

UNDERSTANDING CANADA'S IMMIGRATION AND REFUGEE BOARD THROUGH ROMANI CASES AND ISSUES

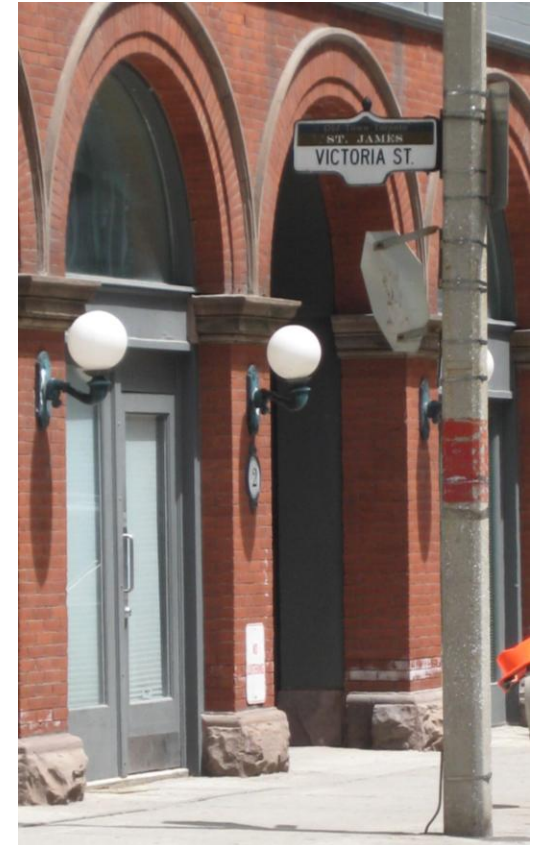
Presentation for the Migration and Ethnic Relations Program Colloquium,
University of Western Ontario

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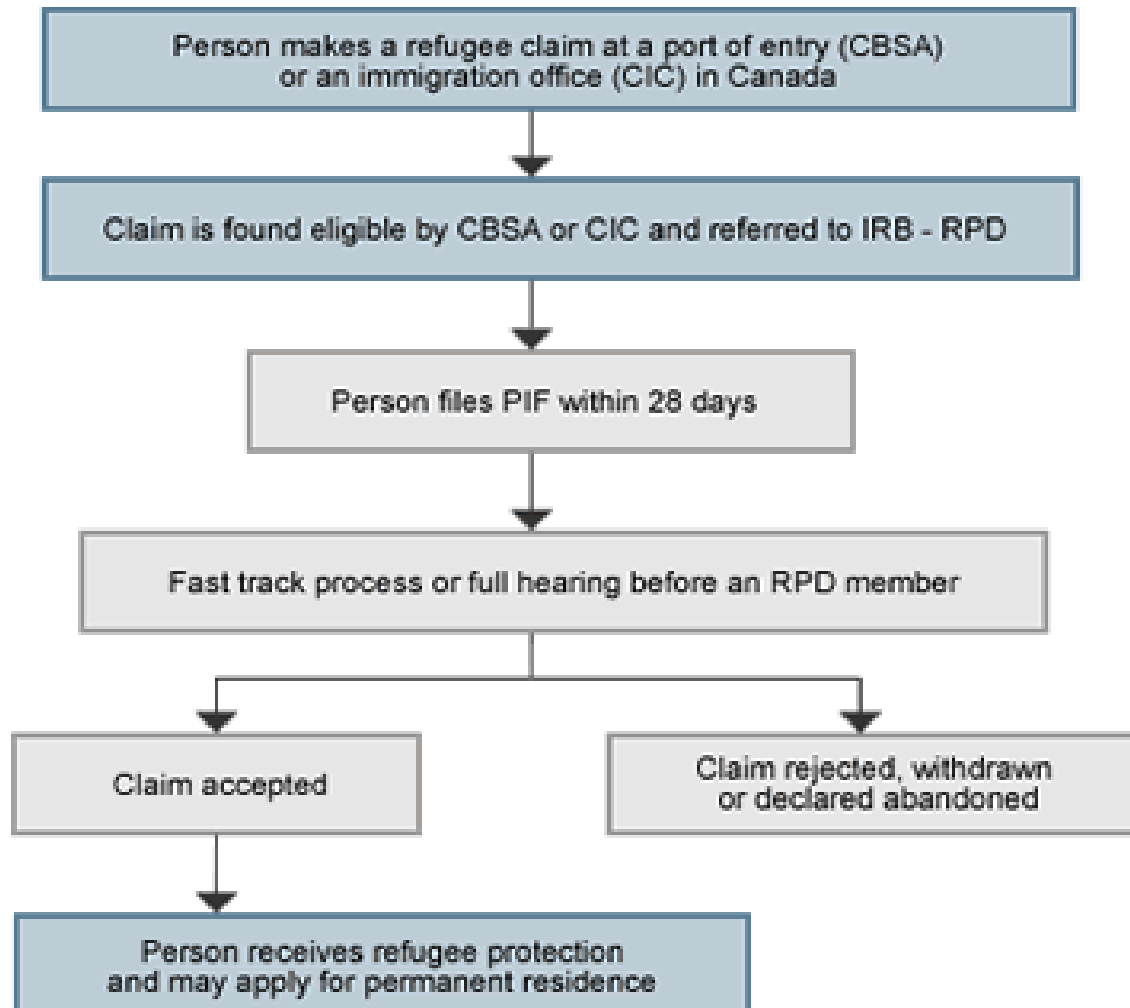
What is the Immigration and Refugee Board?

