Changing Contours of Dealing with Refugee Crisis in EU: A Comparative Study of Ukrainian and Syrian Refugee Crisis

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Abstract: Europe experienced a significant refugee crisis in two separate instances, one in 2015 and another in 2022. A substantial refugee flow has resulted from Russia's invasion of Ukraine, making it one of the biggest in Europe since the end of World War II. Not long ago, Europe faced another humanitarian catastrophe as thousands of Syrians were compelled to escape their war-torn country and the prevailing crisis. Although both crises entailed a similar magnitude, with approximately six million people affected, the public responses exhibited differently. According to the UNHCR 2021 report, more than 5 million refugees and asylum seekers, mostly from Syria but also from Afghanistan, Iraq, and Eritrea, had entered European countries by the end of 2016. However, since the start of the Syrian conflict, barely over 1 million Syrians have been successful in obtaining international protection in the European Union. The recent activation of the temporary protection directive by the EU, which was initially adopted in 2002, has drawn significant criticism. This initiative has been criticised for exhibiting a bias towards welcoming Ukrainian refugees compared to the response seen during the Syrian refugee crisis. Therefore, it is important to understand if the EU is dealing with the refugee crisis differently. This study aims to investigate whether the European Union (EU) employed distinct approaches in its responses to the Ukrainian and Syrian refugee crises. It further examines particular examples of differential treatment and framing of refugees from Ukraine and Syria, and it compares the temporary protection and asylum processes implemented by the EU in response to the two refugee crises.

Keywords: The European Union, Refugee Crisis, Laws, Policies, Ukrainian and Syrian Refugee Crisis

1. Introduction

Migration and refugee management was one of the most convoluted, polarised, and fragmented systems in Europe even before the current crisis. It is the pinnacle of a highly delicate issue that is initially handled cautiously at the national level by each European Union (EU) member state before it is deliberated upon at the EU level (Tassinari, 2016). This often results in diluted agreements, along with the evolving integration of common foreign and defence policies- another aspect of the European strategy that is increasingly intertwined with the refugee crisis. Each year, millions are compelled to leave their residences and native nations due to strife, warfare, scarcity of food, destitution, and deterioration of the environment. From a few decades, Europe is facing the huge migration and refugee crisis from different parts of the world.

In 2015, over 1 million refugees and migrants endangered their lives by embarking on perilous sea journey across the Mediterranean, seeking sanctuary and safeguard in Europe (UNHCR , 2015). At that time, it was regarded as the most extensive migration wave witnessed on the continent since the conclusion of World War II. However, it was subsequently overshadowed by the Ukrainian crisis. The EU-15 faced a huge number of Migration flows due to Yugoslavia civil war (Buonanno, 2017). The dissolution of a number of Yugoslav states during the early 1990s resulted in a sequence of conflicts in Balkan nations like Croatia, Serbia, and Bosnia-Herzegovina. This factor predominantly caused the substantial influx of asylum seekers within Europe in 1992 (Arnett & Zapponi, 2015). One notable distinction between the migration crisis prompted by Yugoslavia's civil war and the present-day crisis was that the EU-15 did not encompass central and eastern European countries (CEECs). These countries have struggled to adequately manage and handle the substantial volumes of asylum seekers passing through to northern Europe from Greece (Buonanno, 2017). The asylum policy of the European Union

was not initially designed to handle large and unpredictable waves of asylum seekers. It places unfair stresses on countries like Greece and Italy that are located near the EU's external borders (Jones,Teytelboym, & Rohac, 2017). The 2015 refugee crisis has deeply unsettled both the European Union (EU) as a whole and the political landscapes of individual member states. Even in nations where the effect of the refugee influx is relatively minor, such as Poland and the United Kingdom, these events have dominated public debate and affected critical elections and choices, including the UK's EU membership vote in June 2016.

