Projecting Canadian Social Values in Managing International Refugee Crises

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Issue

Canada could benefit from a foreign policy strategy characterized by the norms and principles which underpin Canadian social policies. For instance, social norms and principles that reinforce Canada's approach in the management of refugee crises could be strategically amplified to support international refugee crises and inform a new foreign policy strategy for Canada.

Background

Canada's approach to social policy is driven by its commitment to fundamental Canadian values of social justice, diversity, human rights, democracy, and equity (Prime Minister of Canada Justin Trudeau 2021). Whereas these values are considered to be fairly universal across Canada's multilateral partners, Canada has demonstrated a relatively unique interpretation of these values, reflected in both domestic and foreign policy postures. Expressed in governance, values are anchored in foundational legislation throughout the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, Part 1 of the Constitution Act, 1982, and have been promoted and embraced through policies of multiculturalism since 1971. Entrenching diversity, equity, anti-racism, and anti-discrimination as part of Canada's national identity supports all Canadians; especially foreign-born people who make up one-fifth of Canada's population - one of the highest ratios for industrialized Western countries (Government of Canada 2019b; Cheatham 2022; Jedwab 2011). Compassionate humanitarian policies embedded in Canada's refugee policy also illustrate Canadian commitment to support and empower vulnerable and equity deserving groups. This attitude was exemplified by welcoming of more than four thousand asylum seekers in 2020 who entered the country without authorization, unaccompanied by criminal prosecution (Cheatham 2022).

The interpretation of these values and the way in which they inform approaches to Canada's robust social policies, can be strategically emphasized and projected in Canada's multilateral interactions to: (1) reanimate Canada's role as a distinctive standard-setting power within a shifting global order and (2) demonstrate two competencies which are essential for healthy multilateral exchanges and outcomes (being relevant and having something to "bring to the table"). Canada's strength in social values and stability, by way of strong social contracts between people and government, has underpinned its relative success in areas such as education, health, and refugee policy. Given the rise of protectionist sentiments from the US and the EU, Canada has a moral obligation to lead the efforts to establish an equitable and just framework for refugees through multilateral fora, and also vitally secure the future prosperity and cultural richness of the country as a matter of national interest. The application of a standard setting approach based on inclusive social norms will also pave the way for positive relationship building and engagement with less like-minded partners, such as China, who

Canada actively trades and interacts with economically (Nagy 2021). Refugee-related challenges and opportunities are only growing exponentially and serve as a cross-cutting theme that impacts all strategic policy priorities including conflict and security, climate change, economic trade and investment, and supply chain resilience.

Characterizing the Canadian Approach to International Refugee Crises

Research indicates that Canada's approach to refugee policy is founded on principles of public engagement and participation, inter-agency and cross-sectoral collaboration, and enduring principles underpinning the Feminist International Assistance Policies (FIAP), such as gender equality, and the empowerment of women and girls.

Public Engagement and Participation

Attributable to social norms embedded in Canadian foundations surrounding newcomers, government-approved Canadians participate directly in refugee crisis response through the *Private Sponsorship of Refugees* (PSR) program. The program has welcomed over 327,000 refugees since its implementation in 1979 to support Indochinese refugees and is recognized as the most successful and longest-running PSR program in the world (Ilcan, Bueno & Manuela 2020). Legitimized under the *1976 Immigration Act,* the PSR program allows private sponsors that include groups of five or more Canadian citizens or community, cultural, humanitarian, or faith-based organizations to provide substantial assistance. This program, in addition to Canada's Government-Assisted Refugees (GAR), provides meaningful social assistance through language training, employment support, education resources, the acquisition of homes, and other materials (Ilcan, Bueno & Manuela 2020). In 2017, *the Canadian Race Relations Foundation* (CRRF) highlighted that respect for human rights, freedoms and equality are the most important values to Canadians (Our Canada Report 2017, p. 6). This strong linkage between democratic values, social policy norms, and processes in Canada is embedded in the relationships between Canadians and the government, which encourage and promote the "sharing of responsibility for global crises" among Canadians as global citizens (Ilcan, Bueno, Manuela 2020). An estimated 2 million Canadians have reported being personally involved in supporting the resettlement of the 44,620 Syrian

refugees who were welcomed to Canada since 2015, of which more than half were supported by the PSR program (IRCC 2020). The sustainability and high yielding results of the PSR program are attributable to "a community [of] practice, a routine action that is part of a collective commitment, a way of connecting local community actions to global politics of injustice and displacement" (Hyndman, et al. 2021).

