

Family reunification for refugees: Empirical perspectives on the effects of the process on family members settled in Canada and elsewhere in the world

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While political actors and the public opinion seem unconcerned about it, the family class application process for refugees in Canada is currently facing unprecedented delays (CCR, 2021). This presentation is based on preliminary results of a PhD thesis in social work that aims to analyze the separation and reunification experiences of transnational refugee families of which at least one member obtained Canadian protection. This paper is an attempt to: 1) conceptualize the notion of family reunification in a Canadian context; 2) determine the effects of the process on people; 3) identify recommendations for stakeholders working with families and political leaders. The theoretical framework is rooted in critical family studies, transnational feminist studies and critical refugee studies (Allen et Jaramillo Sierra, 2015; Espiritu, 2003; Ritholdz et Buxton, 2021). The methodology adopts elements from feminist and familial storytelling: An open method built on a collective telling on both individual and familial levels (Amason, 2020; High, 2014). Expected results stem from, on one hand, a dozen of narrative case studies (Brandell et Varkas, 2001) of transnational refugee families, and on the other hand, from a dozen of semi-structured interviews conducted with family support professionals. They demonstrate the deep impacts of the reunification process on the ways of “doing family” (Marlowe, 2018), as well as on individual physical and mental health. Finally, preliminary recommendations based on family and interviewees experiences are outlined.