

FROM STATUS TO SCRUTINY:

**EVALUATIVE GOVERNANCE AND THE
INFRASTRUCTURES OF BELONGING IN
CONTEMPORARY MIGRATION SYSTEMS**

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Legal status is widely assumed to secure belonging

In liberal democracies like Canada:

- migrants receive legal authorization to work
- immigration systems emphasize inclusion and opportunity
- digital administration promises efficiency and fairness

(Hennebry 2012; Roberts 2020; Tazzioli 2022)

Yet stability often remains provisional

Migrants continue to encounter repeated scrutiny across administrative systems and labour markets.

Why does conditionality persist even after legal inclusion?

(Akbar 2022; Roberts 2020)

Belonging is increasingly governed through evaluation.

Concept introduced in this paper...

EVALUATIVE GOVERNANCE OF BELONGING

Belonging is not secured through a single legal event (entry, status, naturalisation).

Instead, access to:

- work
- legal continuity
- longer-term stability

is organised through ongoing assessment across multiple infrastructures.

(Kellogg et al. 2020; Noble 2018)

What “Evaluative Governance” Means

Evaluation refers to structured, repeated assessment embedded in institutional systems.

Evaluation occurs across three interconnected domains:

1. Migration administration
2. Labour-market infrastructures
3. Everyday practices of legibility

What “Evaluative Governance” Means

Migration administration

- digital application systems
- automated triage
- compliance verification

Labour-market infrastructures

- hiring platforms
- credential filters
- algorithmic screening

Everyday practices of legibility

- responsiveness
- availability
- self-monitoring

Belonging emerges through the accumulation of assessments across these sites.

(Kellogg et al. 2020; Graham et al. 2017)

Temporality and Continuous Scrutiny

Evaluative governance operates through temporal structures.

Migration systems produce:

- time-limited permits
- renewal cycles
- administrative waiting periods

Labour markets demand:

- constant availability
- rapid responsiveness
- uninterrupted participation

Migrants are therefore positioned between:
slow bureaucratic timelines
and
accelerated labour-market expectations

This produces durable precarity through time.

(Hennebry 2012; Graham et al. 2017)

Canada as an Analytically Revealing Case

Canada combines:

- extensive temporary migration programs
- labour-market-linked pathways to permanence
- expanding digital migration administration

Examples include:

- automated triage systems within IRCC
- digital application platforms
- hiring systems that translate employability into standardized signals

These infrastructures align migration governance with labour-market evaluation.

Illustration: Temporary Protection and Evaluation

Temporary protection mechanisms illustrate how belonging becomes conditional.

For example, displaced Ukrainians admitted through temporary pathways:

- receive authorization to live and work
- but remain subject to time-limited status
- must secure employment and housing through ordinary labour markets

Stability therefore depends on continued administrative and labour-market legibility.

Humanitarian inclusion remains evaluative rather than secure.

Stratified Evaluation

Exposure to evaluative governance is unevenly distributed.

Evaluation interacts with:

- legal status
- race and ethnicity
- gender
- class position

Racialised migrant women often encounter:

- intensified credential scrutiny
- occupational downgrading
- algorithmic and network-based hiring barriers

Systems therefore reproduce stratified belonging.

Evaluative governance is infrastructural

It operates through:

- platforms
- databases
- hiring systems
- administrative procedures

Evaluation becomes routine, technical, and normalised.

Insecurity is produced not through overt exclusion but through continuous scrutiny.

(Espeland & Sauder 2007; Orlikowski & Scott 2008)

Conclusion

In contemporary migration regimes:
Belonging is not secured once through legal inclusion.
It is maintained through continuous proof of value.

Migrants must remain:

- legible
- employable
- compliant
- continuously assessable

Belonging becomes:
something to be maintained rather than attained.

(Akbar 2022; Kellogg et al. 2020; Collins 2023)

Thank you

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