Inter-agency and Cross-sectoral Collaboration

Internationally, Canada continues to mobilize international donors to provide humanitarian assistance for those affected by refugee crises. This leadership is exemplified through the *International Donors' Conference in Solidarity with Venezuelan Refugees and Migrants* and committing $115.4 million CAD in humanitarian assistance to Venezuelan refugees and migrants in collaboration with the UNHCR, the UN Refugee Agency, and the IOM (Government of Canada 2021a). Domestic collaboration among cross-sectoral partnerships and initiatives between settlement organizations, sponsors, Sponsorship Agreement Holders (SAH), and community members (social service agencies, business groups, ethnocultural groups, government representatives, etc) are based on "common goals, trust, and respect" and can be found across municipalities (Kitchener-Waterloo, Toronto, and Etobicoke); grassroots organizations such as Lifeline Syria, Refugee Sponsorship Training Program (RSTP), and Helping Newcomers Work (Allies for Refugee Integration 2019).

Feminist International Assistance Policies (FIAP): Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women and Girls

Canada's crosscutting approach to gender equality, emphasized internationally through FIAP is embedded in its approach to refugee crises responses and humanitarian assistance to be: (1) inclusive of women in decision-making planning, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation, and consultation in projects, and (2) empowering of all who face discrimination by recognizing the intersectionality's that exist, and proving these vulnerable groups with adequate and equitable support (Global Affairs Canada 2017). With a primary goal to address SDG 5 - achieving gender equality and empowering all women and girls- Canada has fostered integrated humanitarian development, peace and security support, as well as refugee resettlement initiatives. This is

exemplified by Canada's establishment of 29 community centers in refugee camps and communities in Kurdistan to provide emergency care for female survivors of sexual violence (Global Affairs Canada 2017). Further, almost half of Canada's investments in the Middle East and Maghreb, in part under the objectives of the Middle East Strategy were fully gender integrated or targeted (Global Affairs Canada 2017). These are representative of Canada's value-based commitment to gender equality as a core action area of Canada's FIAP, as well as the additional action areas highlighted by the FIAP strategy; action areas include, human dignity, growth that works for everyone, environment and climate action, inclusive governance, peace and security (Government of Canada, 2021e).

Canadian Approaches to the Syrian, Afghani, and Ukrainian Refugee Crises

Canada has made considerable progress in refugee resettlement: resettling 44,620 Syrian refugees since November 2015; 13,050 Afghan refugees since August 2021; and 6,100 Ukrainian refugees since January 2022 (Government of Canada 2021b; 2022a; 2022b). Currently, Canada has two systems in place guiding refugee settlement through immigration policies. Between the *Refugee and Humanitarian Resettlement* Program for people who need protection from outside Canada and a domestic Asylum Program for refugees to make protection claims while residing in the country, these programs inform Canadian responses during an international crisis (Government of Canada 2019). However, for each crisis, specialized and differentiating systems were put in place: *Operation Syrian Refugees* for Syrians; priority processing, waiving application fees and additional requirements, and implementing a special family reunification program for Afghans; the *Canadian-Ukraine Authorization for Emergency Travel* (CUAET) and the acceptance of a non-limited number of refugees for Ukrainians (Government of Canada 2021b; Government of Canada 2021c; Government of Canada 2022c). Whereas it is recognized that policy approaches will always be subject to context, emphasizing that common norms and principles underpin the existing two-track system for processing international refugees would give Canada a story to tell, and contribute to sharing standard-setting and good practice in multilateral fora.

Canada's approach to refugee crisis response suffers from elements of inconsistency, as exemplified by the unique pathways to asylum introduced solely for Ukrainian refugees (Su 2022; Government of Canada 2022c). Further, Canada's approach is subjected to the public perception of variability, whereby refugees from white countries are perceived as having fewer barriers to entry into Canada (Giustra 2022; Hicks 2022).

Currently, five of the top ten refugee-hosting countries are located in sub-Saharan Africa, where the capacity to provide adequate public goods and services is limited (Global Affairs Canada 2017). Expanding its current refugee framework in international fora and utilizing its unique norms and principles as the foundations, Canada holds an opportunity to become a global leader and advocate for responsibility-sharing and collective action through a principled humanitarian response to refugee crises. This response is derived from the following characterization of refugee policy: public engagement and participation; inter-agency and cross-sectoral collaboration; and enduring principles underpinning the FIAP, that include gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls.

