Star* didn't correct the mistake for more than eight months, the wrong information quickly spread around the country. The chain email containing the false numbers ended with "Please forward this to every Canadian you know." As a result, Canadians became extremely angry at the government assistance to the refugees.

Finally, on November 27, 2004, *Toronto Star* published an article by its ombudsman Don Sellar, who admitted the mistake and said, "In hindsight, the ombud now wishes he'd issued a speedy

clarification to help set the record straight. But with information (and misinformation) moving at a warp speed on the Internet, I doubt there was a silver bullet for the problem.”

Sellar turned out to be right. In the next few years, the letter to the editor was republished with few alterations in more than 50 newspapers (some of them printed it more than once over a period of time), blogs, discussion papers and online newsletters. It even reached the United States and Australia.

Two years after *Toronto Star*'s article, Citizenship and Immigration Canada responded to the situation. On November 22, 2006, it posted on its website:

Refugees do not get more financial help from the federal government than Canadian pensioners do. A widely circulated email makes this **false** claim. The email mistakenly includes the one-time start-up payment as part of the monthly payment. The amount of monthly financial support that government-assisted refugees get is based on provincial social assistance rates. It is the minimum amount needed to cover only the most basic food and shelter needs.

Nevertheless, the hoax email continued to circulate. On its website, the Canadian Council for Refugees commented: “Passing it on [the chain email] can have devastating impacts. It spreads false rumours, hurting people who have already suffered in their home countries.”

The Canadian Council for Refugees also explained the difference between the three types of refugees in Canada and the assistance they receive (or the lack of assistance). This information could hardly be found in the mainstream media:

[N]o matter the category, refugees receive very limited income assistance from the government.

- Refugee claimants and refugees recognized by the Immigration and Refugee Board receive no specific income assistance. They may, depending on provincial regulations, be entitled, like other residents, to social assistance.
- Privately sponsored refugees are not entitled to governmental assistance (including provincial assistance) during the period of their sponsorship (usually for one year after arrival in Canada).
- Government-assisted refugees have access to financial assistance from the federal government through the Resettlement Assistance Program (RAP). This financial assistance is generally for one year maximum and only if they do not have their own financial resources or income.

Also, The Canadian Council for Refugees pointed out that most refugees arrive in Canada with a significant debt burden – because they are expected to repay the Canadian government for their

transportation to Canada and also for the medical examination they are obliged to have as a part of their processing to come to Canada. Not only they have to make these expenses, but they have to repay to the Canadian Government with interest. These facts were commented in *Vancouver Sun* by Daphne Bramham in her article “Canada unfairly burdens the refugees it hand-picks to help. Desperate and penniless, newcomers must take out loans to pay for required medical tests”, published on August 7, 2013. The article revealed little known facts about the way Canada treats refugees compared to all other United Nation countries:

Since 1995, Canada has had the distinction of being the only country that requires refugees to pay for their pre-travel medical examinations.

Repaying the cost of those medical exams plus travel documents and transportation is expected to begin after only one year in Canada.

Canada has another distinction. It is alone in charging interest on those loans after three years. The loans can be as high as \$10,000 for every family member over 18 with interest charged at a rate set annually by the federal Finance Department.

...

It adds another layer of stress to traumatized, vulnerable people who are desperately trying to learn enough English to survive and learn some skill that will help them get a job. Many are also dealing with children who speak no English and are going to school for the first time in their life.

In spite of all facts, explanations in media and moral considerations, the myth that refugees receive more money from the government than Canadian seniors didn't die. Some continued to forward the hoax email and spread resentment towards refugees. On August 31, 2010 – almost six years after the letter in the *Star, The Tyee* published the article “Refugees Get More than Seniors? Not True!” The author Bill Tieleman commented:

But the email is persistent. It's been circulating in cyberspace since one error in the Toronto Star newspaper in 2004.

And it says a lot about how easily manipulated Canadians are about refugees, how needlessly afraid many people are of foreigners and likely how some are simply racially prejudiced about non-Caucasians.

The newspaper quoted Janet Dench, executive director of the Canadian Council for Refugees:

It's in a broader context where there is an underlying level of xenophobia and speaks to people's insecurities...

Scapegoating foreigners is an easy solution.

Hostility towards refugees, combined with the anger of Canadian taxpayers who believed in the myth spread by the Fraser Institute's reports about the enormous cost of immigration, made it easy for the federal government in 2012 to justify significant cuts in refugees' access to public health care. The justification of the cuts – the will of many Canadians.

In 2012, the federal government made series of changes to the Interim Federal Health (IFH) program, a temporary health insurance program which was available to eligible protected persons, refugee claimants and others who did not qualify for provincial or territorial health insurance plans. The cuts were announced on April 25, 2012, in a news release titled "Reform of the Interim Federal Health Program ensures fairness, protects public health and safety". In this news release, Minister of Citizenship, Immigration and Multiculturalism Jason Kenney said that the IFH program "is being reformed to ensure fairness for Canadian taxpayers."

