



A Tale of Two Refugees: Disparities in the Treatment of Ukrainian and Non-Ukrainian Refugees in Europe

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Article History

Received: 18.08.2024

Accepted: 15.09.2024

Published: 28.11.2024

Abstract: This article examines the differential treatment of Ukrainian refugees compared to those from other regions, particularly the Middle East and Africa, within the European Union. While the EU has demonstrated a swift and substantial response to the Ukrainian refugee crisis, inconsistencies in the application of refugee rights and protection mechanisms have emerged. The paper delves into the key rights enshrined in international refugee law and analyzes their implementation in the context of Ukrainian refugees. It highlights disparities in access to asylum procedures, temporary protection measures, and social services. The potential long-term implications of these disparities for refugee integration and EU refugee policy are explored. Furthermore, the paper discusses the geopolitical factors influencing the EU's response to the Ukrainian refugee crisis and the potential impact of the 2024 US presidential election on global refugee resettlement efforts. It concludes by proposing policy recommendations to ensure equitable treatment of all refugees and strengthen international cooperation in addressing the global refugee crisis.

Keywords: Refugee Crisis in Europe, Discrimination among Refugees, Human Rights Protections, Geopolitics in Protection Mechanism, observance of International Refugee Law.

Cite this article:

Chowdhury, N. I., Mimi, A. D., (2024). A Tale of Two Refugees: Disparities in the Treatment of Ukrainian and Non-Ukrainian Refugees in Europe. *ISAR Journal of Multidisciplinary Research and Studies*, 2(11), 13-19.

1. Introduction

Convention relating to the Status of Refugees, 1951 hasn't provided any exact definition of the term 'Refugee'. However it has provided some contextual content which may determine a person's status as to whether he is to be considered as a refugee or not. Defining refugees may appear an unworthy exercise in legalism and semantics, obstructing a prompt response to the needs of people in distress[1]. The 'Refugee' is a term with content verifiable in accordance with principles of general international law[2]. Historically the birth of international refugee law had taken place in Europe in the aftermath of the war displacement of a large number of people, caused by World War II. Later on, after the dissolution of the Union of the Soviet Socialist Republic (USSR) another huge refugee problem emerged, which contributed in the development of the international instruments and legal documents for determining refugee status and for ensuring the human rights of the refugees. That is why it is said that, birth and development of international refugee laws is Euro-centric. In the twenty-first century, a number of wars had broken out in the Middle East and Eastern Middle East due to political instability, rebellion against governments and military operations against rebellion and

terrorism, i.e. war in Afghanistan, Iraq, Syria, Libya, Yemen and very recently military operations in Myanmar etc. Due to such wars and instability, a huge number of refugees have emerged in this region, most of which are hosted by developing and underdeveloped countries.

Almost two third of the world were hosted by such countries. But the emergence of the new refugee crisis of Europe, caused by the Russian-Ukraine war had changed the calculation notably. The world has about 32.5 million refugees globally as of mid-2022[3]. Among these, European countries host more than 7.8 million *de facto* refugees originating from Ukraine due to the outbreak of the Russia-Ukraine war[4]. The new paradigm has introduced refugees to the developed countries of Europe. Now it is a matter of scrutiny whether the Refugee Rights, ensured by the international instruments, are addressed in the case of Refugees throughout Europe.

2. Notable Rights of Refugees and Observance of those Rights in Case of Ukrainian Refugees:

International instruments for ensuring refugee rights are the Convention relating to the Status of Refugees, 1951 and Protocol

relating to the Status of Refugees, 1967. Throughout these international instruments, many rights are ensured for proper observance and maintaining the minimum standard of human rights of the refugees.

Refugee Convention requires every refugee to observe the duty that he is in conformity with the municipal laws as well as regulations and measures taken for the maintenance of public order, of the country in which he finds himself[5]. So all the rights of the refugees will be ensured as per municipal laws of the host countries, which shall be adopted in accordance with the international instruments. Fortunately, countries of Europe which are members of the European Union observe the same statute regarding refugee policy. In this part of this Article, some basic rights of the refugees will be scrutinized, as to the maintenance of the minimum standard of those rights as set by international instruments and European Union's legislation in the European states in the case of the Ukrainian refugees.

