

Guiding through the maze: Federal MP district offices as IRCC outposts?

Abstract

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In the year 2017-2018, 78% of the 1,7 million calls to the Ministry of Immigration, Refugees, and Citizenship Canada (IRCC) call centre could not get through to an agent. The difficulty to reach IRCC highlights the remoteness of immigration bureaucracy. In this context, many immigration applicants/individuals are left to fend for themselves in an administrative labyrinth, or to hire immigration consultants or lawyers. One significant resource remains, which provides free-of-charge face-to-face immigration assistance: federal constituency offices. This seminar will investigate the critical role played by district offices of Members of Parliament and their assistants in the landscape of immigration services in Canada: what services do they provide to which users and which factors influence the provision of these immigration services? Analyses presented are based on administrative data, original survey data and in-depth interviews conducted in 2021. Results underscore how district offices have become an institutionalized part of immigration services in Canada. Findings from administrative data indicate that districts' demography and location are the most important factors explaining the level and types of services provided, while political party ideology and MP characteristics play a very limited role. Ridings with high percentages of immigrants located in urban centers provide more services than other ridings. The presentation also discusses how constituency assistants act as key agents of mediation between residents and the federal bureaucracy. Overall, the seminar presentation will deepen our understanding of the role of MP offices and of constituency assistants in the provision of immigration services in Canada.

Authors' Bio

Adèle Garnier is an Assistant Professor and the Director of undergraduate studies at the Département de Géographie, Université Laval, Canada. Her research investigates the interplay of regulatory levels (local to global) in migration and refugee policy in comparative perspective. She is the co-editor of *Refugee Resettlement: Power, Politics and Humanitarian Governance* (with Kristin Bergtora Sandvik and Liliana Lyra Jubilut, Berghahn, 2018) and has published in the *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, *Refuge*, the *Journal for the Academic Study of Religion* and *Brussels Studies*.

Danièle Bélanger is Professor at the Université Laval in Québec city and holder of the Canada Research Chair on Global Migration Processes. Between 1997 and 2013, she was professor of sociology at Western University (London, Ontario). Her recent research examines the role of essential workers with temporary migration status in Canada. She is leading a project on MP district offices as critical actors in the delivery of immigration services in Canada. Her research studies the trajectories and strategies of migrants with precarious status, including temporary migrant workers, trafficked individuals, undocumented migrants, asylum seekers, care migrant workers and marriage migrants.