

Spatial Distribution of Iranian Population in Canada: A Portrait Using the 2001 Census Data

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Abstract

International migrants are confronted with a series of complex regulations related to the departure from their country of origin, their arrival in their country of destination, and the conditions of their residency in the receiving country. A rapidly increasing number of migrants today are Iranians. Major destinations of Iranian migrants are Canada, Australia, the United States, and most European countries. This study will focus on the migration of Iranian to Canada. Iranian (also referred to as Persians) is one of many cultural groups in Canada. The purpose of this article is to understand the number and general situation of Iranian immigrants in Canada, and to provide sound and interesting information to Canadian government officials and to the Iranian public in general. Census data 2001 and custom tabulations (purchased from Statistics Canada) will be used to analysis data. Arc View software will also be used for creating the necessary map and figures. Our finding will enable the researchers to provide policy guidelines for immigration and other officials in Canada. It is also identifying avenues for future research on Iranian-Canadian immigration.

Key words: Iranian, Immigrants, Canada, Distribution, CMA, CSD.

1- Introduction

In this article, our statistical representation is based on the official data that are obtained from Stat-Canada up to 2001. Although these statistical numbers

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do not reflect the exact current population of Iranian origin in the country, they appear to be the most reliable source of information available for the analysis of Iranian migrants in different contexts. Of course, many Iranian populations were omitted from our total populations because their residential status in Canada is not finalized yet. Anyhow, according to this official data, Canada received 71,990 individuals from Iran based on the places of birth (Iran) up to 2001. The reason for giving statistic related to Iranian up to 2001 is the new statistic of Stat-Canada for 2005 is not released yet. Therefore, our calculation was based on 71,990 Iranian individuals whose birthplace was Iran by 2001.

This study is divided in three sections. First, the spatial distribution of the Iranian population in Canada including provincial, CMA, intra-urban, and CSD levels will be discussed. At the CSD level, Montreal, Ottawa-Gatineau, Toronto, Calgary, and Vancouver are chosen to portrait the distribution of Iranian in Canada.

Canada is the first largest country in the world; its vast territory ranges from wide fertile prairies and farmlands, through great areas of mountains, rocks and lakes, to northern wilderness and Arctic tundra. The greatest north-south distance is from Cape Columbia on Ellesmere Island to Middle Island in Lake Erie, 4634km. The greatest east-west distance is from Cape Spear, Nfld. to the Yukon-Alaska border, 5514km.

Canada's diverse territory is divided into 10 provinces and 3 territories. These provinces and territories are Newfoundland, Prince Edward Island, Nova Scotia, New Brunswick (The Atlantic Regions); Quebec, Ontario (Central Canada); Manitoba, Saskatchewan, Alberta (The Prairie Provinces); British Columbia (The West Coast); Northwest Territories, Yukon, and Nunavut (The North). Canada is a country of 10 million square kilometers covering many different geographical areas or regions.

For the needs of our study, we have divided Canada into six different regions. These regions are: Prairies, British Columbia, Maritimes, Northern Territories, Ontario, and Quebec.

2- The flow of Iranian immigrants: a brief overview

Geographers have devoted significant attention to the study of migration, their places of origin, and the situation of their residency in the receiving country. The focus of the literature on migration is not so much on identifying

migrants and their reasons for migration, but on identifying spatial aspects of migration such as the distance of the move, the size of the migrant population, and the direction of their migration (Johnston, 1996). It is difficult to determine precisely the numbers of Iranians who migrate to other countries, and what figures do exist apply only to legal migrants. From 1987 to 2000, some 40,054 Iranian refugees were admitted to the United States (U.S. immigration and Naturalization Service, 2002). According to the UNHCR (United Nations High Commission for Refugees), Iranian are among the top five applicants for asylum in Austria, Belgium, Germany, Holland, and United Kingdom. The World Refugee Survey in 1998 estimated that there were 348,800 Iranian refugees in Turkey, Ecuador, India, Pakistan, and Iraq.

Reports also indicate that there are 6,000 Iranian physicians and 3,000 medical students in the United States (Nowruz, 2001). The total number of Iranian immigrants in foreign countries is estimated as follows: the United States --between 800,000 to 1,000,000, Turkey --between 500,000 to 700,000, India and Pakistan --between 200,000 to 300,000, Germany—between 100,000 to 200,000, France—between 80,000 to 150,000, Canada--between 50,000 to 100,000, Scandinavian states --between 145,000 to 200,000, and other European states including Spain and Austria 80,000 (Eqbali, 2000).

Kazemi (1986) notes that Canada is the destination of many immigrant groups. Compared to other migrant groups, Iranian are relative newcomers to Canada. The year 1901 witnessed the arrival of the first Iranian immigrant to Canada, and from this time until the 1970s, Iranian immigration to Canada was very slow (Kazemi, 1986). As recently as the end of World War II, there were only a dozen Iranian living in Canada, and the large influx of immigrant group following World War II did not include Iranian. Throughout the 1950s and 60s, Iranian migrants accounted for only 10 to 100 individuals annually (James H., 1999). The real influx of Iranians to Canada began after the Iranian revolution in 1979, encouraged by a number of related factors: the difficult political situation, difficulties resulting from Iran-Iraq war, and economic situation (Iran Daily, 1986).

Gradually, Iran has become a major source of immigrants to Canada. In 1988, Iran ranked tenth as a source of immigrants to Canada, representing 2.3 % of all immigrants (Citizenship and Immigration, 1991). In terms of refugee claims, Iran (with 11.55 %) was among the top five countries in 1985

(Citizenship and Immigration, 1992). Moreover, restrictions on immigration to the United States due to political confrontation which emerged after the Iranian revolution encouraged Iranian to consider Canada as their destination of choice (Langlois and Gharakhlou, 1996). More recently, the number of Iranian immigrants to Canada has been increasing. Their increasing prominence in Canada immigration has thus given rise to increased interest in better understanding the reasons for, and conditions of, their migration.

