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Redistribution and moral consistency: arguments for granting asylum seekers automatic membership

Birth within a particular state is a major determinant of a person's life course: their life expectancy, health possibilities, income, level of education, employment opportunities, the safety and security of their physical environment, and the stability of their political context. Global North states are generally able to provide their citizens with an acceptable standard of living along these dimensions; Global South states invariably cannot. This disparity tracks global inequality, which is the outcome of a long history of under-development and subjugation, in which colonial disparities have been fossilised in a global economic system which favour the interests of Global North states and institutions. Unsurprisingly, many Global South citizens seek entry into Global North states.

In this article I argue that all asylum seekers should have their claims granted and their basic needs met in Global North states, because doing so may contribute to combatting global inequality, and moral consistency demands it. In most states, infants born to those ordinarily resident are granted automatic citizenship, which, in wealthy states confers a range of privileges. Following Carens (2013) and Shachar (2009), I contend that citizenship should be seen as a valuable resource whose near-exclusive birth-right inheritance is morally dubious. I argue that redistributing access to Global North resources through granting automatic membership to Global South asylum seekers presents an opportunity to offset global inequality. Further, I show that consistency demands that we do so, since asylum seekers are new entrants with needs that can and ought to be met, and are therefore similar in morally important ways to the newborns upon whom citizenship is automatically bestowed. In other words, the same reasoning that motivates automatic citizenship for newborns obliges the automatic membership of asylum seekers. Six substantial counterarguments are anticipated and tackled: that current citizens would be harmed; that future citizens would be harmed; that automatic membership would be abused; that citizens hold ancestral rights to resources; that cultures would be threatened; that the integrity of communities would be threatened. I conclude by noting that if the practical reality of adopting the proposed regime looks unappealing to Global North states, the most effective and morally legitimate alternative

would be to undertake radical, vigorous efforts to address the push factors (poverty, conflict, and climate change) which drive migration and in which the Global North is strongly implicated.

Carens, J. 2013. *The Ethics of Immigration*. Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press.

Shachar, A. 2009. *The birthright lottery: Citizenship and global inequality*. Harvard University Press.