



Jus Corpus Law Journal

Open Access Law Journal – Copyright © 2024 – ISSN 2582-7820
Editor-in-Chief – Prof. (Dr.) Rhishikesh Dave; Publisher – Ayush Pandey

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Comparative Analysis of Refugee Protection: Examining the Impact of Asylum Laws and Non-refoulement Laws on the Lives of Refugees in India, Syria and Germany

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Received 03 March 2024; *Accepted* 04 April 2024; *Published* 08 April 2024

This research article delves into the refugee protection frameworks of three distinct countries—Germany, India, and Syria—in response to the unprecedented challenges posed by forced displacement on a global scale. Germany stands out as a model with its progressive asylum policies and comprehensive support systems, which provide a solid foundation for ensuring the well-being and successful integration of refugees. By closely examining Germany's legal framework, the research aims to not only highlight its strengths but also pinpoint areas where improvements can be made to enhance refugee protection further. India's case is fascinating, considering its diverse cultural heritage and the intricate balance between national interests and humanitarian principles. The study delves into the complexities faced by refugees within the Indian context, shedding light on the challenges and opportunities that arise. Meanwhile, Syria's protracted conflict introduces a unique perspective, highlighting the evolving legal dynamics and the formidable challenges in providing meaningful protection amidst ongoing turmoil. By analyzing the experiences and responses of these three countries, the study offers valuable insights and actionable recommendations for policymakers grappling with the complexities of refugee protection on a global scale.

Keywords: *refugee protection, asylum laws, non-refoulement, socio-political context, humanitarian crises, forced displacement.*

INTRODUCTION

The global landscape of forced displacement and refugee migration has witnessed unprecedented challenges in recent decades, necessitating a critical examination of the diverse frameworks governing the protection and well-being of refugees across different nations. The world over the years has faced displacement and migration due to conflicts, persecution, and socio-political factors. Notwithstanding the policy-making and advocacy efforts in Germany, India, and Syria it is inevitable to overlook the drastic difference with regards to its implementation in the three countries. Analyzing their legal framework and their humanitarian conditions levies the path to strengthening asylum systems. While shedding light on the international obligations and treaties that the countries are signatories to, such examination highlights and brings to limelight the sense of global responsibility, aspects of peacebuilding, and conflict resolution.

GERMANY: PROGRESSIVE POLICIES AND INTEGRATION DYNAMICS

Germany, long recognized for its progressive asylum policies and extensive support systems for refugees, represents a benchmark for comprehensive refugee protection and integration programs. The nation's commitment to upholding the rights and dignity of displaced individuals has positioned it as a leading example of effective refugee protection within the European context.¹ This research endeavours to evaluate the efficacy of Germany's legal framework and integration mechanisms, with a specific focus on how these policies contribute to the overall well-being and successful resettlement of refugees. By dissecting the multifaceted dimensions of Germany's refugee protection approach, this study aims to extract best practices and discern areas for potential improvement, thereby offering valuable insights for global efforts to enhance refugee protection.

¹ WOLFGANG BOSSWICK, 'Development of Asylum Policy in Germany' (2000) 13(1) *Journal of Refugee Studies* 43 <<https://doi.org/10.1093/jrs/13.1.43>> accessed 27 February 2024

INDIA: NAVIGATING COMPLEXITY IN REFUGEE PROTECTION

India, historically renowned for its rich cultural tapestry and tradition of hospitality, stands as a crucial case study in the discourse of refugee protection. With a formidable history of accommodating diverse waves of displaced populations, India's legal framework and asylum policies represent a dynamic interplay of national interests, humanitarian ethos, and complex geopolitical realities.² This study will delve into the challenges faced by refugees seeking sanctuary within the boundaries of India, scrutinizing the extent to which its asylum laws align with prevailing international standards. By examining the impact of India's legal framework on the social, economic, and psychological well-being of refugees, this research seeks to elucidate the intricacies of refugee protection within a nation characterized by its multifaceted legal landscape.

SYRIA: CONFLICT, DISPLACEMENT, AND EVOLVING LEGAL DYNAMICS

In stark contrast to India's historical context, Syria emerges as a case study defined by protracted conflict, mass displacement, and a dynamic interplay of domestic and international legal frameworks. The Syrian crisis, one of the most pressing humanitarian emergencies of our time, necessitates a nuanced examination of the legal safeguards afforded to displaced populations within a context of ongoing instability.³ This study will probe the role of legal instruments in providing meaningful protection to those uprooted by conflict, illuminating the complexities and challenges faced by both refugees and host nations in Syria's unique geopolitical reality.

WHO IS A REFUGEE?

The concept of a refugee holds significant importance in international law, defining who is eligible to seek asylum and receive protection in another country. This definition stems from the

² Bimal N. Patel, *The State Practice of India and the Development of International Law Dynamic Interplay between Foreign Policy and Jurisprudence* (vol 4, Brill's Asian Law Series 2016)

³ 'Syria Refugee Crisis Explained' (USA for UNHCR, 13 March 2024) <<https://www.unrefugees.org/news/syria-refugee-crisis-explained/>> accessed 13 March 2024

Refugee Convention 1951⁴ and its 1967 Protocol⁵. According to these foundational documents, a refugee is characterized by several key criteria.

Firstly, they must possess a well-founded fear rooted in specific circumstances within their own country. This fear typically stems from factors such as ethnicity, religion, nationality, and membership in a particular political ideology or social collective.