3- The conceptual framework

A short explanation of the conceptual framework of this article is given. This is followed by a description of Sjaastad (1962) theory as the principle analytical framework for this study. Sjaastad was the first to suggest a theoretical structure for the notion that an individual migrates in the expectation of being better off. He suggested that the individual or the household moves to add to its human capital, that is, to its ability to generate an income stream over its lifetime as a result of a migration decision. More simply, an individual moves if he or she believes that the benefits will exceed the costs. As Da Vanzo (1981) notes, it can apply to a wide range of circumstances in which people are motivated by a desire for the best for themselves. Because the gains or benefits from migration do not occur immediately, but take place over a period of time, this suggests that migration is an investment. Migration is an activity with costs that occur immediately; these costs are balanced against a future expected return on that investment. In addition, migration is an investment in increasing the potential of the human being; we refer to it as an investment in human capital, that is, an investment in increasing the productivity of human resources (Sjaastad, 1962, p.83).

There are several features of the human capital approach that seem to have advantages over alternative approaches to understanding migration decision making. For example, the human capital model does not just focus on economic costs and benefits. The cost and benefits of migration can also be measured in terms of many non-pecuniary measures: such as psychic costs, leaving friends and relatives, and the loss of various locationally specific assets. Benefits also include a possible increase in the level of amenities, cultural facilities, and access to relatively superior public goods. The public good component is especially important in choosing the destination city among several alternatives in the same region. Hence, many components, both pecuniary and non-pecuniary, contribute to a person's change in welfare resulting from migration.

In this article, the human capital model is the suitable framework and it is compatible to the flow of Iranian immigrants to Canada. Iranian population in Canada has developed some residential patterns in different provinces, regions,

and CMA's to gain some pecuniary and non-pecuniary benefits at their destination.

4- The spatial distribution of the Iranian immigrants in Canada

In this section, a general overview of the presence of Iranians in Canada will be given using three main geographical levels: province/region, CMAs (Canadian Metropolitan Areas), and CSDs (Census Sub-Divisions) levels. This section examines if this population has developed some specific residential patterns at the provincial/regional, metropolitan, and census sub-division scales. First, a comparison is made at the regional/provincial level on the importance of those regions as destination zones for Iranian migrants. The Canadian provinces and the six regions are used to make this comparison. Then, this comparative analysis is repeated at the CMA level to measure the importance of the major Canadian cities as attracting centers for Iranians migrants. Finally, for those CMAs with an important Iranian population, an analysis is presented at the intra-urban level showing the major residential areas of the Iranian population inside the urban areas.

a. At the provincial/regional level.

Canadian provinces, as destination for immigrants, don't have the same importance as indicated in figures 1 and 2. For example, Figure 1 shows the importance of the immigrant population in Canada and among Canadian provinces. By 2001, Canada had a population of 29,440,480 individuals. From this total, 5,448,480 individual were immigrants coming from different countries (18.5% of the total population of Canada). Among the provinces, Ontario alone received 55.6% of total immigrants to Canada being by far the most preferred destination for immigrant coming to Canada. B.C. and Quebec followed with respectively 18.5% and 13% of total immigrants to Canada. Figure 1 also shows that Ontario, British Columbia and Alberta have the highest percentage of their population being considered as immigrant compared to Newfoundland, IPE and New Brunswick for which this percentage is the lowest. It can be interesting to see how the Canadian provinces did for the last five years as destination for immigrants. Figure 2 shows the importance of new immigrants in the Canadian provinces, that is those who came to Canada since 1996. According to this figure, from 1996 to 2001, Canada received 17.6 % of total immigrants indicating a relatively active period of immigration for Canada. Again, three provinces appear to be more popular than the others with Ontario, British Columbia, and Quebec obtaining respectively 55.9, 19.8, and 13.6 percent of total immigrants to Canada during that period. However, if we compared the number of new immigrants with the number of total immigrants, for each province, it appears that British Columbia and Quebec are becoming more

attractive as destination for immigrants. In the next paragraphs, we will see if Iranians immigrants to Canada follow these patterns.

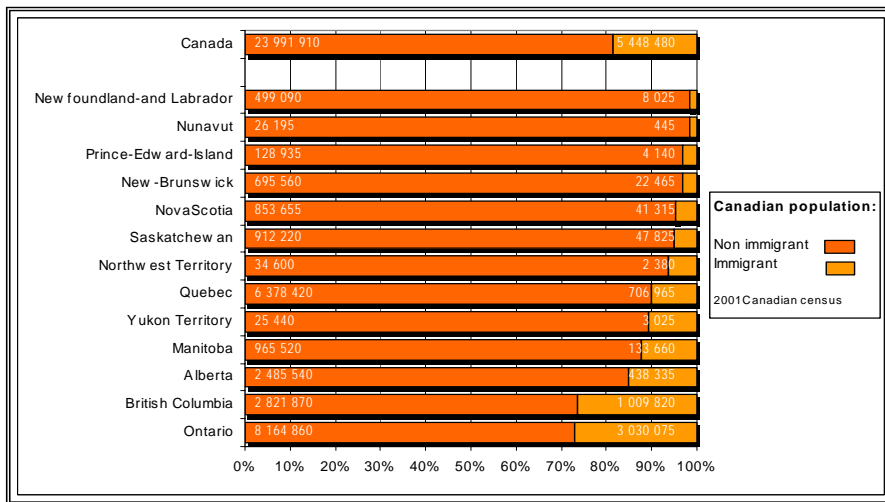


Figure 1: The importance of immigrants in Canadian provinces. (Doesn't take into account non permanent residents)