- ❑ Canada's "largest independent administrative tribunal" (IRB 2010)
- ❑ Refugee Protection Division decides claims made by people in Canada; Citizenship and Immigration (CIC) decides refugee claims made outside of Canada
- ❑ 74 Victoria Street, Toronto

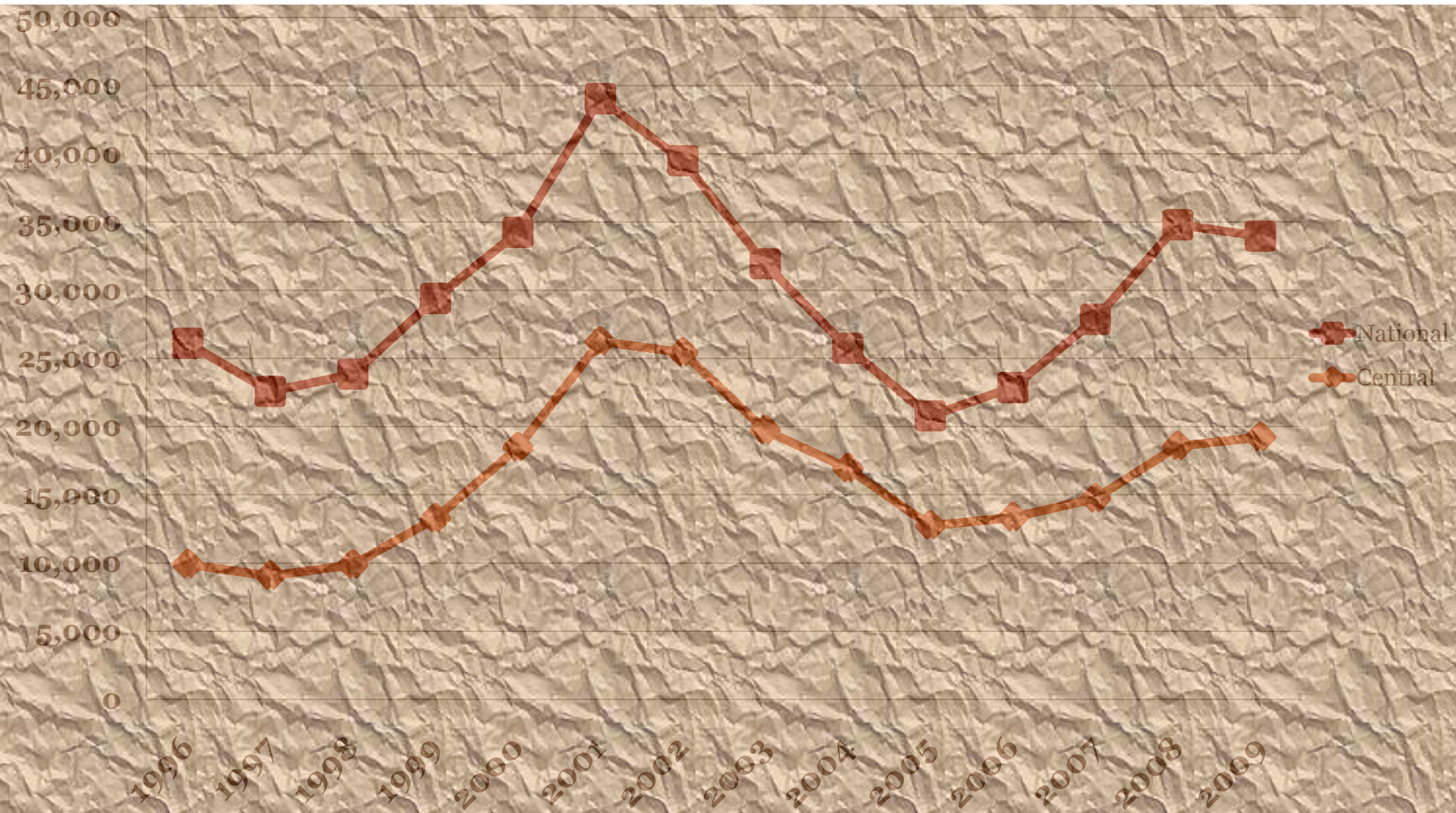


What is the Immigration and Refugee Board?