Secondly, this fear must be directly linked to the threat of persecution, which can manifest in various forms including torture, physical violence, discrimination, and other severe human rights violations.

Additionally, refugees are individuals who find themselves outside their country of nationality and are either unable or unwilling to return due to the fear of persecution. This aspect underscores their need for international protection.

Furthermore, refugees must demonstrate that they lack viable options for seeking refuge or safety within their own country, thereby necessitating assistance from external sources.

It is pertinent to note that, the refugee definition excludes individuals who are classified as war criminals or serious non-political offenders, aligning with the UN's principles and goals. It's worth noting that the Convention acknowledges the concept of "refugee sur place," referring to individuals who become refugees after leaving their country due to events or changes occurring after their departure.⁶

NON-REFOULEMENT IN INTERNATIONAL HUMAN RIGHTS LAW

The notion of non-refoulement is key to the domains of international humanitarian law, customary law, and human rights. This principle requires States to refrain from deporting or bringing back under their control any individuals under their authority if there are reasonable

⁴ Refugee Convention 1951

⁵ Protocol Relating to the Status of Refugees 1967

⁶ 'What Is a Refugee? Definition and Meaning' (USA for UNHCR) <<https://www.unrefugees.org/refugee-facts/what-is-a-refugee/>> accessed 10 February 2024

reasons to suspect that their return will result in grave and permanent harm. This harm includes the possibility of being subjected to torture, maltreatment, persecution, or other serious human rights breaches.

Beyond the boundaries of international refugee law, the non-refoulement principle has gained wider acceptance as a result of the global evolution of the protection of human rights. The 1966 International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR)⁷, which forbids torture even inside a state's boundaries, refers to non-refoulement implicitly. The non-refoulement commitment is expressly stated in the 1984 United Nations Convention against Torture (CAT), which is framed within a larger human rights framework. In light of a history of egregious human rights breaches, Article 3⁸ of the CAT forbids extraditing or sending someone back to a country where there are good reasons to suspect they would be subjected to torture.

Beyond what is stated in the CAT, the ICCPR's non-refoulement concept prohibits cruel, or degrading treatment or punishment. The UNHCR ExCom and resolutions from the UN have reaffirmed this principle, highlighting its standing as a human rights obligation that goes beyond refugee law. Additionally, Article 3 of the 1950 European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR)⁹, which states that torture is forbidden, implicitly derives the rule on refoulement.

Multilateral extradition treaties, which prohibit violations even throughout the extradition process, express non-refoulement within regional frameworks. Resolution (67)¹⁰ of the Council of Europe obliges its member states to abstain from denying entry, refusing admission, or expelling individuals who are at risk of persecution.¹¹

Under Article 19(2) of the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights¹², which has been elevated to the main EU law, the non-refoulement concept is codified in the EU. Removal, expelling, or

⁷ International Convention on Civil and Political Rights 1996

⁸ United Nations Convention against Torture 1948, art 3

⁹ European Convention on Human Rights 1950, art 3

¹⁰ 'Resolution (67) 14: Asylum to Persons in Danger of Persecution' (*Refworld*, 29 June 1967) <<https://www.refworld.org/docid/3ae6b38168.html>> accessed 16 February 2024

¹¹ Jean Allain, 'The Jus Cogens Nature of Non-Refoulement' (2001) SSRN Electronic Journal <<http://dx.doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.2777446>> accessed 16 February 2024

¹² Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union 2000, art 19(2)

extradition to a state where there is a real danger of the death penalty, torture, or other inhumane treatment or punishment is prohibited by this clause. Non-refoulement provisions are defined by secondary EU legislation as a horizontal human rights guarantee for third-country nationals who are living illegally and in the context of asylum and international protection, respectively. Examples of these directives are the Recast Qualification Directive (2011/95/EU)¹³ and the Return Directive (2008/115/EC)¹⁴. These clauses fit with basic EU law concepts such as direct applicability, direct impact, and primacy, while also restating existing international legal responsibilities and enabling the EU to enforce the principle of non-refoulement through the Court of Justice of the European Union.

International and regional human rights organizations, as well as national courts, have repeatedly stated that non-refoulement is a natural protection resulting from the duties to protect, defend, and fulfil human rights. These human rights treaty organizations regularly receive, consider, and rule on individual petitions about possible refoulement instances. The Committee for the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women, the Committee on the Rights of the Child, the Committee Against Torture, and the Human Rights Committee are a few notable examples.¹⁵

CONTEXTUAL BACKGROUND

OVERVIEW OF GERMANY'S HISTORY OF REFUGEES

Germany has a complex history of receiving refugees, shaped by various historical events and political circumstances. After World War II, Germany experienced a massive influx of refugees and displaced persons. This included millions of ethnic Germans who were expelled from Eastern Europe as borders were redrawn, as well as non-German refugees who sought shelter in Germany. In 1956, Germany received a significant number of refugees following the Hungarian Uprising against Soviet control. Approximately 200,000 Hungarians fled to West Germany. During the Prague Spring in 1968, when Czechoslovakia underwent political

¹³ Directive 2011/95/EU [2011] OJ L 337/9

¹⁴ Directive 2008/115/EC [2008] OJ L 348/98

¹⁵ Tamas Molnar, 'The Principle of Non-Refoulement Under International Law: Its Inception and Evolution in a Nutshell' (2016) 1 *Corvinus Journal of International Affairs* (COJOURN) <<https://ssrn.com/abstract=2807437>> accessed 25 February 2024

liberalization, Germany received a considerable number of Czechoslovak refugees seeking asylum from the subsequent Soviet-led invasion. As Yugoslavia disintegrated in the 1990s, Germany received a substantial number of refugees, particularly from Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, and Kosovo.