"Packaging" Canadian Responses to International Refugee Crises

Projecting multilateral strength in refugee crisis response demonstrates the need for a norms/principles framework to be in place at the national level. Consolidating Canada's positive experience to date and deriving a norm/principles-based framework from this experience could provide a useful contribution to multilateral partners, which are increasingly keen to know more about the "Canadian experience" (Bhuyan et al. 2017). Packaging Canadian approaches to a refugee crisis response [within the framework of Canadian values] serves to address the gaps within our current policy arrangements- which will, in turn, legitimize Canada's positive approach to refugee crisis response and enable the projection of a coherent brand. Rather than implement new policy, a shift toward an overarching policy paradigm rooted in outward-focused values approaches will reanimate Canada's identity in global affairs, given the atmosphere of increasingly fragmented multilateralism (Peace Diplomacy 2021). To strategically overcome the common criticism concerning Canadian foreign policy being too 'value-centric',

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projecting Canadian values outward can facilitate Canada's relevance internationally by proving, through research and policy, that our value system is a strength (Paikin 2021). In doing so, the approach will mutually reinforce the development of Canadian refugee policy itself, while creating space for Canada to emphasize its policy and programming strengths internationally.

Recommendations

Long–Term Recommendation

1. **Projecting Canadian norms and principles as national instruments of power by characterizing, triangulating, and packaging Canadian values across social policy.** GAC can reinforce a "human-centric" approach to "global social policy" that would complement existing policies and differentiate Canada's contribution in multilateral fora. This action requires reviewing and characterizing the norms and principles across other social policies. This wider research, such as in the area of education and health policy, could then be triangulated with this research on refugee management policies - to inform how these norms and principles could facilitate and be discussed in strategic level multilateral exchanges. Additionally, packaging 'Canadian approaches', underpinned by Canadian social norms and principles, could help project Canada's positive approach to global social policy. This could help reanimate Canada's identity in the multilateral fora by promoting the strength of a principle-based social policy in a diverse society at home.

Short–Term Recommendation

2. **Promote global responsibility-sharing by elevating the principles of the Private Sponsorship for Refugees (PSR) program to the Global Refugee Sponsorship Initiative (GRSI).** If we look at this issue in the context of international refugee crisis management, neighboring countries to those in conflict are overburdened and lack the administrative capacity to receive and integrate those fleeing from conflict (Global Affairs Canada 2017). As security threats rise globally, Canada has a role to play in responding to this challenge. The one-of-a-kind PSR program marries Canada's civic engagement to address this global challenge. Canada has an opportunity to utilize its principle-based approach to refugee policy

to capitalize on leading international good practice – using Canadian communities as an example for states to create additional community-based sponsorship networks (Ilcan, Bueno & Manuela 2020). These principles can also be leveraged by GAC to encourage and promote the sharing of responsibility for global crises in the multilateral fora. As a founder of the GRSI, Canada can champion collective action among states and NGOs that have already declared their support for community sponsorship and showcase the benefits for other countries to participate (Government of Canada 2016). In addition to the overarching social norms and principles, the sharing of good practice about the PSR model and community-building capacity will allow Canada - in the form of capacity-building - to support partner countries and their civil society organizations in countries in addressing international refugee crises (Ilcan, Bueno, Manuela 2020; Government of Canada 2016).

3. **Foster a positive relationship with less like-minded partners by expanding opportunities for investment through the Canada Fund for Local Initiatives (CFLI) to promote cultural and education initiatives to meet FIAP goals.** GAC can also use this approach to build relationships and engage with less like-minded partners namely, China and Saudi Arabia. Initiatives, such as the CFLI, increase opportunities to project a common set of standards and reanimate Canada's role as a standard-setting power (Government of Canada 2021d). Expanding cultural and educational initiatives among less like-minded partners to establish people-centered and community-based programming will help: (1) strengthen bilateral relations between Canada, recipient countries, and their civil societies to contribute toward positive outcomes in economic, social, and cultural development; and (2) meet FIAP goals. An expansion of initiatives, such as the CFLI, confronts diverse values among less like-minded partners, and allows Canada to uphold its positionality as a democratic country by projecting value-centric approaches outward through community empowerment and working with the less like-minded countries for mutual benefits (Government of Canada 2021d).

4. **Expand engagement with the United Nations through multilateral collaboration to address the needs of equity-deserving groups.** Canada's diplomacy at the United Nations has allowed for Canadian principles and values to be given a strong voice on the world stage (Matheson 2020). GAC can continue to ground their crisis response by playing an active role in its partnership with UN agencies to increase multilateral participation in the protection and management of refugees. This focuses on an area in which Canadian strengths lie, toward innovative solutions to meet the goals of the Global Compact on Refugees, and the Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework (CRRF) (UNHCR 2017). Canada remains an example of how a strong democracy can project its values and principles in its foreign policy. In the UN partnership, Canada has mobilized international donors to provide an intersectional approach to refugee policy, humanitarian assistance, and advocacy efforts (Matheson 2020). Leading human-centered programs with the UN allows GAC to ground crisis response in social policy principles that will help meet global SDG targets and in turn, increase Canada's presence internationally.

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