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## **FORCED DISPLACEMENT AND CANADA'S FEMINIST FOREIGN POLICY: WHAT IS MISSING?**

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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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Despite Canada's recognition as a global leader in refugee resettlement and the introduction of the FIAP under the Trudeau's administration, we identify a crucial oversight: the insufficient focus on forced displacement within its feminist international assistance framework.

**In this article, we critically examine Canada's Feminist International Assistance Policy (FIAP) in the context of forced displacement, a crisis exacerbated by political turmoil and gender-specific vulnerabilities.**

We draw on Canada's policies before and after the election of Trudeau, highlighting a shift from a more conservative stance under the Harper government to a more progressive yet still inadequate approach under Trudeau, arguing that this gap challenges the integrity of the FIAP's feminist ethos by overlooking the role of forced displacement in achieving sustainable development, gender equality and peace.

**We argue that the FIAP's minimal engagement with displacement issues demonstrates a failure to recognize the political and security dimensions of displacement and its impact on women and girls.**

A thorough evaluation of Canada's policy documents, speeches, and public statements reveals a pattern of essentialist and depoliticized treatment of displacement. This article emphasizes the need for a robust and nuanced policy that incorporates local perspectives, particularly from women peacebuilders and organizations in conflict zones. It argues for the expansion of Canada's definition of security to include the threats and concerns defined by those directly affected by conflict and displacement and addresses the complex interplay of gender, security, and peace.

# 1. INTRODUCTION

In 2020, the Honorable Bob Rae, Special Envoy of Prime Minister of Canada on Humanitarian and Refugee Issues, highlighted the gravity of the global forced displacement crisis, further exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic. Rae (2022) emphasized that “the heart of the problem is political,” calling for “responses and solutions that are not only gender-responsive, but also collaborative, cooperative, and comprehensive” (Rae 2022). In this report, he consistently linked the effects of displacement with the broader themes of peacebuilding and gender inequality. However, the integration of these ambitious declarations within the framework of Canada’s feminist foreign assistance policy initiatives remain an area of ambiguity.

**The intricate and increasingly pressing relationship among conflict-induced forced displacement, gender equality, and peacebuilding has emerged as a critical area of concern, particularly in safeguarding the rights and security of displaced women and girls, whether internally or as refugees.**

This nexus underscores a complex dynamic where the challenges of displacement intertwine with gender-specific vulnerabilities, demanding a more targeted and nuanced approach in humanitarian policy foci and efforts.

While scholars criticized the first iteration of the National Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security (WPS) under the Conservative Stephen Harper administration in 2010, the 2017 release of the Feminist International Assistance Policy (FIAP) under the Liberal Justin Trudeau government was heralded as a potential transformative approach to the WPS agenda, ambitiously positioning gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls at the core of its foreign assistance approaches. Since the election of Trudeau, Canada has been globally recognized as a leader in addressing the displacement crisis and was “the world leader in refugee resettlement for 2018 and 2019” (Rae 2022).



**However, a closer analysis reveals a critical oversight in the FIAP: the insufficient attention given to forced displacement, a pressing issue at the intersecting of gender equality and peacebuilding.**

This gap not only challenges the integrity of the FIAP’s feminist ethos but also neglects the pivotal role that displacement plays in achieving gender equality and fostering sustainable peace in an era of unprecedented global displacement. In particular, women positioned as agents to “build peace” under the FIAP face heightened risks of displacement for two reasons: first, because of the dangers of conflict in the countries where they work and live, and second, because of the sometimes violent opposition to their work advancing women’s equality and human rights.

This paper addresses a largely overlooked discussion on forced displacement and gender inequality in both feminist foreign policy and Canadian foreign policy literature. Rather than proposing exhaustive solutions to this complex issue, we aim to shed light on a significant shortfall in Canada's feminist foreign policy approach. Specifically, we argue that the exclusion of displacement weakens Canada's feminist image and diminishes the policy's ability to effectively address the FIAP's action area 6: Peace and Security.



**To address this gap, we propose that the Canadian government prioritize forced displacement as a central component of its feminist foreign policy.**

This requires a broader and more inclusive understanding of security—one defined not by Western geopolitical interests but by the perspectives of local organizations and women peacebuilders directly affected by conflict. By centering these voices, Canada can more effectively integrate displacement into its feminist foreign policy and strengthen its commitment to advancing gender equality and peace globally.

Throughout this paper, we contend that the FIAP's minimal and somewhat surface-level engagement with displacement issues enables Canada to maintain its image as a benevolent humanitarian actor while sidestepping the adoption of transformative strategies or recognizing how its own foreign affairs might contribute, directly or indirectly, to the displacement in conflict zones.