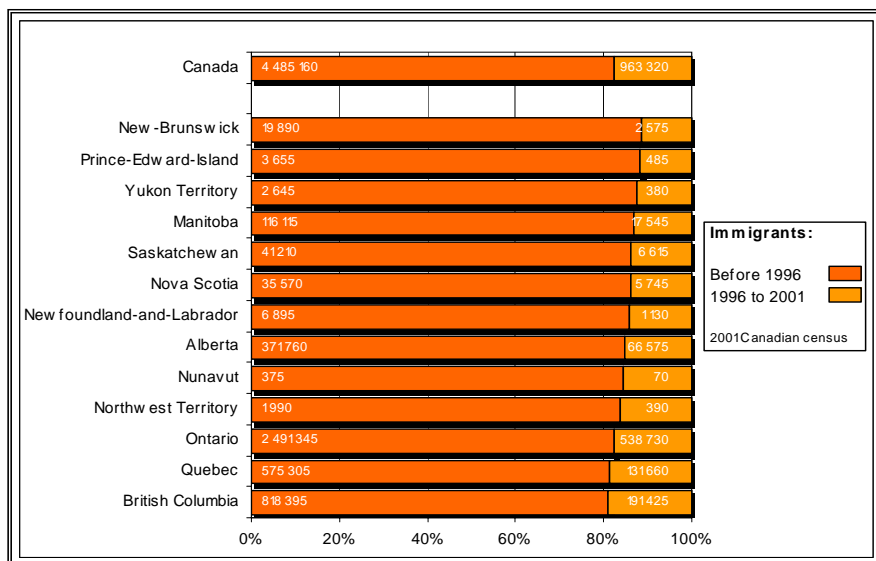


Figure 2: The importance of new immigrants in the Canadian provinces.

Table 1 and Figure 3 (all immigrants) show the spatial distribution of Iranian population among province/region of Canada. The propensity of Persian populations to be located primarily in Ontario province is obvious. The data reveal that 59% of Iranians, who consider their place of birth Iran, lived in Ontario by 2001. Ontario and British Columbia, both have created a center of attention of 85% of Iranian population. British Columbia and Quebec -largely French- together attract a large share of the Persian population (36%), while a smaller concentration is to speaking be found in Maritimes and Prairies provinces (5%). Almost 95% of the total Iranian population of Canada concentrates in three provinces, Ontario, British Columbia, and Quebec respectively.

Figure 3 and Table 1 (all migrants up to 2001, and new immigrants 1996-2001) illustrate a small change for these two periods. The new immigrants trends from 1996 to 2001 indicates that there is 1% decrease for Ontario, 2% for Quebec, and 2% increase for British Columbia, and 1% increase for Alberta. The propensity of Iranian to be located in British Columbia has increased recently. On the other hand, since second language in Iran is English, Iranians are probably more reluctant to migrate to Quebec because of the language problem.

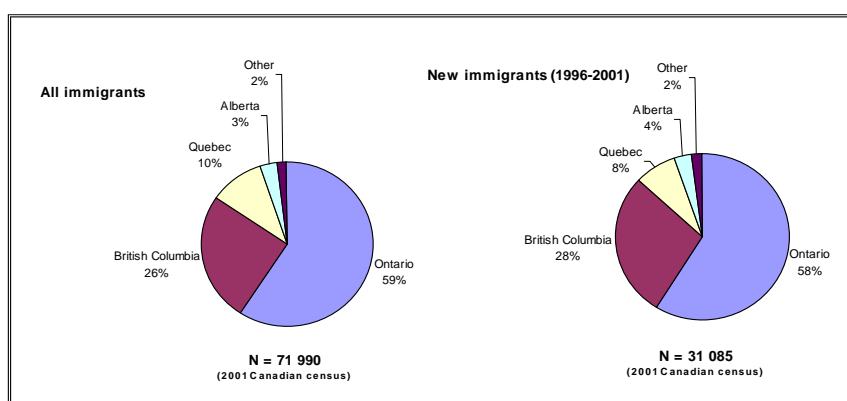


Figure 3: Spatial distribution of old and new Iranian immigrants in the Canadian provinces.

b. At the CMA level

Iranian immigrants are largely concentrated in urban areas as it can be seen from Table 2 and Figure 4. The selected cities shown here are only those having at least 50 or more Iranians migrants based on 2001 Canadian census. From Table2, it can be seen that almost all the Iranian immigrants living in Canada live in these 29 CMAs shown in this table (98%). Another interesting fact to note about Iranian immigrants is their very high tendency to live in large cities with 83% of them living in the first three largest Canadian cities.

Among these cities, Toronto, with 48.5% of all Iranian CMAs population, is on the top of all metropolitan areas. Vancouver, with 24.5% of all Persian population in CMAs, is in the second place. Montreal and Ottawa-Hull, both with 14.5%, have considerable Iranian immigrants. These four metropolitan areas attract almost 87.5% of all Iranian population. Calgary, Edmonton, Hamilton, London, Kitchener and Winnipeg, ranging from 0.6 to 2.0% of total Iranian population in Canada, are among the other CMAs with a significant Iranian population.

Based on recent Iranian immigration to Canada (Figure 4), we can see that Iranian migrants are more attracted toward smaller cities than those previously mentioned. Sherbrooke, Red Deer, Belleville, Fredericton and Saint John are, among others, examples of small CMAs (total population less than 150,000) which have attracted a significant number of Iranian migrants since 1996. It certainly shows a clear tendency toward a spatial deconcentration process in the Canadian urban hierarchy.

