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# Alternative Databases: The Research Resource Division For Refugees

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Carleton University Alternative Databases:  
The Research Resource Division for Refugees

Part of the Centre for Immigration and Ethnocultural Studies, the Research Resource Division for Refugees (RRDR) is located at Carleton University in Ottawa, Ontario, Canada. It was established in 1985 to serve as an international archive and data collection agency for scholarly, governmental and field information on refugee resettlement and adaptation. In addition RRDR publishes a quarterly newsletter INSCAN (International Settlement Canada), each issue being devoted to a specific topic on refugee resettlement. RRDR also is actively involved in research on resettlement. To date three studies have been completed: The Southeast Asian Refugee Study - A Report on the Three Year Study of the Social and Economic Adaptation of Southeast Asian Refugees to Life in Canada (1981-1983); The Settlement of Ethiopian Refugees in Toronto (1989); and, the Settlement of Salvadoran Refugees in Ottawa and Toronto (1989). The Resource Division also publishes a series of Working Papers in Immigration and Ethno-Cultural Studies addressing crucial issues in the area. Examples include: Immigration and Visible Minorities in the Year 2001 - A Projection - by Dr. John Sammel and The Mosaic a Generation Later - Issues and Trends - by Dr. Frank Vallee.

The intent and form of RRDR's activities is largely a product of one fundamental characteristic of the field of refugee studies: namely, its state of considerable and continual development and flux. The composition and characteristics of groups of refugees and refugee claimants can change quickly, placing new and unforeseen demands upon involved governmental, inter-governmental and non-governmental organizations, immigrant and refugee service centres, and sponsors. What these organizations and individuals require in order to provide services in an appropriate and culturally-sensitive manner is information; but this information needs to be produced quickly, and it should also be readily accessible. As it takes up to two years for information to begin circulating through traditional academic venues, so-called "gray zone" publications offer the quickest source of up-to-date information in the field. As a result, the holdings of RRDR are predominantly - but not solely - comprised of "gray zone" publications. Our holdings also include a limited number of central, but specialized academic sources in the field. In addition, each of our documents

has been entered into one of three on-line textual bibliographic databases in order to further enhance speed and ease of access to the required information.

"Gray zone" publications are produced by a wide range of organizations, including various government departments, inter-governmental organizations, non-governmental organizations, ethnocultural associations, and other interested individuals, including some academics. Their form is also diverse, including newsletters and periodicals, research monographs, field reports, occasional papers, conference proceedings, pamphlets, posters, and non-print forms, such as videos, films and photographic slides.

There is a considerable breadth and diversity in the range of topics which one may find published in the field of refugee studies. However, RRDR has from the outset focused upon issues of resettlement as they relate to third-world refugees. Areas of particular interest include the situation and experiences of refugee women, the health and mental health of resettled refugees, and the cultural background of refugee groups. However, numerous faculty members at Carleton University can be consulted depending upon the area of research interest. We have made a conscious decision not to systematically collect documents relating to issues of human rights and refugee law, and we also limit the information obtained regarding the political conditions in refugee-producing countries which underlie refugee flight. The primary reason for not focusing upon these two areas is economic: collecting documents in these areas would require financial and personnel resources which we do not possess. Fortunately, two years ago the federal government of Canada established an organization whose mandate was to act as a documentation centre for information on issues of human rights and political conditions in countries of origin. The Immigration and Refugee Board (IRB), through its documentation centre (IRBDC) in Ottawa, Canada and five regional offices,<sup>2</sup> has rapidly obtained a rather diverse and comprehensive collection of documents on these issues - and others - which are readily accessible to government officials, academics and other interested parties. To our knowledge they are the only government internationally to have invested the resources to establish such a collection of

documents. The resources in the IRBDC are complementary to our own: indeed, we often exchange information.

While RRDR purchases a portion of its holdings, many are obtained at no cost from governmental, intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations, ethnic community groups and researchers. RRDR also obtains a significant number of documents through exchange for our newsletter. We have explicitly sought to avoid obtaining documents which are already held at the Carleton University library on-campus; fortunately, owing to our focus on gray-market documents there is little overlap between the library holdings and our own. However, the library holdings provide easy and rapid on-line access to academic sources in the field - as well as some government documents - thereby extending the range of materials available to researchers in our office. In addition, a number of national libraries exist in the region, enabling RRDR researchers to search for (on-line) and obtain documents from a very wide range of sources. And, while we currently do not have any statistical data sets in our holdings, we would welcome the contribution of such data by any researchers, agencies or governments to our organization.

Although the holdings in RRDR are unique - that is, text-based, predominantly "gray-market" publications on the resettlement of third-world refugees - the format of our on-line records share features similar to those found in many other refugee documentation centres worldwide. This is because we exchange information with participating members of the International Refugee Documentation Network (IRDN) as well as other organizations and agencies. The format for our on-line data follows closely the convention established by HURIDOCS. Although initially intended for documents on the issue of human rights, HURIDOCS has been adapted for use in the field of refugee studies, and also to meet our particular local needs. This format is somewhat different than that used in most libraries, owing partly to the different nature of our respective documents. A number of the participating members of the IRDN have adopted the HURIDOCS format, also with minor modifications.