This influx was a result of the violent conflicts in the region. The fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 and the subsequent reunification of East and West Germany led to a significant movement of people between the two parts of the country. In the 2000s and 2010s, Germany received refugees from various regions, including the Middle East and Africa. Conflicts in countries like Iraq, Syria, Afghanistan, and Eritrea led to a significant increase in asylum seekers. Since the onset of the Syrian Civil War in 2011, Germany has been one of the leading destinations for Syrian refugees in Europe.¹⁶

The German government implemented various programs to provide asylum and support for those seeking refuge from the conflict. During the European Migrant Crisis of 2015-2016, Germany saw a surge in asylum applications, partly due to its open-door policy towards Syrian refugees. The country received hundreds of thousands of asylum seekers from various countries, leading to a significant public and political debate on immigration and integration policies. Germany continues to receive refugees and asylum seekers from various regions, though the specific numbers and circumstances may have evolved since then.¹⁷

OVERVIEW OF INDIA'S HISTORY OF REFUGEE INFLUX

India has a rich and diverse history of providing sanctuary to individuals and communities facing perilous circumstances in their home countries. One of the most profound events in this history was the partition of British India in 1947. This partition, along religious lines, led to mass migrations, with Hindus and Sikhs moving to India and Muslims to Pakistan. The ensuing

¹⁶ Catherine Perron, 'Reimagining German Identity through the Politics of History: Changing Interpretations of German Past Migrations during the "Refugee Crisis", 2015/2016' (2020) 47 *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 4172 <<https://doi.org/10.1080/1369183X.2020.1812276>> accessed 27 February 2024

¹⁷ Matthew Karnitschnig, 'Germany's Never-Ending Migration Crisis' (*POLITICO*, 10 November 2023) <<https://www.politico.eu/article/germanys-never-ending-migration-crisis/>> accessed 10 February 2024

violence and forced displacement left an enduring impact on the region.¹⁸ In 1959, following the Tibetan Uprising against Chinese rule, the 14th Dalai Lama and numerous Tibetans sought refuge in India. The Indian government extended support and allowed Tibetans to settle in various parts of the country, particularly in Dharamshala, Himachal Pradesh, which became a significant hub for the Tibetan diaspora.¹⁹

The Bangladesh Liberation War in 1971 brought millions of refugees to India as conflict raged in East Pakistan. India played a crucial role in supporting the Bangladesh Liberation Movement, ultimately leading to the creation of Bangladesh. Despite the significant humanitarian challenges posed by this influx, India remained steadfast in providing sanctuary.²⁰ The protracted civil war in Sri Lanka led to waves of Tamil refugees seeking safety in India. The conflict between government forces and the LTTE resulted in large numbers of displaced persons. Many found refuge in the southern Indian state of Tamil Nadu, where they received shelter, rehabilitation, and education, contributing to the socio-cultural fabric of the region.²¹

India has also been a destination for various ethnic groups fleeing persecution and conflict in Myanmar. Communities such as the Chin, Kachin, Rohingya, and others have sought refuge in India, particularly in the northeastern states and parts of West Bengal. These individuals have faced grave challenges in their home country and sought safety within India's borders. During the Maoist insurgency in Nepal from 1996 to 2006, some Nepali citizens sought refuge in India to escape the conflict. India provided a sanctuary for those fleeing violence, offering them a haven during a tumultuous period in Nepal's history.²²

In recent years, India has witnessed an influx of refugees and asylum seekers from various neighbouring nations. Ongoing conflicts, persecution, and humanitarian crises in countries like

¹⁸ Ravinder Kaur, 'Narrative absence: An 'Untouchable' account of Partition migration' (2008) 42(2) Contributions to Indian Sociology 281-306 <<http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/006996670804200204>> accessed 10 February 2024

¹⁹ Rajesh Kharat, 'Gainers of a stalemate: The Tibetans in India' in Ranabir Samaddar (ed), *Refugees and the State: Practices of Asylum and Care in India, 1947-2000* (Sage India 2003) 281

²⁰ 'Refugees' (*Bangladesh Genocide Archive*, 14 March 2012) <<https://www.genocidebangladesh.org/refugees/>> accessed 10 February 2024

²¹ Diotima Chatteraj, *Displacement among Sri Lankan Tamil migrants: The diasporic search for home in the aftermath of war* (vol 11, Springer Nature 2022)

²² Ria Kapoor, *Making Refugees in India* (OUP 2021)

Afghanistan, Myanmar, Sri Lanka, and others have compelled individuals and communities to seek refuge in India. This reflects India's commitment to humanitarian values, even though the country does not have a specific national refugee law. India generally adheres to principles of non-refoulement, ensuring that individuals facing danger in their home countries find safety within India's borders.

