



**CYRRC PRE-CONFERENCE FORUM**

# LANGUAGE AND READING DEVELOPMENT OF REFUGEES



**METROPOLIS** 2023




WILFRID LAURIER UNIVERSITY  
**LAURIER**  
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 UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO  
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FOR STUDIES IN EDUCATION




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# BACKGROUND



The Syrian Civil war (2011-ongoing) has displaced millions of refugees

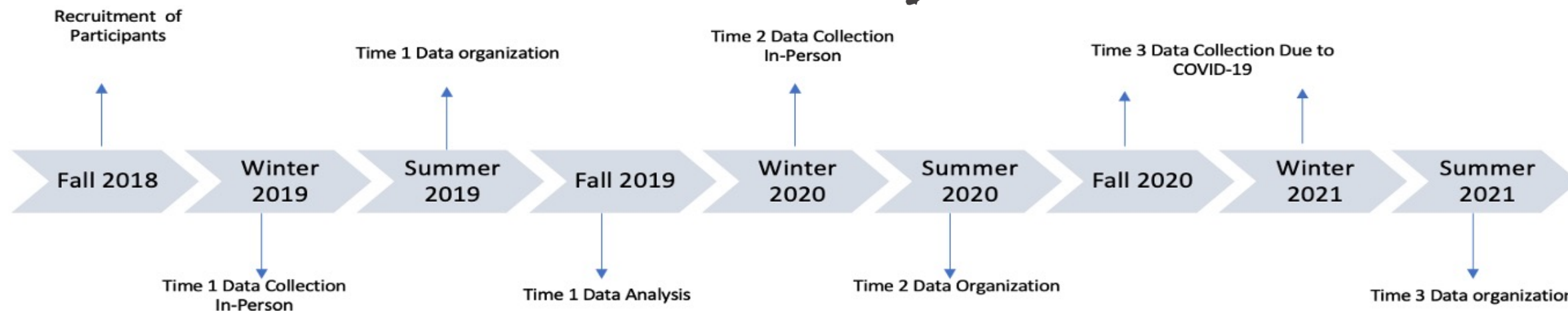


Since 2015, The Canadian government has resettled over 57,000 Syrian refugees



50% of the refugees are young children who experienced trauma and disruptions in their education

# PROJECT 2018-2021



**N=133**



**33%**

# PROJECT GOALS

1

## First Language Maintenance

- Fosters unity and belonging with families
- Provides cultural identity

2

## Second Language Learning

- Foundational for academic performance
- Supports social integration

# FAMILY CHARACTERISTICS & MENTAL HEALTH

- Richness of Arabic and English environment at home and maternal education were lower in Syrian refugee samples compared to other immigrant children in Canada.
- Refugee children's wellbeing had a powerful impact on their overall learning process.
- High behavioral problems (externalizing problems, ADHD) were associated with low English language abilities.



How language environment, age, and cognitive capacity support the bilingual development of Syrian refugee children recently arrived in Canada

Johanne Paradis<sup>1\*</sup>, Adriana Soto-Corominas<sup>1</sup>, Xi Chen<sup>2</sup> and Alexandra Gottardo<sup>3</sup>

# SCHOOL-RELATED SKILLS

- After three years of their arrival to Canada, refugee children performed poorly on English standardized measures. They also demonstrated difficulties in Arabic, as more than half of the children were not able to read in the language.
- Longitudinally, refugee children made significant gains on all language and literacy measures, and they were able to maintain and grow their L1 skills in a language minority setting.
- Refugee children followed a similar yet delayed developmental trajectory compared to less vulnerable populations.



The role of word reading and oral language skills in reading comprehension in Syrian refugee children

Redab Al Janaideh<sup>1</sup>, Alexandra Gottardo<sup>2</sup>, Sana Tibi<sup>3</sup>, Johanne Paradis<sup>4</sup> and Xi Chen<sup>1\*</sup>

# COMPARISON STUDIES

## Canada vs. Netherlands


- socioeconomic status (SES) and parental education of Syrian refugees in Canada were lower than Syrian refugees in the Netherlands; Lower SES was associated with lower L2 outcomes
- Refugee children from the Netherlands had higher L2 richness than refugee children from Canada

## Canada vs. Germany

- All parents were motivated to maintain the home language while learning the majority language; nevertheless, contextual factors made the balance more difficult to achieve in Germany.
- Refugee children growing up in Germany had a slightly different home language environment than their Canadian peers.



Acculturation through the lens of language:  
Syrian refugees in Canada and Germany

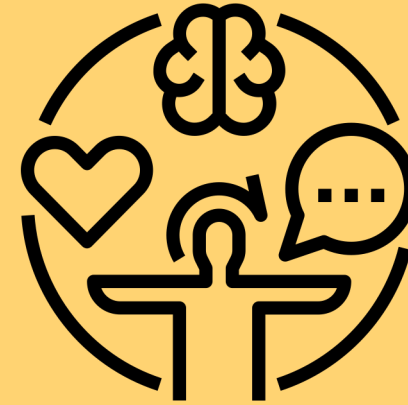
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L2 refugees who are struggling more than their classmates may require psychosocial support.



Schools and communities can expand refugee children L1 and L2, academically and socially.



Early behavioural problems identification & implementing literacy and behavioral-based intervention programmes.



Expand refugee parents' access to employment opportunities and work-related skills training.

# IMPLICATIONS

Supporting Refugee children to thrive in Canadian schools requires an integrative approach that is integrated at the classroom, school and community levels.





# THANK YOU FROM OUR TEAM





# Relevant References

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