**This paper seeks to fill a critical gap in the literature on the FIAP and Canadian foreign policy more broadly by highlighting the insufficient attention given to forced displacement,**

despite its prominence as one of the most urgent issues in contemporary conflict settings. Rather than providing an exhaustive analysis, this paper aims to serve as a catalyst for further dialogue and deeper exploration. To substantiate our arguments, we draw upon an array of federal policy documents, public statements, and speeches, critically evaluating Canada's approach to displacement and its implications for a truly inclusive and effective feminist foreign policy. We also draw upon the WPS agenda, which embeds the issue of forced displacement within its framework, prioritizes gendered dimensions of conflict in peacebuilding efforts (Hall 2018), to deepen our understanding of Canada's approach to displacement and its interplay with the broader international assistance priorities outlined in the FIAP.

To begin, it is essential to recognize there are diverse forms of forced displacement. Refugees are individuals compelled to flee their homes due to by violence, persecution, or other severe threats, crossing international borders in search of safety. International legal frameworks, including the 1951 Geneva Refugee Convention, grant refugees critical human rights, such as the ability to seek asylum and protection from persecution, which must be upheld.

**Conversely, internally displaced people, or IDPs, are those forced to leave their homes but do not cross international borders. Unlike refugees, IDPs are not protected by the Geneva Refugee Convention, as their safety remains the responsibility of their country of origin.**

Beyond these categories, other groups of forcibly displaced individuals are identified by distinct labels or statuses, including non-registered refugees, stateless persons, and asylum seekers. These distinctions, as outlined by the UNHCR (2024), highlight the complexity of forced displacement and underscore the need for Canada's feminist foreign policy to engage more meaningfully with the varied experiences and rights of displaced populations.

## 2. CONTEXTUALISING FORCED DISPLACEMENT AND THE WPS AGENDA

For decades, feminist scholars have challenged traditional paradigms in international relations, particularly those related to security, power, and development. These scholars have worked to expose the androcentric, heteropatriarchal, and colonial approaches that historically rendered women and gender-related issues invisible within discussions of conflict (Sjoberg 2012; Peterson 2004). Laura Sjoberg (2015: 435) argues



that ‘hard’ security pressing questions like wars, genocides, and terrorist attacks and issues of gender, sex, and sexuality are linked—it is impossible to understand one group of issues without the other, even though people try to do it every day. - Laura Sjoberg (2015: 435)



Given that displacement is one of the most tangible, and measurable, indicators of conflict, feminist scholars have highlighted its inherently gendered dimensions, particularly in achieving sustainable peace (Hovil 2017).

While a significant body of feminist literature challenges the WPS agenda as a well-established and coherent ‘norm’, we contend that its recent “unprecedented recognition by states” (True and Wiener 2019: 556) carries profound implications for foreign policy formulation and security discourse used by member states.

This recognition is exemplified by the adoption of National Action Plans (NAPs) by 105 countries, including Canada (UN Women 2023).



**In this paper, we use Canada’s National Action Plan (C-NAP) as a key framework to analyze how Canada integrates forced**

**displacement into its broader peace and security agenda.**

The C-NAP is examined in relation to the Feminist International Assistance Policy (FIAP), highlighting how the two policies intersect to shape Canada’s approach to displacement, gender equality, and peacebuilding. By linking the C-NAP’s commitments under the Women, Peace, and Security agenda with the FIAP’s broader focus on feminist principles in international assistance, we explore how these frameworks collectively expand and inform Canada’s peace and security narrative. This analysis seeks to uncover the synergies and gaps between the two policies, particularly in addressing the gendered dimensions of displacement as part of Canada’s feminist foreign policy. While we recognize that the WPS perpetuates certain gendered myths, such as the victimization of women (Aggestam et al. 2019), we reference it to underscore the importance of state compliance to international human rights standards and gender-awareness in security and peace initiatives.



Since the adoption of the United Nation's (UN) Resolution 1325, which calls for the inclusion of women in peacebuilding and the incorporation of a gender perspective into peace and security efforts, the number of forcibly displaced individuals have steadily increased. The UN Security Council has adopted ten resolutions under the umbrella of WPS agenda since Resolution 1325, which collectively emphasize the need for gendered frameworks in policy with the ultimate goal of “promoting and protecting the rights of women in conflict and post-conflict situations” (UN 2000).

**However, as of 2023, women and girls accounted for approximately**

**49%** and **51%**  
**of refugees**      **of IDP**

(UNHCR 2023), underscoring the urgent need for nuanced policy responses and international attention to address the unique challenges faced by displaced women and girls.

Feminist scholars cite these resolutions as potential transformative steps towards reimagining security, politicizing gender within security frameworks, and ensuring the inclusion of women in decision-making processes (Shepherd 2021; Ferris 2018; Aggestam and Rosamond 2018). Notably, Resolution 1325 specifically highlights the challenges faced by refugees and IDPs, emphasizing the “consequent impact” of these conditions on the achievement of lasting peace and reconciliation (UN 2000).

