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“The office and the CA: Federal MPs’ district offices and staff in the provision of immigration services in Canada”

Immigration lawyers, immigration consultants, educational institutions and community organizations who provide immigration services have been studied as key actors of the landscape of immigration services in Canada. This talk will investigate the place and role of federal MP offices and their constituency assistants (CAs) in this field of players that deal with Canada’s thick immigration bureaucracy. Scant past research has noted that the level and type of services provided by MP district offices vary. This situation creates inequalities among constituents in their access to this unique resource with privileged access to information from IRCC and other governmental agencies. This talk will investigate this situation further by addressing three questions. First, how are MP offices and the constituency assistants who do immigration work located in the constellation of services? To what extent and why are they key actors? Second, what are the factors that determine the level and type of services offered across MP offices in Canada? Third, what is the role of discretion in the office in shaping services provided? Based on quantitative data (administrative data and original survey data from 117 of the 338 offices) and a set of 33 qualitative interviews with constituency assistants, this talk will begin to unpack and theorize the role played by this very important, and yet understudied, actor.