OVERVIEW OF SYRIA'S REFUGEE SITUATION

In particular, throughout the latter part of the 20th century, Syria has long been a welcoming country for refugees. There was one significant movement that led to the Palestinian population being displaced after the state of Israel was established in 1948. In neighbouring nations like Syria, a large number of Palestinian refugees sought safety. Tens of thousands of Palestinians found asylum in Yarmouk, the largest Palestinian refugee camp in Syria, which was founded in Damascus.²³

Another significant wave of refugees came during the Lebanese Civil War (1975-1990). Syrians fleeing the conflict in Lebanon sought safety in their neighbouring country. Additionally, Iraqis sought refuge in Syria during the Gulf War in 1990-1991 and later during the Iraq War in 2003. The Syrian Civil War, which began in 2011, triggered the most recent and greatest migration of refugees into Syria in the early twenty-first century. This conflict began as protests against the dictatorial rule of President Bashar al-Assad and quickly escalated into a massive armed battle. It resulted in a significant refugee flow to neighbouring countries as well as widespread internal displacement in Syria. Millions of Syrians sought refuge in countries like Turkey, Jordan, Lebanon, and Iraq, while others fled to more distant regions in search of safety. The Syrian refugee crisis, which is primarily a result of this ongoing civil war, remains a pressing

²³ Patrick Strickland, 'Palestinians in Syria Desperately Need Yarmouk Truce' (*Al Jazeera*, 25 December 2015) <<https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2015/12/25/palestinians-in-syria-desperately-need-yarmouk-truce>> accessed 14 February 2024

humanitarian issue and has had profound social, economic, and political implications for the entire region.²⁴

²⁴ Hafeez Ullah Khan and Waseem Khan, 'Syria: History, the Civil War and Peace Prospects' (2017) 24(2) Journal of Political Studies
<https://www.researchgate.net/publication/322315808_Syria_History_The_Civil_War_and_Peace_Prospects>
accessed 28 February 2024

COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

Germany, India, and Syria all have different sociopolitical environments and take different tacks when it comes to protecting asylum seekers. Using comparison analysis, one may shed light on both common principles and divergent practices, thereby offering valuable insights into the complex interactions that exist between legal frameworks and practical implementation in the handling of migrants inside these boundaries.

DEFINITION OF REFUGEES

Germany defines a refugee by international standards. It identifies individuals with a well-founded fear of persecution based on specific grounds, aligning with the criteria outlined in the 1951 Refugee Convention²⁵. India, however, faces challenges in providing a clear definition of a refugee. The country lacks a specific legal framework for refugees and is not a signatory to the 1951 Convention. As a result, asylum seekers and displaced individuals in India may encounter uncertainty regarding their legal status due to the absence of standardized guidelines for determining refugee status.

In Syria, the ongoing conflict and internal displacement create complexities in the application of formal refugee definitions. While Syria itself may not formally recognize refugees due to the intricacies of internal displacement, individuals who flee the country and seek protection in neighbouring nations or beyond are considered refugees by host countries. This highlights the unique challenges posed by conflict-related displacement and highlights the importance of considering regional and geopolitical contexts in defining and protecting refugees.²⁶

INTERNATIONAL TREATIES

Germany's adherence to international treaties is the foundation of its commitment to maintaining asylum rules and the concept of non-refoulement. Enshrined in Article 33 of the Geneva Convention on Refugees, to which Germany is a party, the principle of non-refoulement

²⁵ Refugee Convention 1951

²⁶ 'Syria Refugee Crisis Explained' (USA for UNHCR., 2023) <<https://www.unrefugees.org/news/syria-refugee-crisis-explained/>> accessed 15 February 2024

applies not only to refugees but also to migrants in transit, guaranteeing that people who have a legitimate fear of persecution will not be forced to return home. The essential principle of non-refoulement, which prohibits the forced return of people to areas where they may risk persecution, is one of the key requirements outlined in these treaties concerning the treatment of refugees.²⁷ Germany exhibits its commitment to international human rights norms and creates a legislative framework that directs the nation's policies for asylum and refugee protection by ratifying these accords. Germany's extensive asylum procedures, which are intended to guarantee that anyone seeking asylum within its borders is granted the required legal and procedural safeguards, are based on this international commitment. Essentially, these treaties serve as the cornerstone of Germany's endeavours to offer a safe haven to those requiring international protection.²⁸

India's historical stance on refugee protection is characterized by a deliberate avoidance of formal international commitments. Despite expressing political commitment to refugee issues, India's first Prime Minister, Jawaharlal Nehru, intentionally steered clear of legal obligations. As early as 1953, Nehru informed Parliament of India's intention to abide by international asylum standards through non-binding domestic policies. This approach remains evident in India's continued characterization of the Refugee Convention as a 'subject of review'.²⁹ This diplomatic language, employed for over five decades, indicates a measured reluctance to fully engage with international refugee protection frameworks. Consequently, India has not become a party to the 1951 Refugee Convention, resulting in the non-refoulement principle not being enshrined in its domestic legal framework. This deliberate avoidance of formal international commitments is a defining feature of India's approach to refugee protection.³⁰

²⁷ 'Forms of Asylum and Refugee Protection' (UNHCR Germany) <<https://help.unhcr.org/germany/asylum-in-germany/forms-of-asylum-and-refugee-protection/>> accessed 12 February 2024

²⁸ Entitlement to asylum' (BAMF, 22 June 2023) <<https://www.bamf.de/EN/Themen/AsylFluechtlingsschutz/AblaufAsylverfahrens/Schutzformen/Asylberechtigung/asylberechtigung-node.html>> accessed 12 February 2024

²⁹ Jay Ramasubramanyam, 'Refugee Protection in India and the Country's Relationship to the Global Refugee Regime' (bpb, 13 February 2023) <<https://www.bpb.de/themen/migration-integration/laenderprofile/english-version-country-profiles/518000/refugee-protection-in-india-and-the-country-s-relationship-to-the-global-refugee-regime/>> accessed 15 February 2024