However, despite this recognition of displacement, we maintain that the dimension of displacement remains inadequately explored within the broader scope of the WPS agenda and country-specific NAPs, hindering its overall transformative potential.

**Forced displacement is not a homogenous experience but rather one shaped by social, cultural, and political contexts, with women and girls often bearing the brunt of its consequences.**

Women and girls in displacement scenarios face heightened risks of sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV), including rape, sexual exploitation, human trafficking, forced marriages, and harassment. These forms of violence are perpetrated by a wide range of actors, including combatants, state officials, peacekeepers, traffickers, and even members of their own communities or host populations. For example, in refugee camps, women may face sexual exploitation in exchange for food or resources, while in conflict zones, rape is often used as a weapon of war to terrorize and destabilize communities (Kirby and Shepherd 2016). Such experiences not only exacerbate their vulnerabilities but also deepen gender inequalities within already fragile contexts. The complexity of forced displacement requires a robust examination of how entrenched gender norms and power dynamics shape the experiences of displaced individuals.



**Displacement disrupts the social, economic, political, and cultural fabric of communities, often exacerbating pre-existing inequalities.**

Women and girls, for instance, may lose access to education, healthcare, and livelihoods, while also taking on additional caregiving roles. This disruption makes them more susceptible to exploitation and marginalization, further compounding their vulnerability.

Koser (2009: 6) argues that “displacement and peace are inextricably linked,” noting that “durable solutions for the displaced are not simply a humanitarian and socio-economic issue, but a political issue too”. However, the operationalization of the WPS agenda often overlooks this political dimension, instead perpetuating heteronormative and instrumentalist framings of women as victims or inherently peaceful actors. As such, it fails to address the structural inequalities and conditions of oppression that lead to displacement in the first place (Kirby and Shepherd 2016; Powell 2016). By assigning women the symbolic role of “feminizing” conflict situations, this approach risks oversimplifying the complexities of gender dynamics and reinforcing androcentric narratives within peacebuilding (Aggestam and Rosamond 2018). Ferris argues that the limited focus on refugees and internally displaced women in articles 7 and 12 of Resolution 1325 “was primarily [focused] on the incorporation of womwomen’s concerns into peacekeeping, peacemaking, and peacebuilding, rather than on the particular needs and resources of refugee and displaced women” (2018: 501).

Therefore, while the WPS agenda highlights the role of women as agents of peace and offers a framework for addressing gender-specific repercussions of forced displacement, its current implementation lacks the depth needed to fully address the structural and intersectional challenges faced by displaced populations.



**A transformative approach to forced displacement requires not only meeting the urgent needs of displaced women and girls**

**but also reshaping the conditions that perpetuate their vulnerability.**

To do so, countries like Canada must prioritize the leadership and insights of local women’s organizations to ensure that gender equality and peacebuilding efforts are genuinely inclusive and impactful.

### 3. FORCED DISPLACEMENT AND GENDER EQUALITY UNDER THE HARPER ADMINISTRATION

Canada has long been regarded as a champion of human rights and good international citizen (Lui 2012). However, the international image of Canada's progressive leadership in these areas faced significant scrutiny during the tenure of the Stephen Harper Conservative government (2006-2015). This period was marked by a noticeable and simultaneous retreat from advocacy for gender equality and a reduction in refugee intake. As Erin Trolley (2017: 108) highlights:

“There was a progressive movement away from refugees with government discourse targeting perceived queue-jumpers, “bogus” asylum claimants, human traffickers, deportees, and others who “abuse Canada’s generosity” [...] the Prime Minister’s Office had halted the processing of Syrian refugee claims for several weeks in 2014, pending an “audit” to ensure the integrity of the refugee system and the “screen-ing out [of] threats to Canada” [...] the conation of refugee flows with security concerns is a hallmark of Conservative discourse in this policy area.”

**While Resolution 1325 was introduced before Harper's tenure, Canada was one of the last countries to adopt its C-NAP in 2010.**

While this may have seemed like progress, the C-NAP was brief and lacked depth, spanning only 15 pages compared to the more comprehensive plans of other countries, which averaged between 60 to 100 pages (Tiessen and Tuckey 2014). Scholars critiqued the government for the lack of national importance placed on the C-NAP (Tuckey 2015; Women in International Security 2015), delayed and inadequate progress reports that lacked key indicators and targets (Woroniuk, 2014), unclear resource allocation (Woroniuk and Walde 2015), and a “failure to articulate a gender-based approach to addressing issues around women, peace and security” (Tiessen and Tuckey 2014). These critiques mirrored broader concerns about the erosion of progressive gender equality practices and humanitarian funding to Canadian NGOs (Brown 2018; Tiessen and Carrier 2015; Audet and Navarro Flores 2016).