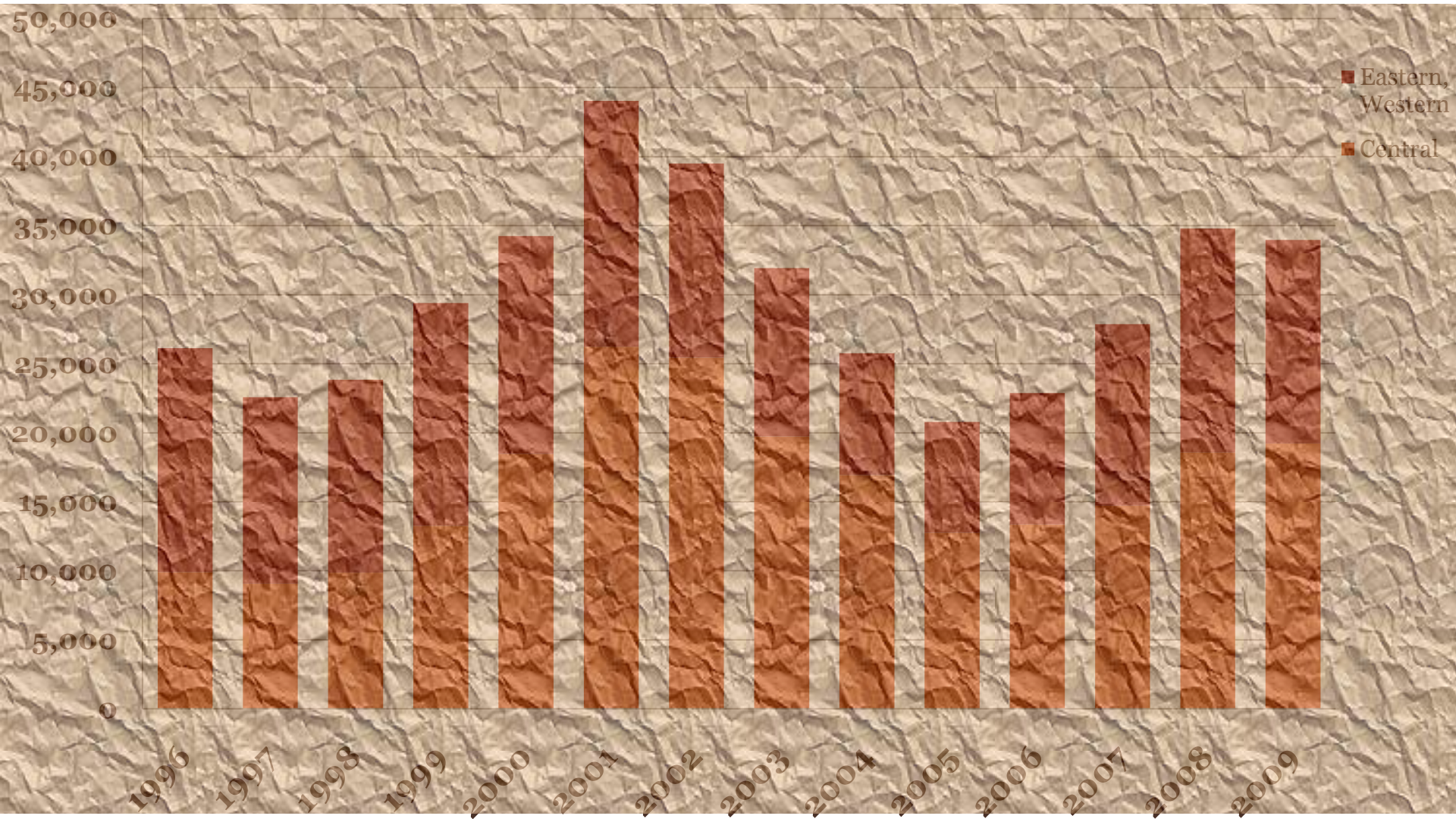
- Overview of process
- Official lingo
 - Referred
 - Pending
 - Finalized
 - Accepted
 - Rejected
 - Withdrawn
 - Abandoned