³⁰ Nimrat Kaur, 'Protection of Refugees in India: A Critical Analysis' (2013) SSRN

In Syria, UNHCR is the sole agency responsible for providing registration services and documentation to asylum-seekers and refugees. Following this process, individuals can obtain their residence permit from the Syrian authorities. As of the end of June, approximately 20,200 refugees and asylum-seekers were officially registered with UNHCR in Syria. The majority of them originate from Iraq, while others come from countries such as Sudan, South Sudan, Afghanistan, Iran, and Somalia. Since Syria is not a signatory to the 1951 Convention and lacks specific refugee or asylum-related legislation, no distinct refugee documentation is issued by national authorities. However, residency permits are granted to refugees and asylum-seekers who meet immigration criteria, possess a UNHCR-issued document, a national passport, and have entered Syria legally. Thus, holding UNHCR-issued documents is a crucial prerequisite for regularizing the stay of refugees and asylum-seekers in the country.³¹

Germany, India, and Syria demonstrate varied approaches to refugee protection, each influenced by their unique geopolitical and historical contexts. Germany stands out for its steadfast commitment to upholding asylum and non-refoulement principles, actively participating in pivotal international treaties such as the 1951 Refugee Convention. This commitment is rooted in a dedication to global human rights standards, forming the cornerstone of Germany's comprehensive asylum procedures. The country provides a secure haven for those with a well-founded fear of persecution.

In contrast, India's historical stance on refugee protection is marked by a deliberate avoidance of formal international commitments. Despite expressing political commitment to refugee issues, India has refrained from becoming a party to the 1951 Refugee Convention. This approach, which has persisted for over five decades, reflects a measured reluctance to fully engage with international refugee protection frameworks. Consequently, the non-refoulement principle is not enshrined in India's domestic legal framework, leaving questions about the extent of legal safeguards available to displaced populations.

³¹ 'Refugees and Asylum-Seekers' (*UNHCR Syria*) <<https://www.unhcr.org/sy/refugees>> accessed 10 February 2024

In Syria, a nation grappling with an ongoing humanitarian crisis, the absence of specific refugee or asylum-related legislation and non-membership in the 1951 Convention create a unique situation. Here, UNHCR plays a crucial role as the primary agency responsible for providing registration services and documentation to asylum-seekers and refugees. This process allows individuals to obtain residency permits from Syrian authorities, highlighting the essential role of international organizations in managing displaced populations in the absence of dedicated domestic legislation.

These distinct approaches significantly shape the experiences of displaced individuals within each country's borders, influencing the level of legal protection and security they receive. While Germany actively engages with international legal frameworks to provide refuge, India's reluctance to formal commitments raises questions about the extent of legal safeguards available to displaced populations. In Syria's case, the crisis emphasizes the critical importance of adhering to international agreements to ensure the safety and well-being of those seeking refuge from dire circumstances.

DOMESTIC LAWS

Regarding non-refoulement and asylum rules, Germany has a thorough legal framework in place. The Asylum Act (*Asylgesetz*) 1993³², which regulates the processes and rights of asylum seekers in Germany, is one of the important pieces of legislation. It describes the steps involved in requesting asylum, such as registration, investigation, and decision-making. The Act also covers the responsibilities and rights of asylum seekers while they are in Germany. Germany upholds the concept of non-refoulement as stated in Article 33 of the Geneva Convention on Refugees³³. This concept forbids sending a refugee back to a place where they would face persecution and threaten their life or freedom. Regarding non-refoulement and asylum rules, Germany has a thorough legal framework. The Asylum Act (*Asylgesetz*) regulates the processes and rights of asylum seekers in Germany and is an important piece of legislation. It describes the steps in requesting asylum, such as registration, investigation, and decision-making. The Act

³² The Asylum Act (*Asylgesetz*) 1993

³³ Geneva Convention relating to the Status of Refugees 1951, art 33

also covers the responsibilities and rights of asylum seekers in Germany. Germany upholds the concept of non-refoulement as stated in Article 33 of the Geneva Convention on Refugees. This concept forbids sending a refugee back to a place where they would face persecution and threaten their lives and freedom.³⁴

India does not have specific domestic legislation addressing asylum laws or non-refoulement laws. India does, however, have a system in place for handling foreign nationals, which is primarily governed by the Foreigners Act of 1946³⁵ and the Registration of Foreigners Act of 1939³⁶. These acts primarily deal with issues related to entry, stay, and departure of foreign nationals, but they do not contain provisions specifically addressing asylum or refugee status. India's approach to refugees has largely been based on ad hoc arrangements and administrative directives. The country has provided refuge to various groups over the years based on humanitarian and geopolitical considerations, but these actions are not governed by a specific legal framework. Regarding non-refoulement, while India is not party to the 1951 Refugee Convention or its 1967 Protocol³⁷, which formally enshrines the principle, the Indian judiciary has occasionally referred to the principle in decisions related to the deportation of foreign nationals who might face persecution in their home countries.³⁸

At present, Syria does not have a complete national legislative framework for asylum. According to Article 39 of the Syrian Arab Republic's 2012 Constitution³⁹, 'political refugees shall not be extradited because of their political beliefs or the defence of freedom. Nonetheless, neither the definition of 'refugee' nor the scope of protection afforded by the national legal system of the nation is specified. Rather, laws, ordinances, and rules concerning foreigners' being admitted and legal status apply to both refugees and asylum applicants. As a result, individuals admitted