Tiessen and Carrier (2015) note that the delay in proposing a C-NAP, which was originally drafted in 2006 and 2007, stemmed from a debate over terminology. The Harper government preferred “equality between women and men” over “gender equality,” a term it viewed as politically contentious. This resistance was evident in the C-NAP itself, which referenced “gender” only twice, and even then, only in international contexts (Tiessen and Carrier 2015: 106).

This essentialist framework limited women's agency and concentrated on "protecting" women and children, aligning with the administrations narrowed commitment to maternal, newborn, and child health priorities (Tiessen and Carrier 2015). Notably, the C-NAP offered minimal attention to displaced populations, with a vague commitment to "support projects in or for peace operations, fragile states and conflict situations... [including] support for refugees, internally displaced persons and returnees" (Government of Canada 2010).

These lackluster policy commitments became even more pronounced during the Syrian refugee crisis, as it was, and continues to be, the largest displacement crisis in modern history. The Harper government's response was heavily criticized, with Lenard (2015) calling it "abhorrent." Peter J. Carver (2016) describes the approach as infused with a "discourse of distrust" towards refugee claimants.

**While the Canadian federal government allocated 90 million dollars to address the Syrian refugee crisis in 2013, the majority of funds were allocated to Canadian organizations or international organizations mainly controlled by Western countries, rather than local organizations.**



**International**



**Local**

Government of Canada, 2013

This funding approach, along with a lack of clear accountability mechanisms, reinforced asymmetrical power dynamics and systematically disempowered local NGOs solutions (Zetter 1996).

Moreover, when analyzing the breakdown of outcomes for each organization who received funding, it becomes evident that the government's funding priorities failed to integrate a gendered perspective (Government of Canada 2013).

**Notably, none of the funded organizations focused specifically on women or gender-specific needs, reflecting a significant gap in addressing the gendered dimensions of forced displacement.**

Women were referenced sporadically, often in a cursory list of vulnerable groups or in relation to their roles as mothers, such as provisions for displaced "pregnant and lactating women." This reductive framing treated displaced women as a homogenous group, with universal needs across conflict zones, while ignoring critical differenced shaped by race, culture, ethnicity, sexuality, and geographical context (Mohanty 2003).

The Harper administration's handling of refugees and displaced persons became a pivotal issue during the 2015 election campaign. The Syrian refugee crisis dominated the discourse, with Justin Trudeau pledging to resettle 25,000 refugees if elected, contrasting sharply with the 2,300 refugees resettled by the Harper government at the time of the election (Hillmer and Lagassé 2018).

## 4. FORCED DISPLACEMENT AND GENDER EQUALITY UNDER THE TRUDEAU ADMINISTRATION

Feminist foreign policy (FFP) represents a paradigm shift in international relations, challenging traditional power dynamics and emphasizing gender, peace, and security. As Elin Liss argues,



**“a feminist foreign policy challenges power [...] with the goal of transforming it” by prioritizing human security and examining**

**conflict through a gendered lens to address the patriarchal systems that perpetuate conflict and violence.**

Grobocopatel et al., 2018

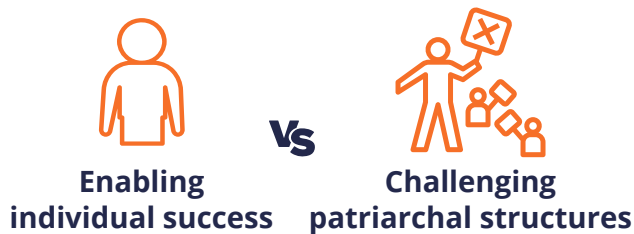
The Trudeau government’s 2017 launch of the FIAP marked a significant commitment to advancing gender equality and women’s empowerment through a human rights-based framework (Government of Canada, 2017a). The government asserted that a feminist lens would be applied to “all aspects of international engagement,” including the C-NAP, to tackle “fundamental structural barriers that prevent gender equality” (Canada, 2017b). However, Broadhead and Howard (2019: 443) argue that

**Trudeau’s approach often emphasized increasing women’s representation in formal institutions rather than “challenging the gendered construction of security” needed for transformative change.**

While this development sparked optimism among advocacy groups about addressing the gendered dimensions of the refugee crisis and conflict-induced displacement, critiques of the FIAP soon emerged, with scholars labelling it “miserly feminist” (Swiss 2018) due to its liberal feminist priorities (Tiessen 2019; Cadesky 2020; Morton et al. 2020) and its reliance on neoliberal instrumentalist approaches to gender equality and human security (Parisi 2020; Smith and Ajadi 2020). Scholars like Tiessen and Swan (2018) argue that while the Trudeau administration prioritized the WPS agenda, it failed to transform understandings of security or incorporate meaningful gender perspectives into peacebuilding and conflict response efforts.