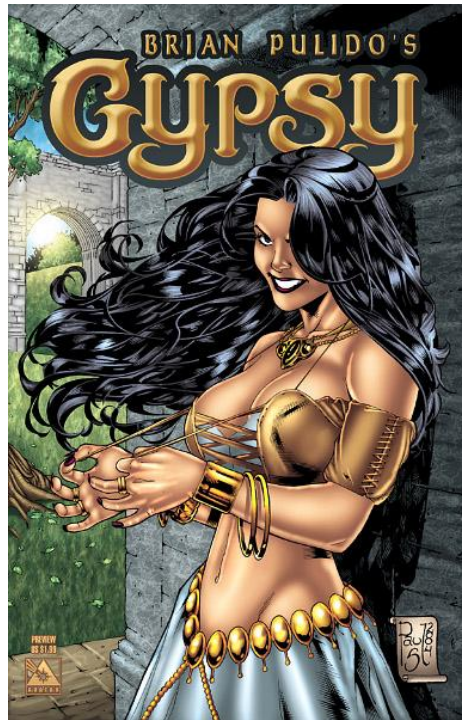
National and Central Comparison of Referred Claims



National and Central Referred Claims, alternative view



“Gypsy” stereotypes



Romani Realities

- ❑ Persecuted ethnic minority
- ❑ Slavery, genocide, forced sterilization, forced adoptions, etc.
- ❑ Every-day human rights abuses and violence, fire bombings, beatings, etc.
- ❑ Lack of state/police protection

Slovakia plans forced school for Roma children

BY TOM PARRY ON MAR 14, 10 11:22 AM IN ROMA



Taking children from their parents to be forcibly placed in boarding schools does not sound like something that happens in modern-day Europe.

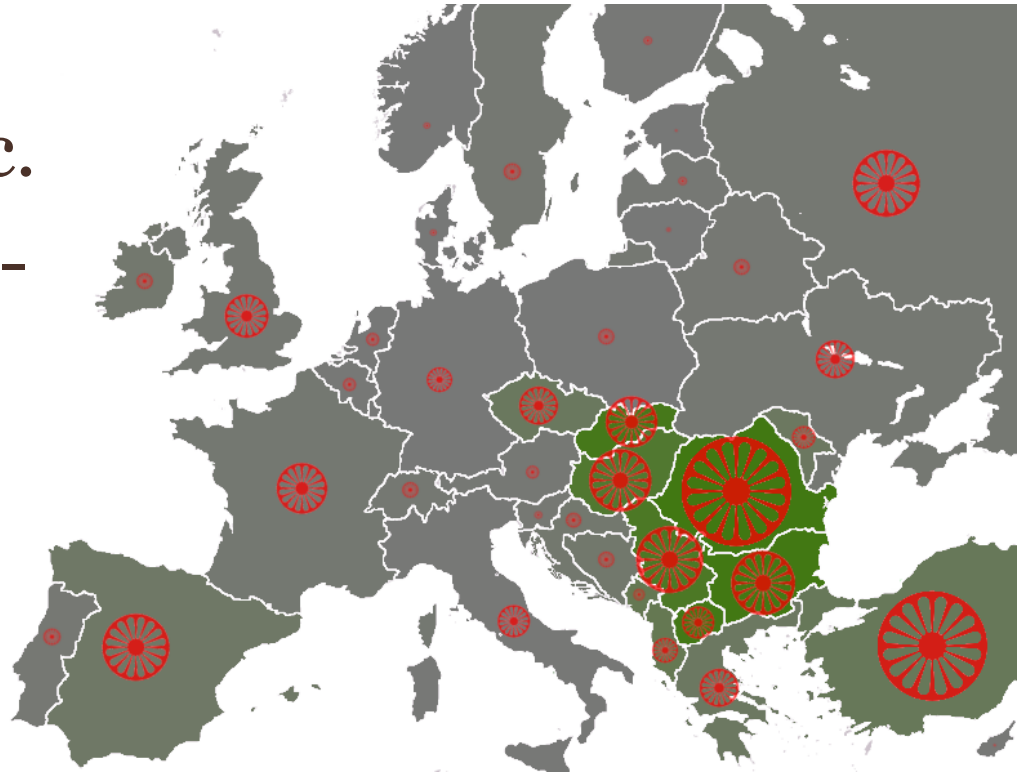
Amnesty, however, claims this policy is exactly what is proposed in Slovakia

<http://blogs.mirror.co.uk/developing-world-stories/2010/03/slovakia-plans-forced-school-f.html>

Who are Romani people?