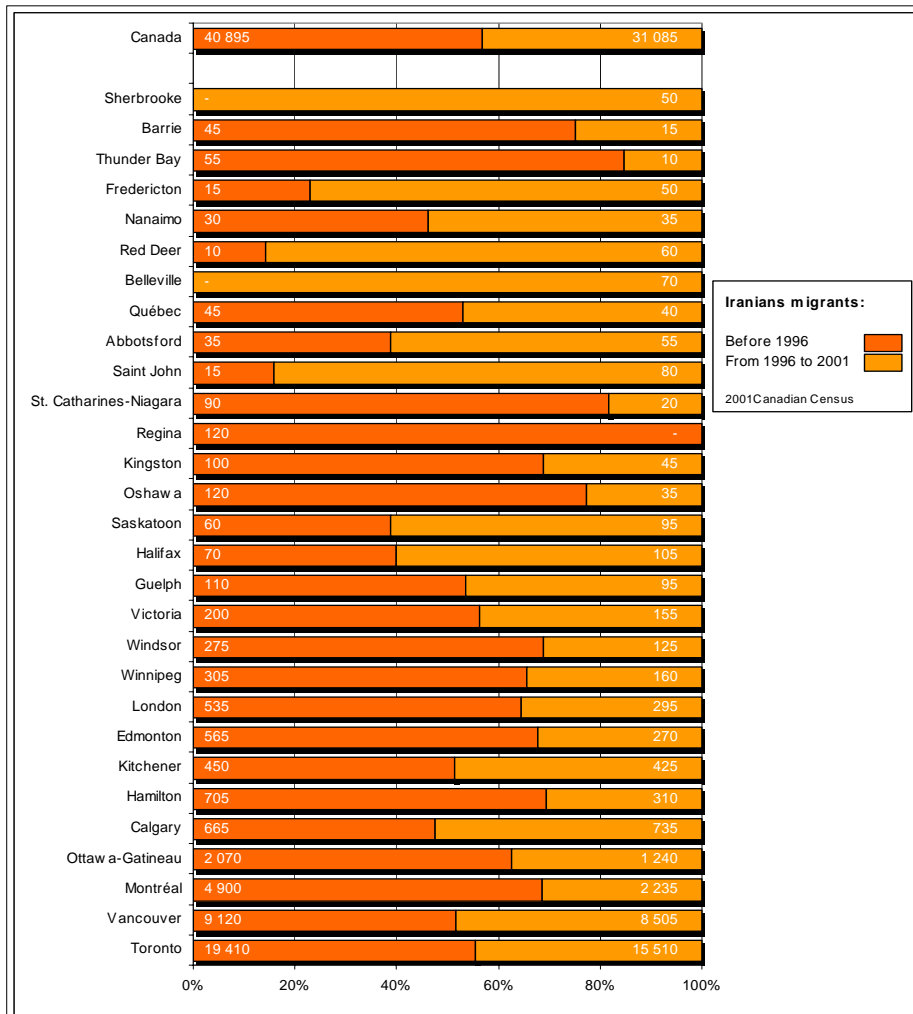


Figure 4: The importance of old and new Iranians migrants in Canadian cities.

Table 2:

Spatial distribution of Iranians migrants in Canadian cities.
 Cities with 50 or more Iranians migrants
 (2001 Canadian Census).

Cities	Periods		Total		
	Before 1996	1996-2001	N	%	%cum
Toronto	19,410	15,510	34,920	48.5%	48.5%
Vancouver	9,120	8,505	17,625	24.5%	73.0%
Montréal	4,900	2,235	7,135	9.9%	82.9%
Ottawa-Gatineau	2,070	1,240	3,310	4.6%	87.5%
Calgary	665	735	1,400	1.9%	89.5%
Hamilton	705	310	1,015	1.4%	90.9%
Kitchener	450	425	875	1.2%	92.1%
Edmonton	565	270	835	1.2%	93.2%
London	535	295	830	1.2%	94.4%
Winnipeg	305	160	465	0.6%	95.0%
Windsor	275	125	400	0.6%	95.6%
Victoria	200	155	355	0.5%	96.1%
Guelph	110	95	205	0.3%	96.4%
Halifax	70	105	175	0.2%	96.6%
Saskatoon	60	95	155	0.2%	96.8%
Oshawa	120	35	155	0.2%	97.0%
Kingston	100	45	145	0.2%	97.2%
Regina	120	-	120	0.2%	97.4%
St. Catharines-Niagara	90	20	110	0.2%	97.6%
Saint John	15	80	95	0.1%	97.7%
Abbotsford	35	55	90	0.1%	97.8%
Québec	45	40	85	0.1%	97.9%
Belleville	-	70	70	0.1%	98.0%
Red Deer	10	60	70	0.1%	98.1%
Nanaimo	30	35	65	0.1%	98.2%
Fredericton	15	50	65	0.1%	98.3%
Thunder Bay	55	10	65	0.1%	98.4%
Barrie	45	15	60	0.1%	98.5%
Sherbrooke	-	50	50	0.1%	98.6%
Canada	40,895	31,085	71,980	98.6%	98.6%

c. At the intra-urban level.