The treatment of forced displacement in the FIAP is notably insufficient, highlighting a significant gap in Canada’s feminist approach. The second C-NAP (2017-2022) references “displacement” only once, while the FIAP mentions “displaced” eight times, “displacement(s)” six times, and “refugee” nine times. There are no FIAP indicators specifically addressing forced displacement, refugees, or forced migration (Government of Canada, 2017b). This surface-level engagement with forced displacement is further underscored by its categorization under “Human Dignity” rather than “Peace and Security,” the latter being the domain where WPS agenda and C-NAP discussions are situated.

This separation diminishes the political and security implications of displacement, framing it instead as an individual based concern rather than systemic.



**The human dignity framing offers an individualized approach that focuses on “enabling individuals to succeed within existing systems,” rather than challenging the patriarchal structures they encounter (Tiessen 2019: 6).**

For example, in a “key facts” on humanitarian action section, the FIAPs discusses the 2010 Haiti earthquake, where a study “found the pregnancy rate was three times higher in camps for internally displaced people compared to the average urban pregnancy rate before the crisis” (Government of Canada, 2017). While this statistic is meant to draw attention to the vulnerabilities of displaced women, it simplifies the threats they face, reducing their experiences to a single indicator—pregnancy—without addressing the structural factors that contribute to their increased vulnerability. This narrow framing obscures the broader gendered power relations and systemic inequities that underpin displacement conditions.

This depoliticization is evident in the 2023-24 Global Affairs Canada departmental plan, where the only indicator related to refugees and IDPs is listed under the departmental result category of “reduced suffering and increased human dignity in communities experiencing humanitarian crisis.” This indicator reads “number of refugees and internally displaced persons assisted and protected” (Global Affairs Canada, 2023a). Such indicators present significant challenges as metrics for accountability. Measuring the “number of refugees and IDPs assisted and protected” offers little insight into the quality, sustainability, or transformative impact of the assistance provided. These metrics reduce complex issues of displacement to quantitative measures that fail to capture the structural barriers and systemic inequalities faced by displaced populations.

**This approach is emblematic of a broader issue in humanitarian frameworks, where success is often measured by service delivery rather than meaningful outcomes that address root causes or foster resilience.**

The emphasis on “protection” reinforces essentialist narratives that position displaced women as passive recipients of aid, perpetuating the notion of their inherent vulnerability without acknowledging their agency or capacity to lead (True 2010). Furthermore, the placement of displacement under “Human Dignity” isolates it from broader discussions of peace and security, where it rightfully belongs. Displacement is inherently political, tied to the conditions of conflict, governance failures, and structural inequalities that drive forced migration.



By decoupling it from these contexts, Canada's feminist foreign policy fails to engage with the systemic issues that underpin displacement, thereby limiting its potential to contribute to transformative change.

If feminist foreign policy principles "can be practically visualized" (Scheyer and Kumskova 2019: 61) through a set of measurable indicators, the lack of focus on forced displacement within Canada's FIAP reveals a significant gap in its feminist and security approaches.



**Forced displacement is treated as an ad hoc and depoliticized issue, disconnected from the broader issues of security that initially led to displacement**

Hovil, 2013

In Aggestam and Rosamond's (2018) evaluation of Sweden's feminist foreign policy, they highlight that while Resolution 1325 has succeeded in politicizing the WPS agenda, the global adoption of depoliticized, technocratic practices has diluted its transformative potential. Once women are displaced outside active conflict zones, they become increasingly invisible in policy discourse. As Holvikivi and Reeves (2017: 2) argue, forced displacement in WPS agendas is often treated as a "marginal and inconsistent concern," sidelining the security needs of displaced populations once they are removed from direct conflict zones.

**The FIAP exemplifies this marginalization by centering its security and peacebuilding efforts on an "add-women-and-stir" model, wherein women's inclusion is tied to formal roles of**



**peace negotiations and conflict-prevention efforts**



**post-conflict state-building**



**addressing sexual violence in conflict zones**

Government of Canada, 2017a

Therefore, displaced women and girls, who exist outside these formal spheres of conflict, are rendered invisible within this framework, and their unique security needs remain unaddressed.

For instance, the 2021-2022 Report to Parliament on the Government of Canada's International Assistance highlights that Canada "provided assistance and protection to almost 95 million refugees and internally displaced persons through the UNHCR." While this statistic underscores Canada's role as a key contributor to humanitarian efforts, the report reveals significant limitations in the scope and focus of its financial commitments.

The only detailed allocations were (1) 115.4 million over 2 years to respond to mass displacement in Venezuela, funding “projects tackling education, health, regularization, employment, security, border management and protection” and (2) “\$67.2 million in development assistance funding to support education for children and youth affected by forced displacement around the world” (Global Affairs Canada 2023b).