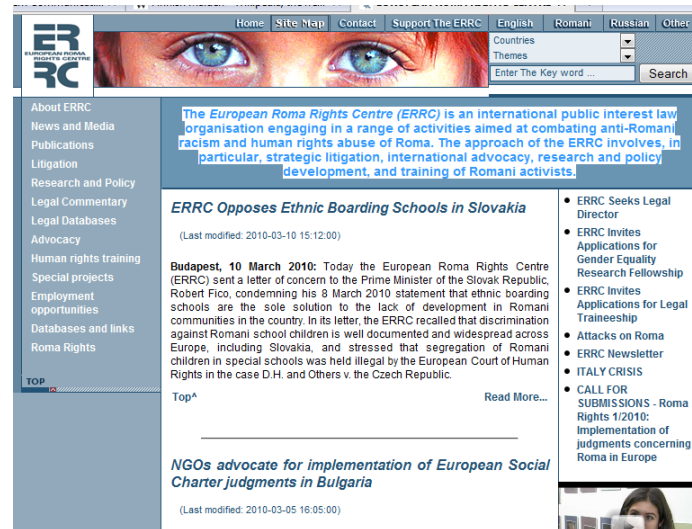


- Many names—
Romany, Rroma,
Romanichal, Sinti, etc.
- Originally from north-
west India
- Europe's largest non-
territorial ethnic
minority
- 5 – 20 million



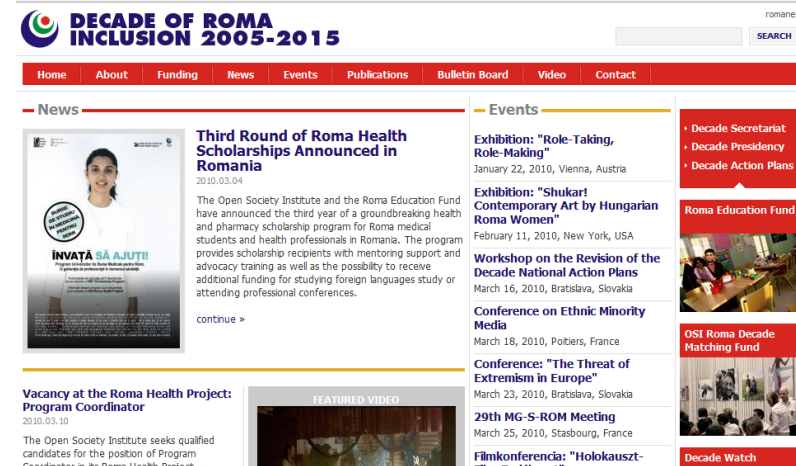
Romani Organizations

- ❑ European Roma Rights Centre (ERRC)
 - ❑ Roma Rights Journal
- ❑ International Romani Union
 - ❑ World Romani Congress
 - 1971, 1978, 1981, 1990, 2000, 2004
 - ❑ International Roma Day – April 8
- ❑ European Roma Information Office (ERIO)
- ❑ Roma Virtual Network



Decade of Roma Inclusion 2005 - 2015

- Vision and values statement
 - *Nothing about us without us:* Roma participation will make or break the Decade. Roma representatives and civil society organizations are involved in every stage of the Decade. Roma shaped and defined the vision from the very outset. Roma civil society groups and experts identified policy priorities and played a key role in defining Decade goals and targets. Roma participation will be central to regular oversight and monitoring of the process over the next ten years. (From the Declaration of the Decade of Roma Inclusion, signed in Sofia, Bulgaria, Feb. 2005)
- Founding international partner organizations
 - World Bank, UN Development Program, Council of Europe, UNHCR, Open Society Institute, and more
- 12 European countries