2.1 Notable Rights of Refugees Supposed to Be Observed in Europe:

2.1.1 Right to be Given Status of Refugee

People who flee from their country and seek refuge in another country, have the right to be acknowledged legally and have the right of given the status of the refugee to be able to enjoy all the rights guaranteed for the refugees by the international instruments and such status shall be determined by the municipal law of the host country[6]. The European Parliament and the Council of the European Union had also adopted regulations for accepting, examining and determining the status of persons originating from a third non-member state or a stateless person, who had lodged an application in a member state for international protection from persecution or grave violation of human rights[7]. The right of asylum and the rights of the refugees ensured by the Refugee Convention of 1951 and its Protocol of 1967 are also guaranteed by the European Fundamental Rights Charter[8].

2.1.2 Right to Food

If the host states operate any rationing system, which applies to the population at large and regulates the general distribution of products in short supply, refugees shall be accorded the same treatment as nationals[9]. Host states shall authorize refugees to participate in wage-earning employment in its territory and refugees shall have the same rights as of the habitual residents of the host states[10].

2.1.3 Right to Shelter and Residence

Host states shall allow refugees to stay and reside in their territory, regulated by laws or regulations or is subject to the control of public authorities, in a favorable condition which shall not be less favorable than what the host states offer to a legally residing foreign national in its territory[11]. The European Fundamental Rights Charter has provided that, if anyone has the threat of being persecuted if removed or expelled from the territory of the Union, then such shall not be expelled and shall have the authorization to stay within the territory of the Union[12].

2.1.4 Right to Health Treatment

Right health or access to health treatment is a fundamental human right of every citizen of every state, and even if there are any

communities who are stateless, it is a moral obligation of the world community of civilized nations to ensure measures for addressing their health treatment necessity properly[13]. The European Union ensured access to preventive health care and the right to access medical treatment. The Union emphasizes on adoption of a high level of human health protection measurement in all policies of the concerned authorities[14].

2.1.5 Right to Personal Security and Protection of Law

No one shall be subjected to torture or to inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment[15]. Everyone has the right to liberty and security of a person[16]. Refugees shall have access to the court in the host states. Refugees shall have the equal right as of the habitual residents of the host state in the matter of access to courts including legal assistance and exemption from *cautio judicatum solvi*[17]. In regulation of Europe it is provided that Member States shall ensure that the person concerned has access to legal assistance and, where necessary, to linguistic assistance[18].

2.1.6 Right to Special Care of Women, Children and Elderly People

The host states shall, by legal provisions, ensure the social security of the refugees, notably of women, elderly persons, and children regarding employment injury, occupational diseases, maternity, sickness, disability, old age, family responsibilities, or any other contingencies[19]. Children have the right and protection which is necessary for their well-being and every child has the right of maintaining a regular and direct personal relationship with both of the parents[20]. The European Union also prohibited the employment of children in the workplace and marked such employment as child labor which is strictly prohibited[21]. The European Union recognizes and respects the rights of the elderly persons to lead a life of dignity and independence and to participate in social and cultural life[22].

3. Disparity in Treatment across Refugee Origins

The EU's approach to the influx of Ukrainian refugees is significantly different from its approach to refugees from the Middle East, Africa, and South Asia. Temporary protections were promptly granted to Ukrainian refugees, which enabled them to access employment, lodging, and education in various EU countries[23]. Temporary protections were promptly granted to Ukrainian refugees, which helped them to access employment, lodging, and education in various EU countries. However, refugees from other regions frequently encounter lengthy and complex asylum procedures. The accelerated approach for Ukrainians reflects the political, cultural, and geographic proximity to Europe, which has prompted policymakers to implement a fast-track system. Differential treatment of Ukrainian versus non-Ukrainian refugees reveals significant inconsistencies in its humanitarian policies, shaped by cultural proximity, political interests, and media influence. Conversely, non-European refugees are subjected to more stringent eligibility requirements and more extended processing periods. This discrepancy raises questions regarding the EU's adherence to international refugee law. Ukrainians benefit from rapid access to housing, employment, and transit options under the Temporary Protection Directive, bypassing the protracted asylum processes that non-European refugees face. This two-tiered

system implies that refugee reception may be more reactive to political and cultural biases than to universal human rights principles, undermining the EU's position as a global humanitarian advocate.