To show how the Iranian population is distributed in space, inside urban areas, we will analyze their residential areas in the following sections. This analysis will be done for the first five most important Canadian CMAs based on the size of their Iranian community. These are: Toronto, Vancouver, Montréal, Ottawa-Gatineau and Calgary.

i. Montreal

The size of the Iranian community in Montreal was 7,135 in 2001 that is near 10% of the total Iranian population, the third largest Iranian community in Canada. As Figure 5 shows, most of the Montreal Iranian community live in the central part of the Montreal CMA. For the CMA, at the CSD level, we can see that some of them live in the western part of the CMA, for example in Laval, Pierrefonds, and Dollard-des-Ormeaux. Also, there are some Iranian in Longueuil, Saint-Laurent, LaSalle, and Verdun. Finally, some other CSDs have a significant Iranian population like Brossard, Beaconsfield, Lachine, L'Île-Bizard, Point-clear, Kirkland, Ste-Anne-de-Bellevue, and Dorval. All the other CSDs in the Montreal CMA are almost ignored by the Iranians.

Inside the city of Montreal, at the census tract level, we can identify some neighborhoods where the Iranian community is largely concentrated. For example, the western part of the downtown area, including l'Île des Soeurs, seem to be an important residential area. Farther west, Notre-Dame-de-Grâce, with Côte-Saint-Luc, appears as another very important residential area for Iranians. Finally, on the South Shore, Longueuil contains a significant Iranian population.

ii. Ottawa-Gatineau

The Iranian community in Ottawa-Gatineau was 3,310 in 2001 (4,6% of the total Iranian population in Canada, the fourth largest). As shown on Figure 6, the Iranian community is mostly located on the Ontario side of the CMA. In fact, Iranians mostly live in the Ottawa CSD, that is in the city of Ottawa as such which concentrate 3,150 Iranians (over 95% of the Ottawa-Gatineau Iranian community). Other concentrations are also found elsewhere, especially in Aylmer (Quebec side), farther away from the center of the metropolitan area, but with a much more lower size (only 56 to 65 individuals for Aylmer) . There

are also a small number of Iranian in Hull, Gatineau and Chelsea, and Clarence Rockland.

At the census tract level, it seems that the Iranian are clearly attracted to the central part of the city, near the downtown area and along the Rideau River, and in some inner-city neighborhoods (south of the Queensway). Another area appears as an important residential area in the western part of the city (Kanata). Elsewhere, the presence of this community remains fairly low.

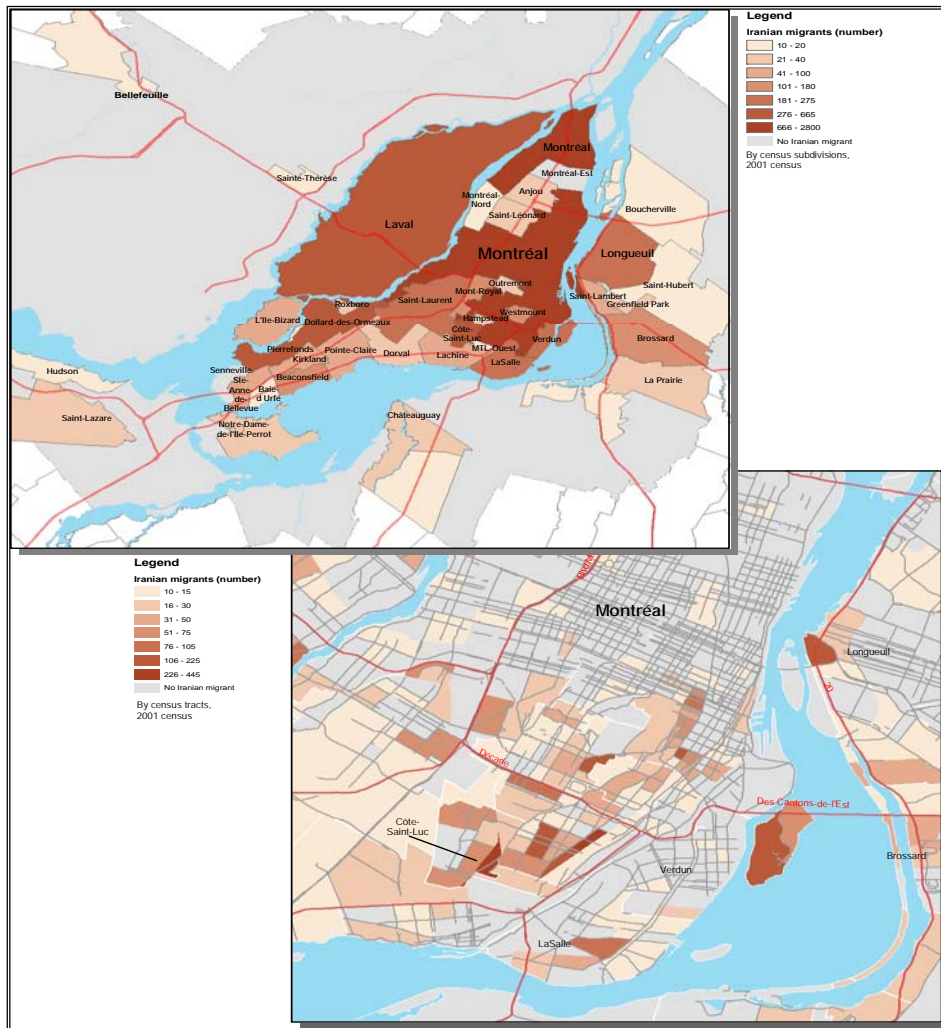


Figure 5: The spatial distribution of Iranian migrants in Montreal. (by census subdivisions and by census tracts, 2001).