³⁴ 'Asylum and refugee policy' (*Federal Ministry of the Interior and Community*) <<https://www.bmi.bund.de/EN/topics/migration/asylum-refugee-protection/asylum-refugee-policy-germany/asylum-refugee-policy-node.html>> accessed 28 February 2024

³⁵ Foreigners Act 1946

³⁶ Registration of Foreigners Act 1939

³⁷ Protocol Relating to the Status of Refugees 1967, art 33

³⁸ Pooja, 'India's Refugee Policy' (*Indian National Bar Association*) <<https://www.indianbarassociation.org/indias-refugee-policy/>> accessed 28 February 2024

³⁹ Syrian Constitution 2012, art 39

into Syrian territory under refugee or asylum status are legally integrated into the national immigration framework.⁴⁰

Germany's legal framework, anchored by the Asylum Act, demonstrates a comprehensive approach to asylum processes and rights. The Act outlines steps for asylum requests and covers the responsibilities and rights of asylum seekers, aligning with international standards such as non-refoulement as stipulated in the Geneva Convention. Germany's adherence to these principles highlights its steadfast commitment to protecting refugees' lives and freedoms.

In contrast, India lacks specific domestic legislation addressing asylum and non-refoulement. The absence of a formal legal framework leaves India's approach to refugees primarily based on ad hoc arrangements and administrative directives. While India has historically provided refuge to various groups, the lack of a structured legal framework poses challenges in ensuring consistent protection for refugees and asylum seekers. However, the Indian judiciary has occasionally invoked non-refoulement principles in deportation decisions, reflecting a degree of adherence to international norms despite the absence of formal legal provisions.

Syria's legal landscape regarding asylum remains ambiguous, with no comprehensive national legislative framework in place. While Article 39 of Syria's 2012 Constitution ostensibly prohibits the extradition of political refugees, the lack of clear definitions and protections leaves refugees vulnerable. Laws governing foreigners' admission and legal status apply to refugees and asylum applicants, integrating them into Syria's immigration framework. However, the absence of specific asylum laws raises concerns about the adequacy of protection afforded to refugees within Syria's legal system.

Overall, while Germany demonstrates a comprehensive legal framework aligned with international standards, India and Syria face challenges stemming from the absence or ambiguity of formal legal provisions on asylum and non-refoulement. Strengthening legal

⁴⁰ Sarah Bidinger et al., 'Protecting Syrian Refugees: Laws, Policies, and Global Responsibility Sharing' (2014) Boston University School of Law, International Human Rights Clinic
<<https://www.bu.edu/law/files/2015/08/syrianrefugees.pdf>> accessed 28 February 2024

frameworks and ensuring adherence to international norms are crucial steps toward enhancing protection for refugees and asylum seekers in all three countries.

HUMANITARIAN CONDITIONS

Germany's commitment to supporting refugees is both steadfast and wide-ranging. Not only does Germany stand as UNHCR's second-largest contributor, but it has also emerged as the third-largest host country for refugees globally, providing sanctuary to 2.2 million displaced individuals. Additionally, Germany plays a significant role in resettlement efforts. In light of the conflict in Ukraine, over 900,000 Ukrainian refugees have found temporary protection within Germany's borders.⁴¹

Critical protective measures, such as refugee identification and registration, documentation assistance, legal aid, and counselling, are among the essential interventions facilitated by Germany's support. Moreover, Germany has long been at the forefront of providing access to higher education for refugees, highlighting its dedication to fostering opportunities for displaced individuals to rebuild their lives. This multifaceted approach exemplifies Germany's unwavering dedication to the integration and welfare of migrants living within its borders.

Germany has been at the forefront of offering refugees access to higher education for many years. The UNHCR's Refugee Higher Education Scholarship Programme, which was first formed in 1992 as the "Deutsche Akademische Flüchtlingsinitiative Albert Einstein" (DAFI scholarship program), is a prime example of this commitment. It was created through a partnership between the UNHCR and the German government. As the UNHCR's premier tertiary education scholarship program, it forms the basis of the organization's 15by30 Roadmap, a strategic plan designed to increase the percentage of refugees enrolled in higher education to 15% by 2030. This initiative, which celebrated its 30th anniversary in 2022, has helped over 22,500 young men and women who are refugees in 55 different countries obtain recognized higher education credentials in their initial nation of the sanctuary by offering them

⁴¹ Jannis Panagiotidis, "Not the Concern of the Organization?" *The IRO and the Overseas Resettlement of Ethnic Germans from Eastern Europe after World War II* (2020) 45(4) *Historical Social Research/Historische Sozialforschung* 173

vital support. This enduring commitment highlights Germany's commitment to empowering refugees via education so they can create better futures for themselves.⁴²

As of January 31, 2022, UNHCR India has registered over 46,000 refugees and asylum-seekers. This number is expected to increase due to various factors such as poverty, insecurity, limited access to essential services, conflicts, environmental degradation, and natural disasters. Refugees and asylum-seekers predominantly reside in urban areas, often alongside local host communities. Among them, 46% are women and girls, and 36% are children. UNHCR provides vital assistance to this population, including the issuance of Asylum Seeker Certificates and Refugee Cards to access policy benefits. Additionally, they offer a range of services, such as healthcare benefits including HIV, reproductive health, and vaccine distribution during the Covid-19 pandemic.⁴³