Romani refugees and Roma in Canada

- ❑ Roma Community Centre, Toronto
- ❑ Transnational networks spanning centuries



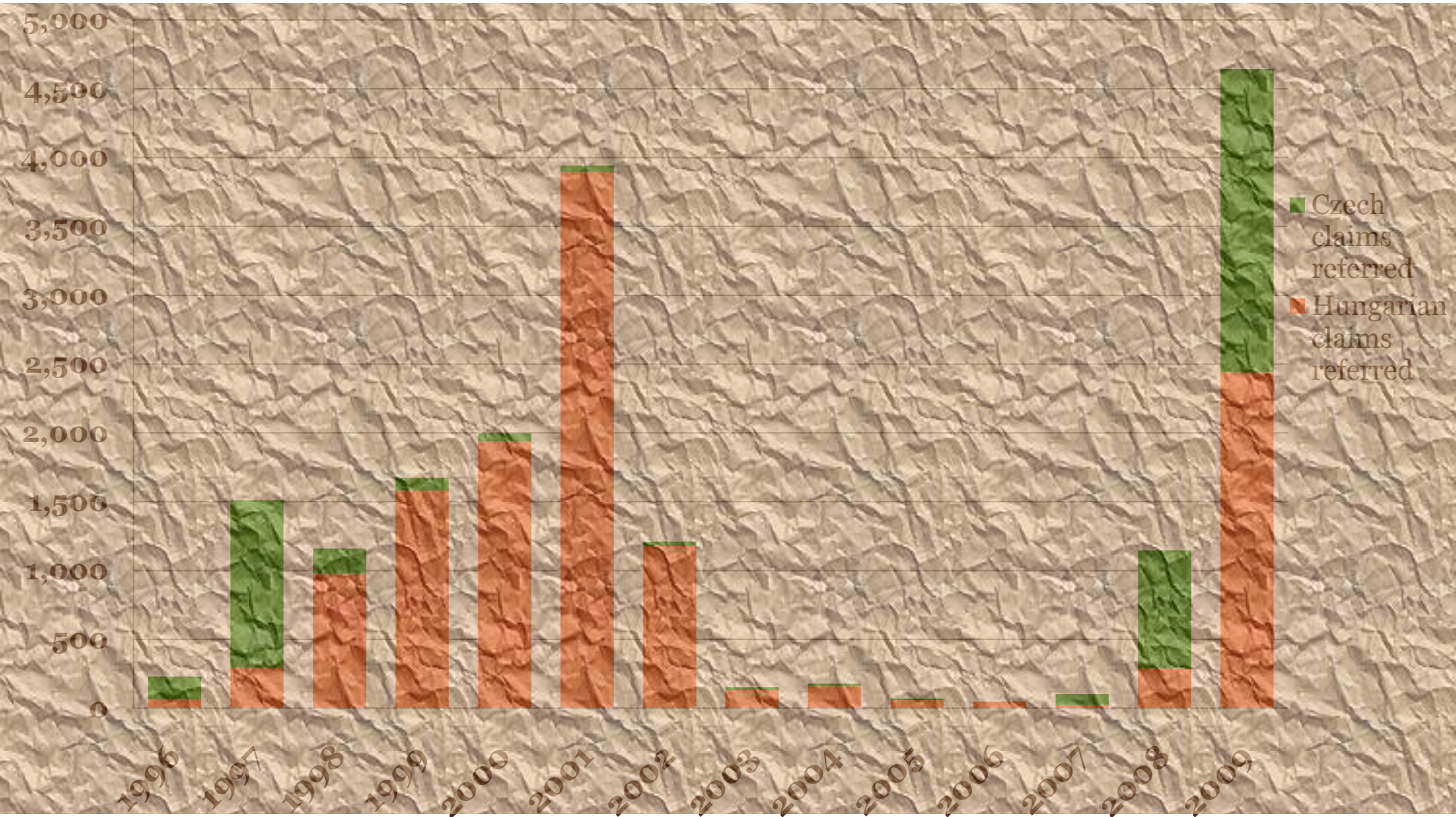
Painting by JoEllen Brydon depicting the Gypsy caravans and wedding feast that took place in Peterborough, Ontario, 1909.

Past Research

- Oulu, Finland
2002-2003
 - Kale/Kaale (from *kàlo* = black); *Mustalaiset*
 - Virtually invisible
 - Traditional dress
 - Social welfare system interesting comparison for Canadian system



National Referred Claims by Nationality



Why this research now?

- ❑ The IRB as a relatively new institution with many significant changes in the last 10 years
- ❑ Policies that affect claimants, all Canadians, international relations, transnational communities, and more
- ❑ Refugee issues intertwined with immigration policies, including public attitudes
- ❑ November 2007: lifting visa restrictions
- ❑ July 2009: re-imposing visa restrictions