From a critical standpoint, this disparity could weaken the EU's credibility as a champion of equitable human rights by selectively upholding the rights of those who culturally and geographically align with Europe rather than establishing universally consistent protection standards. The policy shift in favor of Ukrainians demonstrates Europe's capacity for flexibility. Yet, it raises the question: why isn't the same responsiveness extended to non-European refugees facing equally dire conditions? This inconsistency challenges the EU to reconcile its human rights commitments with its demonstrated selective practices, especially as migration escalates globally.

Bulgarian Prime Minister Kiril Petkov recently drew a distinct line between the two groups, justifying differential treatment and fostering a sense of Ukrainian exceptionalism:

"These are not the refugees we are used to...These people are Europeans...These people are intelligent, they are educated people...This is not the refugee wave we have been used to, people we were not sure about their identity, people with unclear pasts, who could have been even terrorists." [24]

Additionally, the comprehensive report on refugee integration in the EU observes that, even though Ukrainian refugees are generally granted broad social welfare benefits, refugees from African and Middle Eastern countries frequently encounter administrative or systemic barriers that impede their ability to access these resources. According to the National Integration Evaluation Mechanism (NIEM) of the European Union, these disparate standards lead to unequal access to rights, with non-European refugees facing particular obstacles in employment, education, and healthcare integration.

4. Observance of Rights in Europe in Case of Ukraine's Refugees

Ukrainians now have an automatic right to reside and work in any of the EU's 27 members for up to three years as this facility is granted by the European Union. If they are unable to live with friends or family, refugees are placed in receiving centers established in bordering countries of Ukraine. They are receiving food, medical attention, and information about subsequent travel from the receiving centers and other local authorities of the member states of the European Union. They have a right to social welfare benefits as well as access to housing, healthcare, and educational opportunities. Poland, one of the nations with the highest refugee intake, and Moldova, which has the highest proportion of refugees in its population, have requested further assistance [25]. Even though these *de facto* refugees are offered and given with various rights and facilities, neither their *de jure* status are not being determined by any of the host states yet.

More than 7.6 million Ukrainian refugees have been recorded across Europe since Russia began its full-scale invasion of Ukraine on February 24. More than 4.2 million Ukrainians have applied for temporary protection status in nations of the European Union, however, some of them have since returned to Ukraine [26]. In addition to that, not all refugees are treated the same. Throughout

the entire conflict, observers have noticed a double standard in how refugees are treated. Ukrainians leaving conflict have been welcomed with wide arms, whilst those from other conflict-affected countries are ostracized by Western nations [27]. Roma people of Ukraine are suffering discrimination while fleeing from Ukraine. Roma refugees from Ukraine are frequently suspected of not being Ukrainian, and they are housed separately in subpar facilities. Many people, according to multiple NGOs, are given incorrect information about their rights, and problems that other Ukrainian refugees have had no trouble resolving, such as missing passport stamps, are frequently cited as justification for turning them away. Since arriving in Europe from India hundreds of years ago, Roma groups have been persecuted and subjected to discrimination. They were also persecuted during the Holocaust. According to the European Union Agency for Fundamental Human Rights, almost 90% of people live in poverty. Once again, at this difficult time of conflict, when every person needs humanitarian aid equally as everyone else, the Roma communities are the target of discrimination, both in Ukraine and in the nations where they fled to find safety [28]. Currently women and children who had fled from Ukraine, are in great risk of being victimized of grave human rights violation, i.e. Human trafficking, forced labor etc. It has been reported that suspicious people at borders are offering incoming Ukrainian lucrative job offers in various countries. The International Organization for Migration (IOM) says its anti-trafficking advice hotline in Ukraine has received almost 19,000 calls since the war began – twice the monthly average. Moldova is one of the countries which is receiving a bigger number of refugees, which is a matter of shock that it is a hot spot for potential human trafficking. Despite making substantial efforts to do so in recent years, according to a 2021 US State Department report on the subject, Moldova still does not achieve the minimal policy standards required for the elimination of trafficking [29]. Though there is a general declaration from the Council of the European Union, but relatively poorer EU member states of Eastern Europe are unable to fulfill all the directives of the Council and are also unable to maintain the minimum standards of refugee rights as required by the international instruments as well as European legislation and regulations.