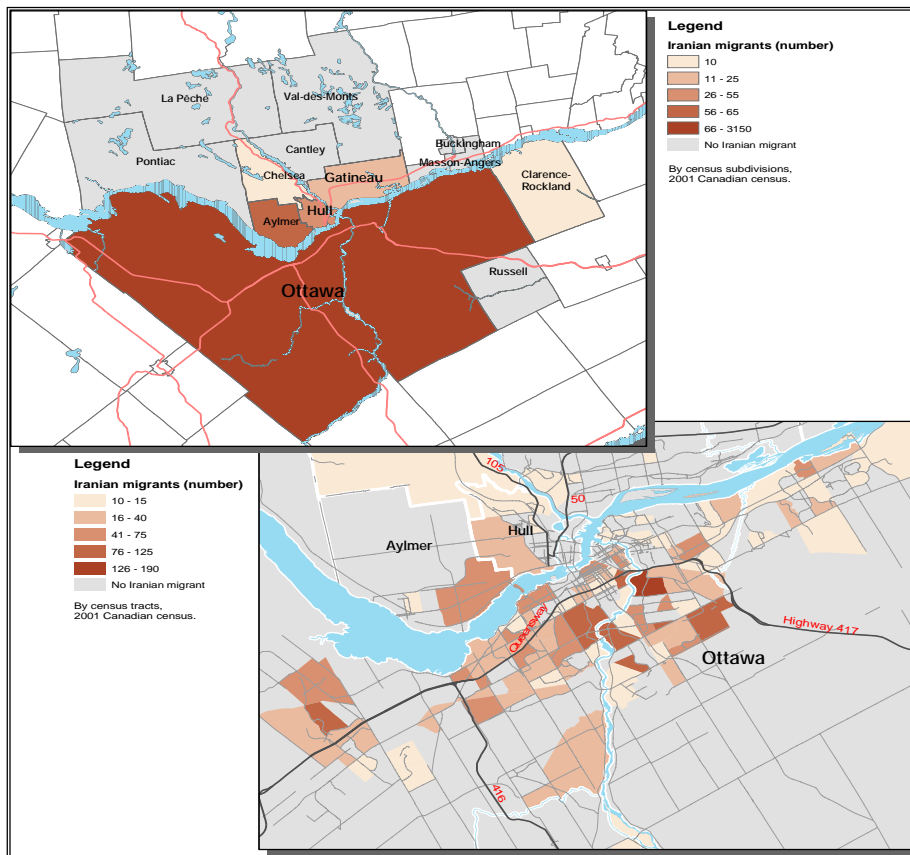


Figure 6: The spatial distribution of Iranian migrants in Ottawa-Gatineau (by census subdivisions and by census tracts, 2001).

iii. Toronto

The Toronto Iranian community is by far the most important one in Canada with a size of nearly 35,000 persons in 2001, that is over 58% of the total Iranian population in Canada.

As Figure 7 illustrate, it seems that this community is more spatially dispersed in Toronto than it was the case in Montréal or Ottawa-Gatineau. Even if a large number of the Iranians concentrate in three CSD of Toronto metropolitan areas (Toronto, Markham, and Mississauga), significant

concentrations of Iranians are found in peripheral CSDs such as Vaughan, Brampton, and Oakville. Those facts indicate that there is a general tendency for Persian to live in Toronto suburbs. Compared to other Iranian communities in Canada, one can see this behaviour as a clear sign of their adaptation to Canadian society.

The analysis of the Iranian residential areas, at the census tract, reinforces this impression that the Iranian community in Toronto seem to be more adapted the Canadian society. Indeed, this analysis reveals that these areas are not localized near the downtown area, as it was the case for Montréal or Ottawa-Gatineau, but much farther away from the CBD area, for example near the intersection of Don Valley and 401 highways and in Richmond Hill.

iv. Calgary

In Calgary, the size of the Iranian community was 1,400 persons in 2001, constituting almost 2% of the total Iranian population. An interesting fact to note about this community is that it is growing rapidly. Indeed, Figure 4 shows that among the most important Canadian CMAs for the Iranian migrants, it is the one that has the highest percentage of new Iranian migrants (since 1996).

The Calgary CSD is the best expression of Iranian tendency to live near the core of the city (Figure 8). In fact, all the persons reporting Iran as country of birth, for the Calgary metropolitan area, live in the CSD of Calgary. However, this does not involve they live necessarily in the same neighborhood. In fact, three residential areas clearly appear in Figure 8. The first one is located near the center of the city, just south of the Trans Canada Highway. The other two are located in the suburbs but in the opposite direction, one being located in the northern part of the city, the other to the south.

v. Vancouver.

The Vancouver Iranian community is the second largest after Toronto with over 17,000 persons in 2001 (near 25% of the total Iranian population in Canada). This population is still growing since, like in Calgary, recent Iranian migration has been quite significant (see Figure 4).

Inside the Vancouver CMA, the Iranian population is mostly concentrated in three central CSDs: Vancouver, North Vancouver(C) and North Vancouver (DM) (Figure 9). However, some peripheral CSDs like West Vancouver, Burnaby, and Coquitlam still contain a significant Iranian population which

demonstrate a certain level of dispersion in this CMA . Indeed, some Iranian communities have developed quite far away from the core area such as in Richmond, Port Coquitlam, Great Vancouver, and Surrey. It seems that the Iranians in Vancouver area are more spread than in any other metropolitan area of the country.