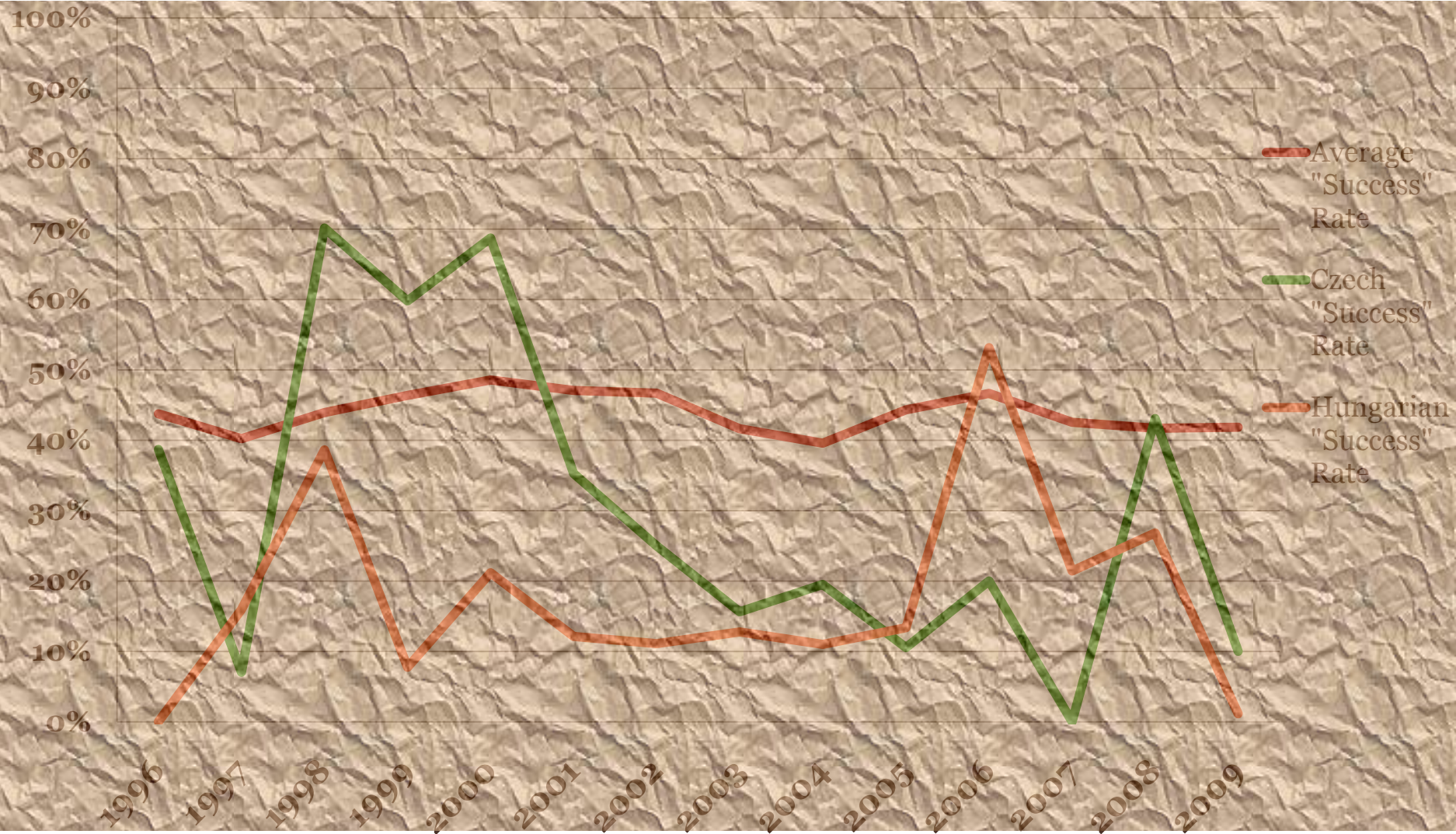
Why anthropology?

- ❑ Issues of representation, identity, agency, history, memory, as well as the varied and heterogeneous effects of displacement, discrimination, persecution, violence, etc.
- ❑ Ethnographic fieldwork, in-depth interviews and participant-observation lead to insights gained from long-term contact with informants.
- ❑ The anthropology of policy – to reconfigure supposedly neutral or apolitical statistics and numbers. Part of a holistic platform to understand lived experiences, emphasize urgency: speak the language of the policy-makers.

National Acceptance Rates



National “Success” Rates



Dear Mr. Kenney...

- “It’s hard to believe that the Czech Republic is an island of persecution in Europe...[We need to] prevent people from abusing our very generous refugee determination system.”
(Canwest News 2009)
- “The sheer volume of these claims is undermining our ability to help people fleeing *real* persecution.” (CIC 2009, emphasis added)

Canada cuts refugee targets for 2010

BY NORMA GREENAWAY, CANWEST NEWS SERVICE NOVEMBER 2, 2009



Refugees who fled the conflict in Sudan's western Darfur region peek through a hole in a shelter. Canada plans to cut substantially the number of refugees it will accept in the coming year from people who make their claim after arriving in the country, according to new government figures.

Photograph by: Finbarr O'Reilly, Reuters

OTTAWA — Canada expects to accept fewer refugees and family class immigrants in the coming year than this year, new government figures show.