5. Long-Term Implications of Temporary Refugee Protections

5.1 Impact of Temporary Protections on Future Integration Policies

A significant precedent in refugee policy has been established by the EU's prompt response to the Ukrainian refugee crisis through interim protection measures, such as the interim Protection Directive (TPD). This directive expedites the integration of Ukrainian refugees by granting them immediate access to healthcare, lodging, education, and employment, without the necessity of submitting formal asylum applications [30]. By instituting more flexible, crisis-responsive frameworks, the extension or conversion of these temporary protections into long-term residency would likely reshape EU refugee law. This change has the potential to inspire the implementation of similar rapid-response measures in future crises, which would represent a departure from the conventional, protracted asylum processes that are frequently implemented for non-European refugees.

Potential policy changes may entail the establishment of more comprehensive pathways for the conversion of temporary protection into permanent residence. This would simplify the transition from transitory to long-term status, which would reduce administrative burdens for both refugees and host countries. Nevertheless, the EU's resources may be challenged and legislative frameworks may need to be revisited to guarantee equal treatment if such flexible protections are implemented across all refugee groups.

5.2 Socioeconomic Impact on Host Countries

Eastern European countries, particularly those bordering Ukraine, such as Poland and Romania, have experienced substantial strain on their social, economic, and political infrastructures as a result of the substantial influx of Ukrainian refugees. Although the integration of Ukrainian refugees has increased demand for housing, healthcare, and public services, it has also presented economic challenges. The increased demand for social support and educational resources is causing countries with limited budgets for public welfare to struggle to keep up.

Socially, the high intake of refugees in regions with pre-existing socio-economic constraints can result in changes in local demographics, which may provoke public debate or tension. Nevertheless, Ukrainians' employment has contributed to the alleviation of labor shortages in a variety of sectors, including manufacturing and construction. In the long term, these economic contributions may compensate for the initial resource constraints, provided that support systems are able to adjust in order to maintain effective integration policies without compromising local resources.

5.3 Long-term Refugee Protections and EU Expansion Policy

The EU's enlargement strategy, particularly in relation to prospective member states in Eastern Europe, may be impacted by the current influx of Ukrainian refugees[31]. The current crisis has emphasized the necessity of collaborative management of border security and refugee support infrastructure, which are areas in which EU candidate countries must comply with EU standards. Demonstrating the ability to effectively manage refugee inflows and comply with EU refugee protections may become a critical criterion for accession negotiations.

Furthermore, the extension of provisional protection to permanent status for Ukrainians could indicate the EU's readiness to implement more adaptable residency frameworks, which could potentially impact future policy development within the EU and influence relations with neighboring countries. This change has the potential to motivate candidate countries to more closely accord with EU integration norms, thereby providing new incentives for collaboration in border protection and asylum management policies.

In order to evaluate the resettlement opportunities and constraints for refugees in the United States, particularly in the context of the 2024 election, which features Kamala Harris and Donald Trump as prospective candidates, it is imperative to investigate the potential influence of each candidate's foreign policy stance on refugee policies. The following is an analysis that considers these factors.

6. Refugee Resettlement Possibilities and Limitations in the United States

6.1 Kamala Harris's Foreign Policy and Refugee Resettlement Strategy

Kamala Harris, a Democratic candidate, is expected to maintain the Biden administration's dedication to increasing refugee resettlement quotas. In contrast to recent Republican administrations, her foreign policy prioritizes humanitarian concerns, multilateral cooperation, and a more liberal immigration policy. Harris's methodology is anticipated to encompass the following:

- a. Expanded Resources and Increased Resettlement Cap: Harris could strive to substantially increase the refugee cap, with the objective of restoring levels to the historic highs observed during previous Democratic administrations. Her policy may prioritize vulnerable populations, including women, children, and LGBTQ+ refugees, particularly those from conflict zones.
- b. Multilateral and Human Rights-Based Focus: Harris's proclivity for multilateral engagement may necessitate the development of stronger partnerships with UN agencies and NGOs to provide assistance to refugees, including direct resettlement and aid within regions of displacement. This concentration could potentially result in the United States collaborating with other countries to share responsibility for refugee crises, including the potential funding of regional refugee facilities and rehabilitation centers abroad.
- c. Strategic Foreign Aid: Harris would likely advocate for increased foreign aid to stabilize regions with high refugee outflows, a move that is consistent with her overall foreign policy approach. This method has the potential to reduce the necessity for immediate asylum in the United States, thereby affecting refugee resettlement by addressing the underlying causes of displacement, including conflict and climate change.