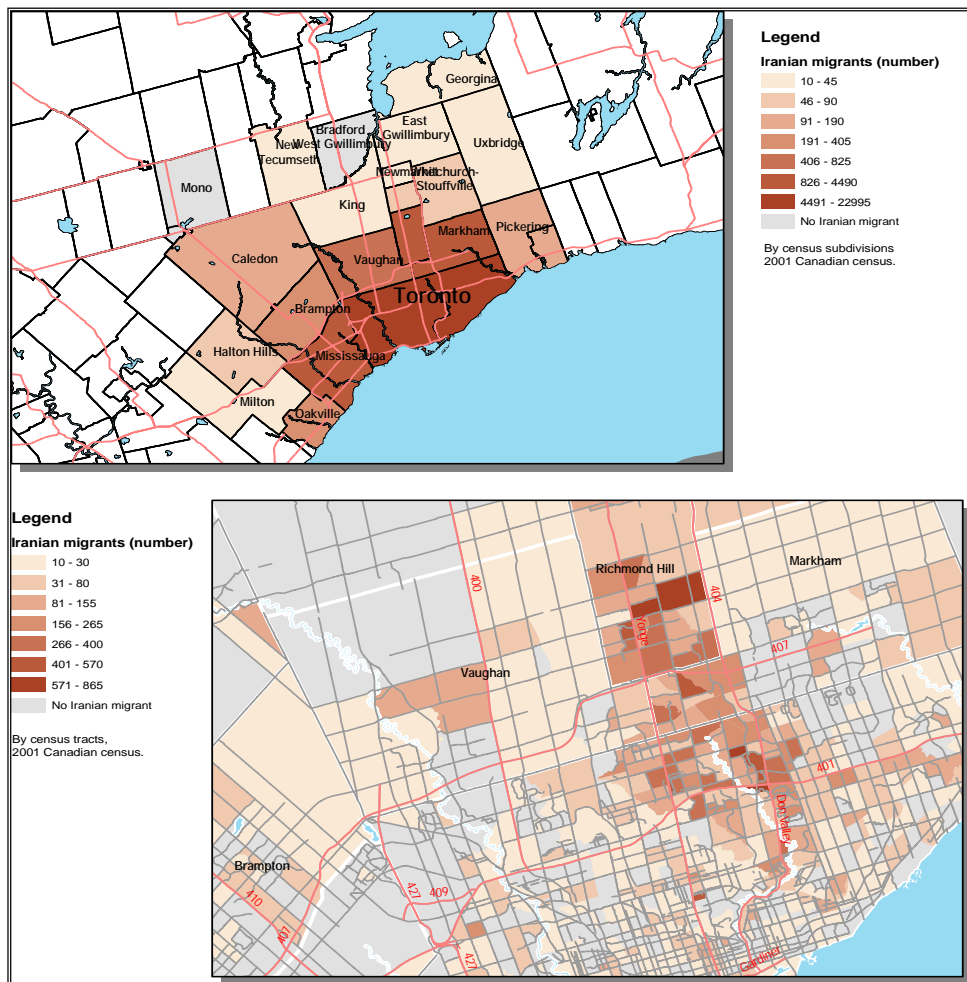


Figure 7: The spatial distribution of Iranian migrants in Toronto (by census subdivisions and by census tracts, 2001)

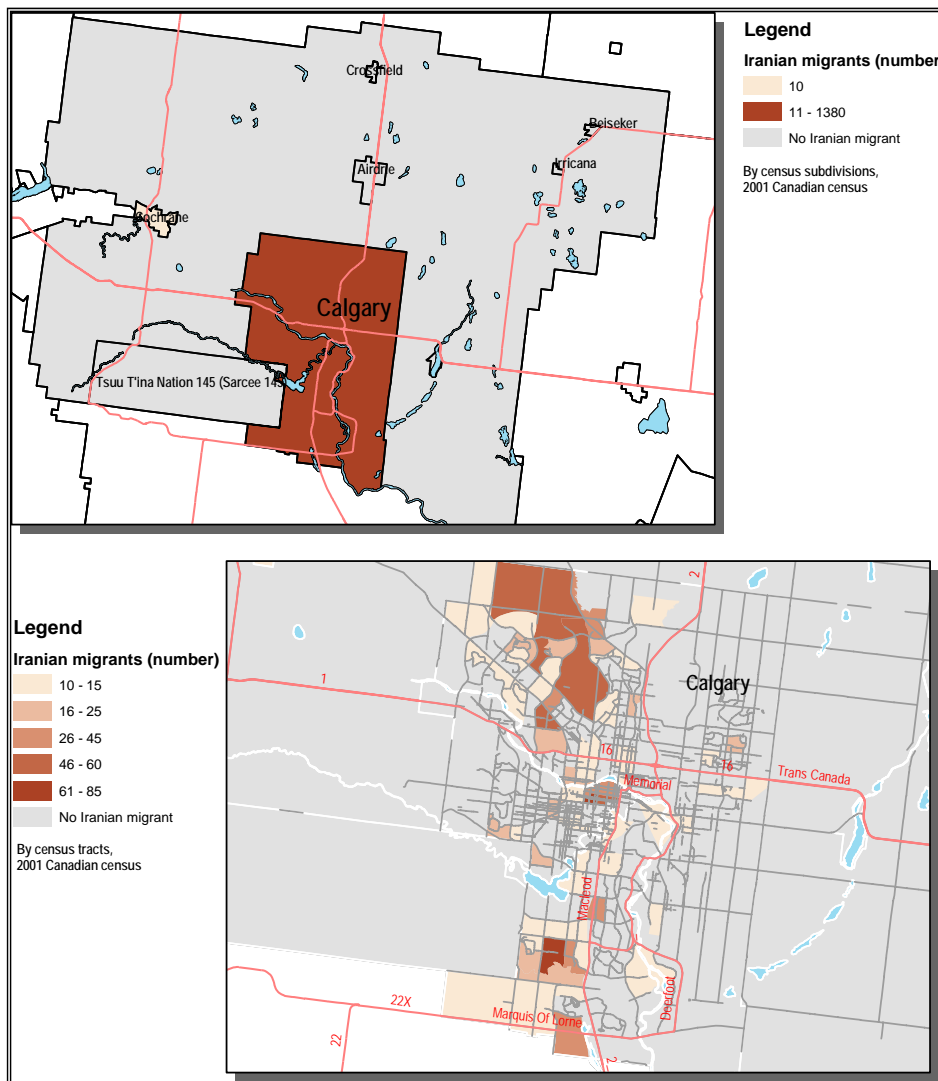


Figure 8: The spatial distribution of Iranian migrants in Calgary (by census subdivisions and by census tracts, 2001).