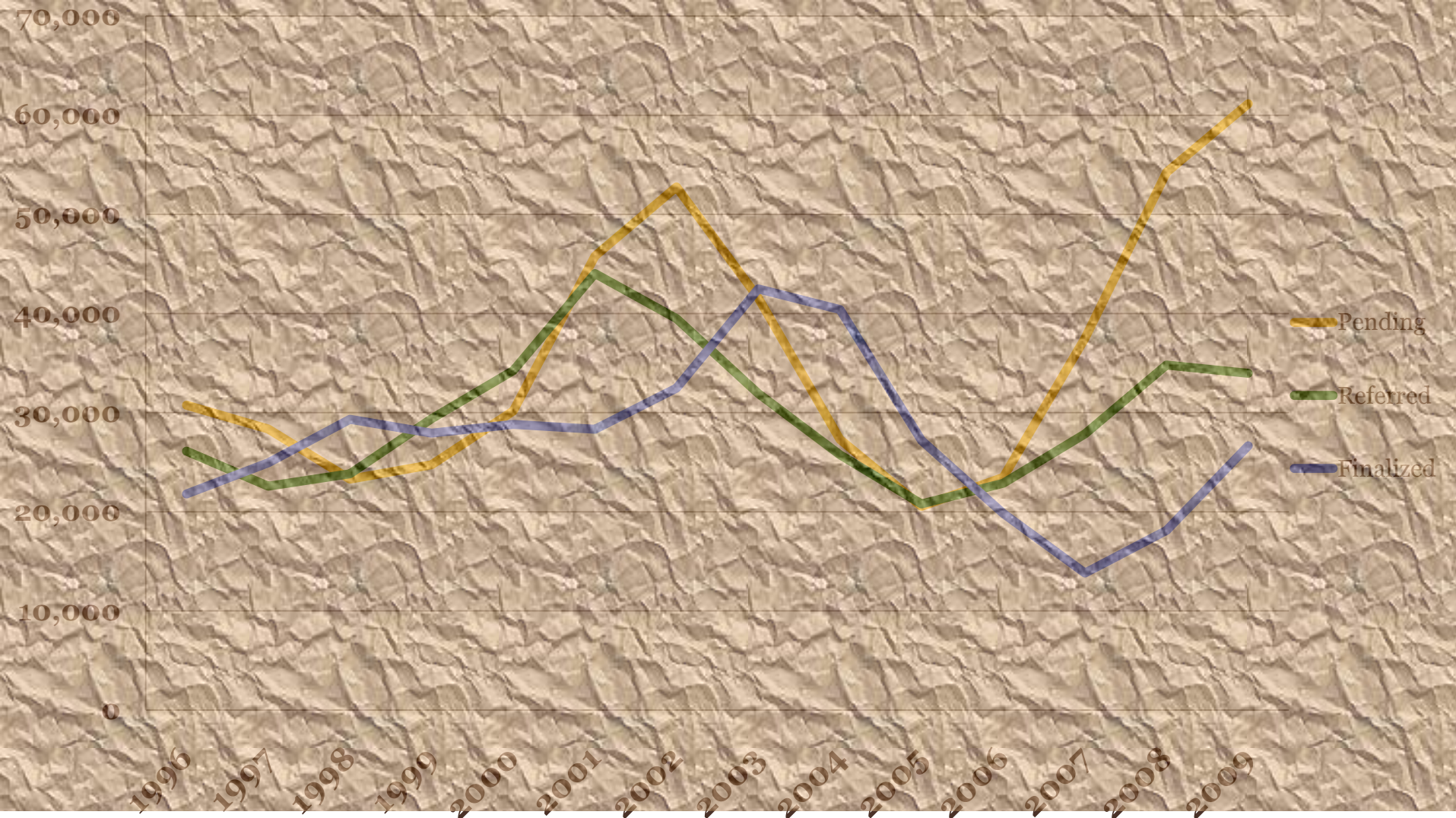
The 2010 numbers, outlined in Immigration Minister Jason Kenney's annual report to Parliament, show the government's target for accepting people who apply for asylum after they land in Canada is more than 3,000 less this year.

The maximum 2010 target number for spouses, children, parents and grandparents of immigrants is 8,000 fewer than this year's, the report says.

Kenney set the total immigration figure for next year at 240,000 to 265,000, about the same as in recent years.

The figures show the bulk of them, as many as 166,800, will be accepted under the economy class, which includes people willing to start a new business, skilled workers and live-in caregivers.

National Referred, Finalized, and Pending Claims



Conclusions

- The Canadian refugee system is not a “neutral” process
 - Human errors, misconceptions, and prejudice work to reinforce and institutionalize ethnicity-based discrimination
 - Influence by international relations and contexts
- Research is needed (from all angles)
 - Understanding lived experiences of refugee claimants and refugee communities in Canada
 - Reform is vital (Rousseau et al. 2002, Showler 2008)
 - Better training for Board Members, more accurate reports
 - Implementation of appeal process
 - Reduce backlog

Thank you

- Dr. Randa Farah, my supportive supervisor
- The Migration & Ethnic Relations program, coordinators, faculty, and peers
- Anthropology Department
- Welcoming Communities Initiative
- Roma Community Centre, especially Ronald Lee and Paul St. Clair
- IRB Documentation Centre staff