6.2 Donald Trump's Approach to Refugee Resettlement and Foreign Policy

Donald Trump's refugee resettlement strategy is anticipated to be in close alignment with the policies he implemented during his previous administration. During that time, the United States implemented stricter verification procedures and reduced refugee admissions. It is reasonable to anticipate that Trump's perspective will encompass the following:

- a. Reduced Refugee Caps and Limited Resettlement Options: Trump may implement policies that prioritize the reduction of the refugee cap to a mere fraction of its current levels, with the objective of reducing the number of individuals eligible for resettlement. This reduction would primarily focus on refugees from regions that are perceived as security risks and may impose additional restrictions on resettlement from specific countries, notably those that are currently experiencing conflicts.
- b. Increased Security Vetting and Border Control Measures: Trump could implement more rigorous screening processes for refugees and asylum seekers, which would extend the time and decrease the probability of successful resettlement, with an emphasis on security. Refugees from regions that are

experiencing political instability would likely be subject to enhanced verification, which is consistent with a more protectionist approach to national security.

- c. A Foreign Policy with Reduced International Engagement: Trump's foreign policy may adopt a unilateral approach, which could result in a reduction in contributions to international refugee efforts and a potential withdrawal from multilateral agreements related to refugee assistance. His policies could potentially motivate nations to independently address their own refugee crises, which could involve prioritizing the financing of refugee camps in the region over the promotion of increased resettlement in the United States.

6.3 Potential Outcomes for Refugee Resettlement in 2024 and Beyond

- a. Under the leadership of Kamala Harris, the United States may experience an increase in refugee resettlement opportunities, with a greater emphasis on international collaboration. This strategy is expected to cultivate more robust partnerships with nations that are grappling with substantial refugee crises and to broaden the protections available to vulnerable populations. The United States may be able to play a more prominent role in global resettlement efforts as a result of Harris's policies, which would increase its humanitarian impact and ensure that it adheres closely to human rights principles.
- b. The United States is expected to further restrict refugee admissions under Donald Trump, with an emphasis on the implementation of stringent security measures and a decrease in the aggregate number of resettlements. This strategy has the potential to reduce the nation's participation in international refugee initiatives, thereby advocating for a more isolationist stance. The resettlement opportunities for individuals from high-conflict regions would be diminished by Trump's policies, particularly if they are perceived to pose security concerns.

The 2024 election's results will be instrumental in determining the direction of U.S. refugee policy and its impact on global resettlement initiatives, potentially altering America's role in refugee protection and humanitarian assistance for years to come.

7. Recommendation

7.1 General Recommendations for Strengthening Refugee Protections across the Europe

The European Union and its member states are the pole stars for ensuring human rights throughout its territory. Though there are specific provisions in international instruments and EU legislations, some contravention of such provisions has been seen in the refugee situations in the countries of Eastern Europe. Especially the allegation of discrimination and social protection risk of women and children needs to be addressed urgently and with serious note. The Council of the European Union and the European Parliament shall take more effective and efficacious measures to ensure the state responsibilities of the EU member states of Eastern Europe while dealing with refugees of Ukraine. The Council and Parliament shall also adopt regulations for offering permanent recognition of the Ukrainian refugees rather than their temporary status and rights which are guaranteed for three years of time as this war of Europe doesn't have the possibility to come to an end anytime soon. If the refugees are

recognized according to their legal status, their rights and interests will be protected more intensely.