The recognition of refugee status by UNHCR, though granted to some, is not uniformly acknowledged by the Indian government. This leaves the determination of their status subject to the discretion of various authorities, including schools and healthcare facilities, resulting in a legal ambiguity for many. Consequently, they encounter ongoing challenges in securing even the most basic rights promised by the central government. For instance, while one government school may admit a child recognized as a refugee by UNHCR, another may exercise its right to deny admission, deeming the child an "illegal" resident. This situation, already fraught, was exacerbated during the COVID-19 pandemic, laying bare the extent of these migrants' precariousness and vulnerability. Their uncertain legal standing rendered many unable to access essential medical care or government relief initiatives, and the lockdown-induced loss of income left few with savings to fall back on.⁴⁴

⁴² 'The Refugee and Migration Situation' (*Federal Foreign Office*, 2022) <<https://www.auswaertiges-amt.de/en/aussenpolitik/themen/-/275636#:~:text=Moreover%2C%20Germany%20is%20substantially%20involved,programmes%20run%20by%20the%20L%C3%A4nder>> accessed 10 February 2024

⁴³ 'India' (*UNHCR India*) <<https://www.unhcr.org/in/countries/india>> accessed 17 February 2024

⁴⁴ Prafulla Kumar Nayak, 'Protection of Refugees: A Humanitarian Crisis in India' (2013) 2(3) *Voice of Research* 95-96 <<https://www.urban-response.org/system/files/content/resource/files/main/protection-of-refugess-a-humanitarian-crisis-in-india.pdf>> accessed 12 February 2024

After twelve years, the Syrian crisis continues to be one of the biggest global displacement issues. While neighbouring nations kindly accept Syrian refugees, the socioeconomic situation in the area is getting worse and there is a rise in anti-refugee sentiment, especially in Lebanon and Turkey, which calls for the refugees to return to Syria. The vulnerabilities facing Syrian refugees worsened in 2023. In addressing the ongoing Syria crisis, UNHCR and UNDP are committed to maintaining their leadership roles in the Regional Refugee and Resilience Plan (3RP), overseeing collaborative efforts with more than 270 partners spanning Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, and Turkey. The overarching aim of the 3RP is to align humanitarian responses with long-term national strategies for fostering equitable growth and sustainable development. Despite these efforts, the return of refugees to Syria from neighbouring countries is expected to remain limited, with only approximately 38,400 refugees opting to return during the initial nine months of 2022. Looking ahead to 2024, UNHCR and UNDP will continue to jointly steer the 3RP, facilitating cooperation among diverse stakeholders to bolster national initiatives in the aforementioned countries.⁴⁵

The findings from the Eighth Regional Survey on Syrian Refugees' Perceptions and Intentions on Return to Syria reveal diverse sentiments among respondents. A majority, comprising 56.1% of surveyed refugees, expressed an overall aspiration to return to Syria, while 11.7% remained undecided about their prospective return. Conversely, 32.2% stated that they harboured no hope of returning. In terms of the timeframe for return, only a small fraction, accounting for 1.1% of respondents, expressed an intention to return within the next twelve months, while 5.4% hoped to do so within five years. Notably, the overwhelming majority, constituting 93.5%, expressed a long-term aspiration to return to Syria someday.⁴⁶

Large-scale humanitarian needs still exist in Syria. To help those who are most in need, UNHCR will offer comprehensive support to refugees, internally displaced people (IDPs), and returnees. To reduce vulnerabilities and improve protection, UNHCR will prioritize community mobilization and developing self-reliance through the use of an area-specific and community-

⁴⁵ 'Syria Situation' (*Global Focus*) <<https://reporting.unhcr.org/operational/situations/syria-situation>> accessed 12 February 2024

⁴⁶ UNHCR, *Eighth Regional Survey on Syrian Refugees' Perceptions and Intentions on Return To Syria* (2023)

centred strategy. Furthermore, UNHCR will continue to be the front-runner in the cluster responses for protection, shelter, and camp coordination and management (CCCM).⁴⁷

Germany, characterized by its strong commitment to supporting refugees, exemplifies a comprehensive approach to refugee integration and welfare. As the third-largest host country for refugees globally, Germany accommodates a significant number of displaced individuals, including those fleeing conflict in Syria and Ukraine. The country's multifaceted approach encompasses critical protective measures such as refugee identification, registration, legal aid, and access to education, emphasizing the importance of fostering opportunities for refugees to rebuild their lives. Germany's long-standing dedication to offering refugees access to higher education, demonstrated through initiatives like the UNHCR's Refugee Higher Education Scholarship Programme, highlights its commitment to empowering refugees for long-term success.

In contrast, India faces distinct challenges in refugee assistance and protection. With over 46,000 registered refugees and asylum-seekers, primarily from neighbouring countries like Afghanistan and Myanmar, India's approach to refugee support is marked by significant legal ambiguity and challenges. While UNHCR provides vital assistance to refugees in India, including healthcare benefits and educational opportunities, the recognition of refugee status by the Indian government remains inconsistent. This legal uncertainty leaves many refugees vulnerable to arbitrary treatment and denial of basic rights by various authorities, hindering their access to essential services and exacerbating their precariousness, particularly evident during crises such as the COVID-19 pandemic.

Furthermore, the situation in Syria highlights the complexities of refugee crises and the challenges in achieving durable solutions. Despite efforts by organizations like UNHCR and UNDP to address the ongoing Syria crisis through initiatives like the Regional Refugee and Resilience Plan (3RP), the return of refugees to Syria remains limited. The Eighth Regional Survey on Syrian Refugees' Perceptions and Intentions on Return to Syria highlights the diverse

⁴⁷ Syria Situation (n 45)

sentiments among refugees, with a majority expressing an aspiration to return to Syria in the long term. However, significant obstacles, including socioeconomic challenges and anti-refugee sentiments in neighbouring countries, continue to impede refugee repatriation efforts.

