

Cardus Presentation to Parliamentary Committee on Refugee Resettlement

Renze Nauta, Program Director, Work & Economics

Work & Economics Program Director Renze Nauta presents to the committee about the role of subsidiarity in refugee resettlement policy.

OPENING REMARKS

Merci, Madame la présidente.

Je m'appelle Renze Nauta et je représente Cardus, un institut de recherche en politiques publiques où je dirige un programme de recherche sur le travail et l'économie. Cardus a récemment publié une étude de recherche sur l'intégration des réfugiés dans la société canadienne.

Thank you, Mr./Madam Chair. My name is Renze Nauta and I am representing Cardus, a public policy think tank where I run a research program on Work and Economics. Cardus recently completed a research study on the integration of refugees into Canadian society, so I will be focusing my remarks on the third item listed in the motion for this study, concerning immigration processes.

Canada, as you know, has two main streams for resettling refugees in Canada. The first is the privately-sponsored refugee program, in which refugees are integrated mainly by Canadian civil society. In this stream, Canadian families, churches, and diaspora communities are responsible for raising funds and providing the necessary assistance to newcomers to help them integrate. The second involves government-assisted refugees, who are integrated with the help of settlement agencies funded by the Government of Canada.

Cardus's study focused on the large body of research that has shown that privately sponsored refugees tend to have better economic outcomes than government-assisted refugees. For example, a Statistics Canada survey of Syrian refugees to Canada in 2016 found that more than half of those sponsored by civil society had found employment within one year of their arrival. That's compared to less than 10 percent of those assisted by government-funded settlement agencies. Privately sponsored refugees also have higher incomes on average than government-assisted refugees. And these trends persist in the long run, even when you control for factors such as education level, language skills, and vulnerability, suggesting that refugees sponsored by civil society have a real advantage in integrating.

Les chercheurs ont proposé plusieurs raisons pour expliquer pourquoi les réfugiés parrainés par le secteur privé bénéficient de cet avantage. D'abord, ils reçoivent un soutien personnalisé de la part de personnes qui leur sont proches. Ils ont également accès à un capital social plus important, que leurs parrains leur apportent. Ils disposent aussi d'une communauté déjà établie, qui favorise un accueil chaleureux et des amitiés authentiques. Enfin, certains suggèrent que les parrains privés ont tendance à accorder la priorité à l'emploi par rapport à d'autres formes d'intégration.

Researchers have offered several explanations for why privately sponsored refugees have this advantage. For one, they receive personalized assistance by people close to them. They also have access to more social capital that their sponsors lend them. They also have a built-in community that leads to welcoming and genuine friendships. There is also some suggestion that private sponsors tend to prioritize employment over other forms of integration.

I believe that all of these are plausible explanations, but there is one that deserves greater attention. And that is the principle of subsidiarity. Subsidiarity is a cornerstone principle of social organization that says that actions and decision-making should be taken by the level of authority that is closest to an issue that is competent to deal with it.

C'est un principe qui appuie le fédéralisme ainsi qu'un rôle important pour les provinces et les municipalités. Mais il met encore davantage l'accent sur le rôle des institutions de la société civile entre l'individu et l'État.

It is a principle that supports federalism and strong provinces and municipalities. But it emphasizes even more the role of civil-society institutions between the individual and the state.

It recognizes that people and institutions that are closer to an issue usually have better information about the individual circumstances and can provide personalized supports and solutions.

But even more fundamentally, subsidiarity is about giving the space to people to care for each other. This is what our research uncovered: in surveys, government-assisted refugees described relationships with settlement workers as “friendly” but not “friends”. By contrast, refugees and their civil-society sponsors tended to use the language of “family”. Even “love”.

The thick bonds formed between refugees and sponsors lead to relationships of care. This in turn leads to more personalized assistance, and stronger community to welcome the newcomers—all of which help to produce better economic outcomes for the refugee and ultimately a stronger confidence on the part of the Canadian public in our immigration system's ability to accommodate them.

Canada will always need a government-assisted refugee stream, but government should do all it can to celebrate the distinctively Canadian option of private sponsorship and should encourage civil-society participation in it.

Unfortunately, the government has announced steeper cuts to the privately sponsored refugee program than the government-assisted refugee program. This means the proportion of those sponsored by civil society will decline. I believe this is a mistake and that we should return to a mix with stronger participation of civil society.

In addition to that, the principle of subsidiarity is a useful guide for decision-making on all matters of policy and should be applied to other aspects of this study as well. Our research report includes a series of questions to guide policymakers in their application of subsidiarity to these and other public policy questions, and I recommend those questions to you in this study.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

ABOUT CARDUS

CARDUS is a non-partisan think tank dedicated to clarifying and strengthening, through research and dialogue, the ways in which society's institutions can work together for the common good.

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