**Although these allocations represent important investments in immediate service delivery, they fail to address the root causes of displacement or equip affected communities with the tools for long-term resilience and peacebuilding.**

The focus on service delivery perpetuates a dependency model in which displaced populations are treated as passive beneficiaries rather than active participants in shaping their futures. The lack of a gendered lens in these initiatives is particularly concerning. Despite the disproportionate impact of forced displacement on women and girls, there is no indication that these programs integrate gender-specific considerations. By failing to prioritize the unique experiences of displaced women, these programs miss an opportunity to foster their leadership and involvement in community-driven solutions, which are essential for sustainable recovery.

Scholars, such as Parisi (2020) have critiqued the FIAP’s framing of gender equality as a precondition for economic growth, or “smart economics.”

**However, this approach is particularly ill-suited to the realities of forcibly displaced women, who are often excluded from formal economies, denied access to labor markets, and disconnected from economic systems due to entrenched legal, social, and structural barriers.**

The reliance on economic growth as a justification for gender equality raises critical questions about the strategic omissions in the FIAP’s goals. Displaced people, refugees, and stateless individuals are conspicuously absent from many of the policy’s core indicators, suggesting that their exclusion may stem from the difficulty in quantifying their contributions or measuring the outcomes of displacement-related initiatives to economic empowerment or growth in traditional evaluation frameworks.

Further complicating this issue is the way forced displacement is addressed within the FIAP, primarily through examples designed to showcase “policy in action.” For instance, in a section titled “human dignity for women and girls,” forced displacement in Iraq and Canada’s role in providing assistance is highlighted. It states:

“The hostilities in Iraq have led to the forced displacement of more than 4.7 million people. The conflict has been marked by serious violations of international humanitarian law, including sexual violence [...] With Canada’s help, 29 community centers set up in refugee camps and communities in Kurdistan and other regions are meeting the urgent needs of thousands of women and girls every year [...]



The workers at these centers also help the women reintegrate into their families and communities [...] Canada's multi-year assistance enables its partners to support these women in their return to a normal life" (Government of Canada 2017).



While this narrative underscores Canada's contributions, it does not identify Canada's partners or define what constitutes a "normal life" for displaced women. This ambiguity raises questions about whose perspectives and priorities shape these interventions, reflecting a lack of inclusivity and transparency in program design and implementation. By focusing solely on urgent needs, the FIAP fails to engage with the long-term gender analysis required for transformative programs.



**Displacement is not a temporary disruption, but a complex process intertwined with ongoing structural inequalities and power dynamics.**

The narrative of reintegration into families and communities assumes pre-displacement structures are inherently positive and unproblematic or that this integration is possible. The absence of local women's groups from these interventions further exacerbates this issue. Research has consistently shown that local women's organizations play a critical role in creating sustainable, community-driven solutions for displaced populations (Kaya and Bond 2019).

This reinforces Northern-dominated power structures, where Canada's "helper-fixer" role (Munton and Keating 2001), reinforces paternalistic approaches that are externally imposed rather than co-created with those directly affected. As Achilleos-Sarll et al. (2023: 8) argue, "[o]rganizations and actors outside the Global North tend to be viewed as objects of [feminist foreign policy], rather than knowledge producers and agents." To address these shortcomings, Canada must recognize displacement as both a security and political issue.

**Programs must move beyond addressing immediate needs to focus on long-term, systemic change, including challenging**



**the patriarchal and structural inequities that perpetuate displacement-related vulnerabilities.**

In the next section, we emphasize that the solution to sustainable peacebuilding lies in mobilizing local women's groups.

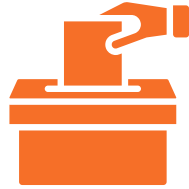
## 5. THE PATH FORWARD: CENTERING DISPLACED PEOPLE

Throughout the last several decades, we have witnessed the evolution of human rights and the rapid change of culture across various countries. The historic increase in global forced displacement has impacted the political debate in hosting countries and challenged their national policies on how to share responsibility with other countries and incorporate displacement into national policies. This has depicted the extent to which national policies facilitate integration and the participation of refugees in the host country.

**Welcoming national policies requires the existence of welcoming political platforms that allow and empower previously displaced persons and individuals with lived experience to develop policies and change the status quo on a national and worldwide scale.**

This political participation would most likely lead to more inclusive policies and meaningful participation by forcibly displaced people to address political and security problems that they and other refugees face. In order to measure the political participation of refugees, we must identify the available forms of political engagement that are offered through national policies by states at home and abroad. In some cases, we could consider engagement with civil society as part of political participation as it is a concrete practice of 'claims-making' which Koopmans (2004: 454 ) defined as "the collective and public articulation of political demands, calls to action, proposals, criticisms, or physical attacks, which, or potentially, affect the interests or integrity of the claimants and/or other collective actors."