In conclusion, while Germany demonstrates commendable efforts in refugee support and integration, India faces notable challenges in providing consistent protection and assistance to refugees. The ongoing Syria crisis further highlights the complexities and obstacles in achieving durable solutions for refugees. Efforts by international organizations like UNHCR are crucial in addressing these challenges and advocating for the rights and well-being of refugees globally.

RECOMMENDATIONS

In the dynamic realm of refugee protection, adapting policies to align with current events is imperative. In India, reconsidering the stance on the Refugee Convention and non-refoulement is essential amid the global refugee crisis. Embracing international commitments would fortify the legal framework, ensuring a comprehensive approach to safeguarding refugee rights. Such a recalibration could enhance the nation's capacity to address the evolving challenges of forced displacement.

Syria, grappling with a prolonged humanitarian crisis, requires sustained international collaboration. Increased engagement with international organizations, neighbouring countries, and humanitarian agencies is paramount. This collaboration facilitates resource-sharing and provides essential assistance to refugees, internally displaced persons (IDPs), and host communities. Focusing on delivering crucial services, including healthcare, education, and livelihood support, becomes pivotal in mitigating the impacts of the crisis.

Germany's successful model of inclusive integration programs offers valuable insights for nations like India and Syria. Adopting similar initiatives emphasizing language training, vocational skills development, and cultural orientation can facilitate the seamless integration of refugees into host communities. Drawing from Germany's experience presents an opportunity to enhance social cohesion and improve the overall well-being of refugees.

Recognizing the unique vulnerabilities faced by refugee women and girls, there is a shared imperative for India, Syria, and Germany to prioritize gender-specific programs. Ensuring access to reproductive healthcare, protection from gender-based violence, and initiatives for economic and social empowerment become crucial steps toward fostering a more inclusive and equitable environment for displaced individuals. Collectively, these recommendations aim to shape a more responsive and humane approach to refugee protection, considering the distinctive contexts of India, Syria, and Germany.

WAY FORWARD

A comparative analysis of refugee protection in India, Syria, and Germany unveils varying approaches to addressing the needs and rights of displaced individuals. To advance refugee protection in these nations, it is imperative to first align domestic legislation with international standards. This entails revisiting and revising existing laws to ensure they incorporate key principles such as non-refoulement. This step forms a crucial foundation in safeguarding the rights and well-being of refugees. Institutional capacities must also be strengthened to effectively process asylum claims and provide essential support. Specialized agencies or units should be established to handle assessments, streamline procedures, and offer comprehensive assistance to refugees. This institutional reinforcement is integral in facilitating a smoother transition for displaced individuals and ensuring they receive the necessary care and attention.

Access to legal representation is paramount in empowering refugees to navigate complex legal systems. Advocacy for initiatives that provide refugees with legal support throughout the asylum process is crucial. This ensures they can effectively advocate for their rights and interests, contributing to a fairer and more just process. Furthermore, the development of reception and integration programs tailored to the specific needs of refugees is essential. These programs should encompass language training, vocational skills development, and access to education, healthcare, and other critical services. By addressing these fundamental needs, India, Syria, and Germany can significantly improve the prospects and well-being of displaced individuals seeking refuge within their borders.

Regional cooperation is a cornerstone in enhancing refugee protection. Encouraging collaboration between neighbouring countries and regional partners can lead to coordinated efforts in addressing the root causes of displacement and establishing more effective solutions for refugees. This burden-sharing approach helps distribute responsibilities and resources more equitably. Additionally, raising public awareness and fostering community engagement is vital. Awareness campaigns in India, Syria, and Germany can play a pivotal role in dispelling misconceptions about refugees and building empathy within society. This inclusive approach fosters a more welcoming environment for displaced individuals, promoting integration and social cohesion.

Gender-specific concerns must also be addressed comprehensively. Policies and programs should be implemented to cater to the unique needs and vulnerabilities of refugee women and girls. This includes access to specialized healthcare, protection from gender-based violence, and opportunities for economic empowerment. Regular monitoring and evaluation mechanisms are essential to track the effectiveness of refugee protection policies. This ensures that programs are yielding positive outcomes and allows for adjustments where necessary. Refinement of policies and evidence-based decision-making are predicated on accurate data reporting and gathering.

Finally, striking a balance between national security imperatives and humanitarian considerations is crucial. This involves refining screening processes and ensuring transparent decision-making to safeguard both the security of the host nation and the rights of displaced individuals.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, a comparative analysis of refugee protection in India, Syria, and Germany highlights the diverse approaches and policies implemented by each nation. While India and Syria face unique challenges and exhibit distinct stances towards international refugee conventions, Germany stands as an example of a country deeply committed to upholding global standards for refugee protection. To enhance refugee protection, India and Syria must consider aligning their domestic legislation with international norms, strengthening institutional

capacities, and fostering regional cooperation. Additionally, prioritizing access to legal representation, gender-specific concerns, and tailored integration programs can significantly improve the prospects and well-being of displaced individuals. This comparative examination serves as a critical foundation for advocating comprehensive and effective refugee protection policies across nations, ultimately ensuring the safety and dignity of those seeking refuge in their borders.