In numerical terms, our holdings currently comprise more than 6,000 items (i.e. publications) which have been entered into a number of on-line searchable (text-based) bibliographic databases. One of the databases focuses on the condition and experiences of women refugees in countries of origin, countries of first asylum and countries of resettlement. This bibliography is in the final stages of editing and will be published shortly. A second database contains items relating to the physical and mental health of refugees. A third database covers more general issues of refugee resettlement and integration, including economic, cultural, linguistic, and civic

and social welfare facets, among others. Ideally, each of the sources in the databases will be fully abstracted and keyworded using the International Thesaurus of Refugee Terminology (developed by the International Refugee Documentation Network, 1989). This should enhance the utility of the databases as the entry of standardized keywords will increase the speed and precision of literature searches. However, owing to limited financial and personnel networks only the bibliography on refugee women has been fully abstracted and keyworded.

Our holdings include items published by international and national non-governmental organizations, governmental and inter-governmental bodies, local ethnic-cultural communities, research institutes, and interested individuals.

Examples of our international periodicals from non-governmental organizations include ICVA News, published by the International Council of Voluntary Agencies, the International Catholic Migration Commission Newsletter, by the International Catholic Migration Commission, and Refugee Participation Network, by the Refugee Studies Programme, Oxford University. Refugees, from the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, and Monthly Dispatch, published by the Intergovernmental Committee for Migration are two instances of our inter-governmental periodicals holdings. National periodicals include the Canadian Ethnocultural Council, by the Canadian Ethnocultural Council, Update, by the U.S. Catholic Conference, Migration and Refugee Services, and Ny Fremtid, by the Norwegian Refugee Council. Immigrant Women of PEI, by the Immigrant Women's Group in Prince Edward Island, Canada, is one example of more local periodicals from non-governmental organizations. Our holdings also include a number of newsletters and periodicals from ethnic associations.

Our holdings of reports, field studies, occasional papers and policy analyses are as diverse. Instances of documents from national governments include The Hmong Resettlement Study, published by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Please Listen to What I'm Not Saying: A Report on the Survey of Settlement Experiences of Indochinese Refugees, 1978-1980, by the Australian Government, and A Follow-up of the Conditions of Unaccompanied Minors and Handicapped Persons among the Refugees from Vietnam Resettled in Sweden, by the Swedish National Board of Health and Welfare. Our holdings also include provincial and state documents such as The Training Needs of Settlement Service Workers, by the Ministry of Citizenship and Culture, Government of Ontario, and documents from local governments, like the publication Information for Young Refugee Parents from the Fresno County Department of Social Services. Our holdings also include a number of publications from intergovernmental organiza-

tions such as Working with Refugees in Somalia Towards a Development Perspective: A Technical Cooperation Report, by the International Labour Office, and numerous reports from various United Nations bodies, including Violence Against the Vietnamese Boat Refugees: An Assessment of Needs and Services from the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees.

Examples of documents from national non-governmental organizations include Uprooted Angolans, by the U.S. Committee for Refugees and Voluntary Repatriation Programmes for African Refugees: A Critical Examination, published by the British Refugee Council. Making it on Their Own: From Refugee Sponsorship to Self-Sufficiency, by the Church World Service, and Helping Refugee Women Help Themselves: YWCA's Response are instances of publications from international non-governmental organizations.

While one could provide many more instances of our publications holdings, the preceding recitation should have provided some indication of the range of documents in RRDR.

One of our mandates is to make this information widely available to persons and organizations working in the area of refugee resettlement; we often receive requests from organizations world-wide for information in the field. The databases make it relatively easy to process these information requests and, following an on-line search, to forward our findings. In cases where the individual or organization would like to acquire specific documents in our holdings we may, with the permission of the authors, reproduce and forward copies of the publications. In events where this is not possible or feasible, we refer requests to the original publisher.

Unfortunately, owing to limited computer and software facilities in RRDR, the databases are not currently accessible directly from terminals outside of the office and off-campus. On-line access to a read-only copy of the databases is planned for the near future, pending the availability of resources.

Requests for information are received and dealt with at RRDR through a number of routes. Many information requests are forwarded to us by phone, fax and electronic-mail.<sup>3</sup> The simplest of these requests can often be answered over the phone. More complex information requests, or those requiring either a bibliographic listing of publications or the publications themselves, involve sending the information to the requesters by fax, electronic-mail, or through the postal service. A number of requesters also conduct research on RRDR premises. Users of RRDR facilities include students, academic and other researchers, refugee and immigrant service organi-

zations, government departments, and assorted other non-governmental organizations.

<sup>1</sup> Presented at the IASSIST 90 Conference held in Poughkeepsie, N.Y. May 30 - June 2, 1990.

<sup>2</sup> These regional offices are in Vancouver, Calgary, Winnipeg, Toronto and Montreal.

<sup>3</sup> Our fax number is (613)788-3676. Inquiries can also be sent by electronic mail to "neuwithr@carleton.ca" and "rrdr@carleton.ca".