7.2 Policy Recommendations for Strengthening Refugee Protections across the Europe

7.2.1 Unified Refugee Reception Standards

The necessity of unified minimum reception standards across all EU member states is illustrated by the disparity in responses to various refugee groups in Europe, as recently emphasized in the discourse. The implementation of a European-wide standard would guarantee fundamental humane conditions for all refugees, irrespective of their country of origin, and would eradicate unequal treatment. A standardized approach could entail the following:

- a. Common Shelter and Living Standards: Prior to the continuation of asylum proceedings, each member state may establish minimum standards for shelter quality, healthcare access, and sanitation.
- b. Equitable Procedural Fairness: The EU could prevent certain countries from adopting more invasive or less transparent procedures for specific groups by establishing consistent timeframes for the processing of asylum applications across countries. This would mitigate discrepancies and perceptions of discrimination based on nationality or origin.
- Centralized EU Supervision: The European Asylum Support Office (EASO) could assume a more substantial role in ensuring that these unified standards are adhered to, by establishing mechanisms for reporting and addressing deficiencies. This would help to maintain consistent standards.

7.2.2 Enhanced Legal Aid and Language Support Services

- a. It is imperative to guarantee that refugees have access to legal and linguistic assistance in order to facilitate long-term integration, particularly for those who have been displaced indefinitely. Numerous refugees from non-European countries encounter linguistic and legal obstacles that impede their capacity to effectively integrate and advocate for their rights. Suggestions consist of:
- b. Legal Aid Funded by the EU: The EU should establish a centralized fund that offers legal assistance to refugees as they navigate the asylum procedure. This fund should be accessible to all member states. This could be accomplished by establishing partnerships with nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), which can offer legal assistance that is customized to the unique obstacles faced by refugees.
- c. Language and Cultural Orientation Programs: Refugees should have access to standardized language and cultural orientation programs that are available throughout the EU upon their arrival. In order to facilitate the integration of refugees into the host society, programs could be customized to account for the cultural context and languages of each country.
- d. Mental Health and Psychological Support: A comprehensive approach to integration would be achieved by addressing the trauma that many refugees have experienced through EU-funded psychological services. These services should be accessible to refugees throughout their stay in Europe and should be customized to accommodate their diverse cultural contexts.

7.2.3 Regional Support Mechanisms

Given that refugee arrivals more heavily impact certain EU states due to geographic location, equitable burden-sharing mechanisms are essential for sustainable refugee protection. Key proposals include:

- a. **Refugee Resettlement Fund:** A resettlement pool financed by the EU, to which all member states contribute, could provide financial assistance to countries that are burdened disproportionately, such as those in Eastern and Southern Europe. This fund has the potential to alleviate the burden on national resources by providing support for lodging, healthcare, and educational facilities.
- b. **Proportionate Relocation Systems:** A system that equitably distributes refugees proportionally based on the capacity of each member state would assist in balancing the burden. Economic stability, population density, and the current refugee populations of each member state could be considered by this system.
- c. **Flexible Emergency Response Teams:** Emergency task forces in the European Union should be deployed to provide logistical, medical, and security support in response to refugee crises. These teams would aid national governments in the management of abrupt surges of refugees, thereby improving the capacity for both immediate response and long-term planning.

8. Conclusion

Guaranteeing and ensuring refugee rights has always been considered as a very difficult job and a great challenge in the way of obtaining minimum fulfillment of fundamental human rights as the refugee crisis since the end of the twentieth century emerged in Asian and Middle Eastern underdeveloped and developing countries. But after the outbreak of war in Europe, developed countries of Europe are now hosting refugees. If these countries can't set an example that, with proper financing and maintenance of information and system, refugee rights can be guaranteed and ensured, then it will remain as a bad example for the world community implying that refugee rights are subject matter of documented texts, not absolute realities. The global refugee crisis, particularly exacerbated by the ongoing conflict in Ukraine, has exposed significant disparities in the treatment of refugees based on their origin and cultural proximity to Europe. While Ukrainian refugees have benefited from expedited procedures and swift access to rights, refugees from other regions, especially those from the Middle East and Africa, often face lengthy bureaucratic processes and limited access to essential services. It is imperative that the international community, particularly the European Union, adheres to the principles of international refugee law and ensures equal treatment for all refugees, regardless of their nationality or origin. This requires a comprehensive approach that addresses the root causes of displacement, promotes equitable burden-sharing among nations, and provides adequate support for refugees' integration into host societies. By implementing policies that prioritize human rights, solidarity, and sustainable solutions, the international community can work towards a more just and compassionate response to the global refugee crisis.

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