In the case of civil society, we can find refugees assembling first to seek solutions to their problems and demand inclusive policies and responses that consider their needs as minority groups in host countries.



**However, the political participation of refugees in their country of origin plays an essential role in their assumption of politics and their perception of their capacity for political participation in host countries.**

Therefore, our estimate of the extent to which refugees will participate in politics may differ depending on their experiences at home. In this regard, we should keep in mind the reason for their displacement, which may occasionally encourage them to become more politically involved or, conversely, may have the opposite effect, leading refugees to choose not to participate in politics at all because they lack confidence in their governments. The majority of refugees flee their countries due to political troubles, wars, or economic unrest in post-war and post-colonial countries. That said, when refugees arrive from active or post-conflict zones, we should not expect their immediate or full engagement with, or understanding of, the political system in host countries. Various hidden factors, such as trauma, PTSD, and experiences under repressive regimes, may hinder their involvement.

**These challenges are often tied to their prior negative experiences of civic action or political participation in authoritarian contexts within their homeland, and impact their willingness to actively engage with the politics of their host countries.**

There are also gender-specific considerations in refugees' political participation. In many authoritarian countries, women and minority groups are denied full political rights, and this is exacerbated by social norms that consider women unfit to lead countries or be involved in politics. Women are thus often mandated to the private sphere of society and face harsh ostracization, rejection, or punishment when they try to step out of their expected role.



**These conditions can impact a woman's perception of her ability to engage in politics in her host country upon arrival and serve as an additional barrier to participation.**

In general, there are limited mechanisms for refugees' political contributions in host nations, owing not just to misconceptions and stigmas but also to a lack of political will and national interest in recognizing and representing refugee perspectives in host countries. This is because refugees and displaced people are frequently portrayed as having been forcibly displaced for humanitarian rather than political and security reasons.

Yet, visible minority groups have always been involved in the public interest and national concerns in different ways, which are not necessarily through the traditional ways of political participation. Participation varies greatly and could manifest through non-traditional channels such as civic engagement in the not-for-profit sector. National policies around refugees and personal experiences in the country of origin will, directly and indirectly, impact the extent of political participation of refugees in the host country.

We must consider that refugees' significant involvement in the formulation of national policies serves as an implicit barometer of inclusivity and localization when assessing the inclusivity of policies. The ideology and governing structures of countries in the Global North are reflected in their national policies. These countries can generally be categorized into two groups: 1) Resettlement nations, such as the United States, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand; and 2) Conventional host nations, such as France, Spain, and Italy.

The purpose of dividing these countries into two categories is to highlight an obvious observation: in resettlement countries, there is a Ministry of Immigration and Citizenship. This ministry is responsible for assessing the political and security situation in conflict countries, organizing refugee accommodations, and developing policies in coordination with other ministries.

It is essential to note that the Ministry of Immigration and Citizenship develops a long-term immigration strategy by interpreting its policies into laws and policies that welcome immigrants and make the country's position toward immigrants clear to both host society and immigrants.

It is essential to note that the Ministry of Immigration and Citizenship plays a pivotal role in shaping a country's approach to migration by developing a long-term immigration strategy. This involves interpreting broader policies into actionable laws and regulations that clarify the country's stance toward immigrants for both the host society and incoming individuals. However, it is important to distinguish these immigration strategies from the approaches taken to address the needs of displaced populations, such as refugees or asylum seekers.

**Refugee responses often require coordination with humanitarian actors, the development of tailored policies, and temporary or emergency measures that differ significantly from the long-term strategies focused on economic migration or family reunification.**

These ministries must balance both domains to ensure clarity and coherence in their operations.

Many voices of displaced persons and refugee-led organizations raised the demand for an inclusive policymaking process that meets the needs of refugees from different identities and circumstances. Policies are very important in shaping people's future, and this is especially true for refugees who are often excluded from the policymaking process at all levels.



**Involving refugees in the policymaking process can take many forms, such as public discussions with civil society, which includes**

**refugee-led organizations (RLOs), or directly consulting individuals from displacement backgrounds, yet the most potent way is to offer them a seat at the table.**

Canada has been a global leader in the international response to address displacement by engaging refugees and people with lived experience in policymaking. For the first time in its history, the Minister of Immigration, Refugees, and Citizenship, Marco Mendicino, named Mustafa Alio, a former Syrian refugee in Canada, as Refugee Advisor to the Canadian delegation at the inaugural Global Refugee Forum in Geneva in December 2019 (Keung, 2020). Despite the significance of such an action for Canada, the 2019 GRF was heavily critiqued for its overall lack of representation of people with lived refugee or displaced experience. In the margins of such global events, refugees have also been shut out of international conferences and meetings, even though these events often address the future paths taken by refugees. In response to this inequity, the Refugee Advisory Network of Canada (RAN) was formed to promote meaningful refugee participation in Canada and globally. Both IRCC and GAC have been involved with supporting RAN's mission on multiple levels, either by including refugee advisors in Canadian delegations or through ongoing engagement with the group regarding Canada's policies regarding forced relocation, both domestically and internationally (RAN 2021).