The cuts provoked protests among physicians, nurses and medical students who defended the refugees' right to health care. They stated that it was inhuman to deprive the poorest and the most vulnerable from health care and that there is no way the fiscal cost of the cuts to outweigh the moral cost. Most media supported the protesters and criticised the government's decision. On June 27, 2012, in her article in *The Globe and Mail* "Doctors will monitor cuts to refugee health care" Gloria Galloway informed:

Doctors say they will keep records of refugees who suffer serious untreated ailments or die as a result of health-care cuts planned by the federal government...

Canadian Doctors for Refugee Care, a coalition of concerned health-care providers, said on Wednesday that it has asked physicians and coroners across Canada to report any negative outcomes arising from the changes to the Interim Federal Health Program (IFHP).

The article was written just before the cuts were to come into effect. It says:

Mr. Kenney argues that the existing [before the cuts] rules mean refugees are entitled to health benefits that are superior to those ordinary Canadians get from governments.

That statement actually reinforced the myth. Ms Galloway continues:

But the doctors say the benefits refugees currently receive are no different to those offered to hundreds of thousands of Canadians who are on welfare and other types of government assistance. "Many refugees arrive poorer than the poorest Canadians, said Dr. Berger [chief of family and community medicine at St. Michael's Hospital in Toronto] and "their health is often much worse because it has often been neglected for many years and they may have been through trauma and physical violence.

After the reforms in the IFHP, physicians from all parts of Canada started to report heart-breaking examples of refugees who were denied health care. Here are some of the cases they posted on the Canadian Doctors for Refugee Care's website:

- An elderly woman from a Designated Country of Origin (DCO) country with an existing heart condition (previous heart attack) cannot have the appropriate investigations. On a subsequent visit, she has worsening chest pain and has to be sent to the Emergency Room.
- A pregnant woman in her third trimester with DCO coverage is denied prenatal care and rescued by a midwife collective who agrees to provide care for free.
- A man with a life-threatening inflammatory disorder fails to show up for follow-up appointments to his specialist because of limited IFH coverage.
- A woman followed by an obstetrician for her pregnancy is turned away for care at 36 weeks once she is denied her refugee status.

Many media published similar stories reported by physicians. The demonstrations of healthcare workers also received media coverage. In "Health cuts tell refugees they aren't welcome", published in *Thestar.com* on June 27, 2013 Ritika Goel wrote:

This policy, which cannot be justified from an economic or ethical perspective, has led to an unprecedented mobilization of health-care workers in Canada with demonstrations in 19 cities across the country last week. As a physician who works with refugees, I have joined in the fury, but also noticed a growing trend of denial of health care to migrants in Canada and worrisome immigration policies.

Illness does not discriminate on the basis of immigration status, and neither should health care.

4. Findings

The two myths examined in this media review have several characteristics in common:

- They both provoke anger in Canadian population through the wrong information about large amounts of money taxpayers have to pay for immigrants and refugees in Canada.
- The creation and the longevity of the myths have been supported by different media.
- Even though there have been enough data, facts, arguments and research that counter the myths, the myths have survived and are still believed to be true by many Canadians.
- A key to the longevity of the myths is the persistence of those who spread them. The strategy of the Fraser Institute is to publish “new” reports and articles (repeating the same claims) almost every year and to make sure that they are quoted in as many media as possible. The chain email about refugees’ benefits is circulating even until now – despite the post on the Citizenship and Immigration website that the information in the email is false; and the letter to the editor in *Toronto Star* has been published and republished again and again in the media.

In contrast, the study of Mohsen Javdani and Krishna Pendakur that exposed in July 2011 the mistakes and misleading arguments of the Fraser Institute’s report was published only once and received far less media attention. Some publications that quoted its conclusions didn’t explain in details how the researchers came to these conclusions. Also, the media that paid more attention to it had smaller audience than the media that wrote about the Fraser Institute’s report.

It took more than eight months for *Toronto Star* to admit the mistake in the letter to the editor and two years for the Citizenship and Immigration Canada to rebut the myth.

5. Recommendations

Persistency and intentionally seeking of media attention is the key to success of the two myths analysed in this review. To refute the myths, the same persistency and public attention is needed.

The arguments that counter the myth should not only be presented in immigrant-related media but have to reach the Canadian-born audience.

To refute the myth that the cost of immigration exceeds the benefits and to defend the right of immigrants to equal access to public services, some main things should be explained to Canadians:

1. Why the Fraser Institute's reports are wrong – argument of Javdani and Pendakur;
2. What the negative consequences of the Fraser Institute's proposals for changes in the immigration selection system would be for the Canadian job market;
3. How immigrants contribute to the Canadian economy; Why taxes are not the only way one contributes to the society;
4. Why immigration is crucial for the future of Canada;
5. Why it is important to keep immigrants healthy.

To rebut the myth that refugees receive more government assistance than Canadians, a good strategy would be to use posters and to print pamphlets containing photos and refugees' stories in public areas. Papers like "12 Stories. Narratives by New Canadians" by Kimberly Williams and Lynn Peterson, published by the Canadian Federation of Medical Students, could be printed and distributed for free.

Cooperation with other organizations and institutes that are passionate about promoting immigrants' and refugees' health care could be useful in the campaign.

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