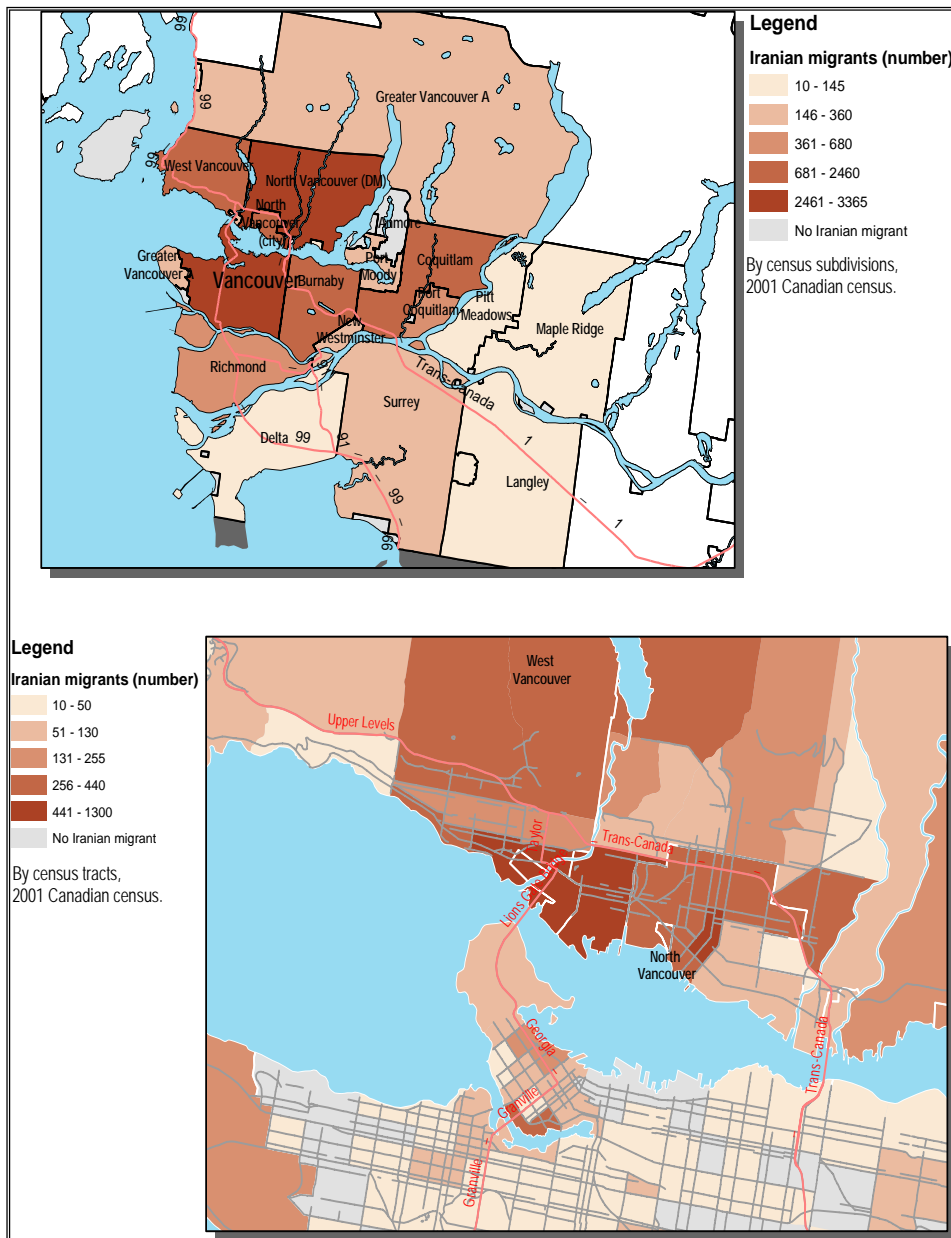


Figure 9: The spatial distribution of Iranian migrants in Vancouver (by census subdivisions and by census tracts, 2001).

5- Conclusion

The objective of this article was to give a detailed portrait of the Iranian community in Canada using 2001 data. The present location of the Iranian has been analyzed at different spatial levels. This portrait has shown that near 72,000 Iranians are formally living in Canada. They are mostly located in urban areas with Toronto having the most important Iranian community. Vancouver, Montreal and Ottawa-Gatineau are other urban areas containing an important Iranian community. Among the Canadian provinces, Ontario comes first for the size of its Iranian community, followed by British Columbia and Quebec.

With regard to framework of this study, Iranian migration is an investment in increasing the potential of the human being; which can be refer to it as an investment in human capital, that is, an investment in increasing the productivity of human resources. Iranian migrants' benefits also include a possible increase in the level of amenities, cultural facilities, and access to relatively superior public goods. The public good component is especially important in choosing the destination cities.

Back to urban areas, the residential areas of the Iranian communities are not always located near the center as it is often the case for ethnic minorities living in North American cities. In fact, in Toronto, the Iranian community occupies areas quite far from the city center which may indicate a high level of integration to Canadian society in this city. However, it seems that, for the most recent Iranian migrants, the Maritimes is becoming more attractive whereas Quebec is less attractive as a region of destination. At the CMA level, CMAs like Calgary and Vancouver are among the most popular destination for Iranian migrant especially among the most recent ones.

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