This perspective echoes the work of Bloemraad (2006), which demonstrates that proactive policies such as official multiculturalism in Canada have a symbolic value and encourage and facilitate refugee inclusion.



**Involving refugees in the policymaking process would help to legitimize policies as those most affected by the response would be able to ensure it address their needs.**

However, it is with caution that this participation is not simply tokenized, and rather meaningful. The efforts by governments to adopt the bottom-up approach at the policymaking level helps ensure that diverse voices in their societies have been heard and represented, thus avoiding the power imbalances of a hierarchical structure.

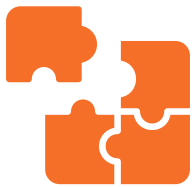
The RAN example demonstrates the political will to include refugees, but it is unclear whether it will work across departments outside of IRCC and GAC at this time. Displacement is not recognized as a cross-cutting issue that should be applied to everything related to national policies and foreign policy, particularly in the creation of feminist policies and their commitments, but also to international conferences and narrow roles surrounding meetings that discuss refugee issues.

**When refugee women from different backgrounds have a lasting impact on all platforms where choices, laws, and actions that impact their lives are being developed, implemented, and assessed in a way that is open, inclusive, knowledgeable, safe, impartial, and sufficiently supported, then refugee participation is meaningful.**

Therefore, operational and programmatic commitments at several levels would be necessary to prioritize displacement in Canadian feminist foreign policy. In terms of the programmatic level, long-term planning and early warning systems are required to foresee probable displacement and incorporate it into proactive responses. Canada's response to defending women at risk was delayed. Behind the political turmoil, for example, Canada's evacuation of Afghani women leaders was chaotic and disorganized due to the lack of early warning mechanisms and the ignorance of the security concerns raised by Afghani women (Nash 2021). Second, Canada must meaningfully center the agency of displaced women in its Feminist Foreign Policy because FFP is still viewed as a Western concept that does not consider or adequately address the reality of women in the Global South. Without their participation, FFP will remain an elitist policy that does not assist displaced women in finding long-term solutions or increasing their political participation. Additionally, further increasing the funding for female refugee-led organizations and local initiatives that serve displaced women is a step towards progress.

Finally, Canada must benefit from the peacebuilding efforts of women leaders who have been relocated or resettled to Canada, as their work does not end after their arrival.

Their untapped expertise would enhance Canada's role at the international level in diplomacy and peacebuilding to address the root causes of displacement such as political instability, human rights abuses, and colonization. At an operational level,



**Canada must move beyond symbolic commitments to feminist values and actively integrate its feminist policies into its broader foreign policy.**

This includes addressing power imbalances within its operations, missions, and programs.

This could only be accomplished by committing to ending arms sales and the military involvement, which are leading contributors to displacement. Canada plays a strong colonial role by providing weaponry to conflict parties in the Global South and putting women's lives at risk (Gallagher 2023). Furthermore, Canada's FFP and WPS might enhance localization not only on an operational and programmatic level but also by simplifying and localizing the feminist agenda.

**This might be achieved by maintaining ongoing, meaningful relationships with displaced women, viewing them as change agents, and eschewing the status quo, which views women in the Global South as weak and defenseless.**

Finally, Canada must ensure that its FFP and other related feminist policies provide equal footing to all women regardless of their ethnicity, race, sexuality, or religion. For example, the protection that Canada provided to displaced women from Ukraine was not equal to that of other displaced women from countries in North Africa or the Middle East (Pardy 2023). Therefore, greater consideration of intersectionality and cooperation between Global Affairs Canada and Immigration, Refugees, and Citizenship Canada is necessary to ensure alignment in their policies. All women deserve to live in safety and security, and Canada's FFP should support such a notion.



## 6. RECOMMENDATIONS

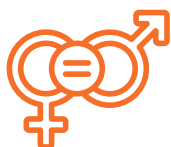
This paper recommends that the Canadian government:



Recognizes forced displacement as a cross-cutting political issue and consider it in all types of foreign policies



Expands conceptualizations of threats and security so that they can be defined by local actors in the context that conflict or displacement is occurring



Prioritizes forced displacement as a main issue in the work of both peacebuilding and gender equality in its foreign policy



Develops long-term planning and early warning systems to foresee probable displacement and incorporate these mechanisms into proactive responses



Increases meaningful and core funding for women refugee-led organizations and local initiatives that serve displaced populations



Views displaced women as active agents of change and maintain partnerships with them in order to collaborate on achieving durable solutions



Meaningfully centers the agency of displaced women in its Feminist Foreign Policy (FFP)

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