The refugee crisis didn't inevitably start off as a refugee crisis. It started as a rhetorical crisis in the Mediterranean, the situation is frequently framed as a security danger rather than a humanitarian emergency, with political leaders and the media prioritising unrestricted migration, border security, and national interests over refugee rights. Different European governments and institutions had different ideas on how to deal with the refugee crisis, which resulted in divergent opinions on accountability, burden-sharing, and legal duties under international refugee law (Jones,Teytelboym, & Rohac, 2017). However, an increase in smuggling tragedies- particularly deaths by drowning on the shore of the Italian island of Lampedusa in 2013, was brought on by an increase in people attempting to cross sea borders (Servent, 2019). In this way, the beginnings of the crisis may be traced back to these terrible accidents, demonstrating a consistent rhetorical narrative rather than a discrete breach caused by a sudden external event. From September 2014 onward, a growing number of voices stressed how important it was to resolve Mediterranean crossings. But it wasn't until April 2015 that the idea of a catastrophe became more pervasive, going beyond the problems with illegal immigration and the procedures for search and rescue off the coasts of Italy, Greece, and Malta. However, it wasn't until April 2015 that the concept of a crisis took on a more widespread meaning, going beyond smuggling and search and rescue operations around the beaches of Italy, Greece, and Malta. The European Agenda on Migration, published by the Commission on 13 May 2015 (COM/2015/240 final), indicated a transition from a localised crisis involving the EU's coastal borders to a wider problem necessitating a broader variety of policy measures (Balla, 2023).

In spite of the fact that the Syrian crisis is still ongoing, another humanitarian calamity soon threatened European soil. The refugee crisis is not over and in this time the attention has shifted from Syrians to Ukrainian refugees. The Russian invasion on Ukraine on 24th February 2022 triggered an intensifying and extensive displacement scenario, causing millions of individuals to flee within Ukraine and towards the European Union. The majority of those departing Ukraine initially sought refuge in Poland, as well as in other neighbouring EU Member States sharing a border with Ukraine, such as Slovakia, Hungary, Romania, and Moldova. As time progressed, a significant number continued to move onwards (Parusel & Varfolomieieva, 2022). As of December 31, 2022, nearly 1.3 million refugees had fled from Ukraine. Additionally, approximately one million were residing in Poland as of June 26, 2023. Presently, the total number of registered Ukrainian refugees across Europe stands at around six million which replaced the number of Syrian refugees and became the largest refugee exodus in the EU (Statista , 2023).

Despite the fact that both Syrian and Ukrainian refugee crises were sudden and involved roughly six million refugees each, the public and political reactions were noticeably different. The most current refugee crisis received a swift reaction from the European Union. The European Union's leaders expressed fervent solidarity with Ukraine and its people on February 24, 2022, during a special meeting of the European Council. They urged the European Commission to suggest emergency measures as well. The Council quickly endorsed the Commission's plan. The principles of Western humanitarianism have been rooted in the conviction of the equal and crucial value of every individual since the early 20th century, often regarded as a symbol of the world's positive attributes (Baughan & Fiori, 2015). But the European Union's distinct political choices compared to seven years ago, such as the activation of the

most advantageous reception and protection system for Ukrainian refugees in the history of the EU shows the different scenario in dealing the refugee crisis.

This research paper aims to explain whether the European Union (EU) adopted different strategies in its reactions to the Ukrainian and Syrian refugee crises. The research also scrutinizes specific instances of varying treatment and portrayal of refugees from Ukraine and Syria, and it draws comparisons between the temporary protection and asylum procedures implemented by the EU in response to these two refugee crises.

2. Methodology

This paper explores whether the European Union (EU) adopted different approaches in its responses to the Ukrainian and Syrian refugee crises by understanding the scenario from both cases. The data for this study were collected from various online sources, including reports, news articles, and studies conducted by different non-governmental organizations (NGOs), such as the United Nations (UN) and other human rights organizations. It followed academic databases with comprehensive review of academic literature, focusing on major publications related to the keywords mentioned. A distinctive methodological approach has been employed to critically analyse and draw conclusions on the issue under study.

3. Theoretical Framework

Recent efforts to broaden the theoretical discourse have resulted in more interdisciplinary approaches to migration theory. Various theoretical approaches can be used to analyse refugee studies, depending on the objectives of the research. however, Postcolonial theory is the best framework for comprehending inequality in treatment and underpinning power dynamics since this study critically analyses the EU's response to the acknowledgement of Syrian and Ukrainian migrants. A wide range of facets and viewpoints are covered by the multidisciplinary field of postcolonialism. Postcolonial theory is concerned with understanding the historical processes of colonisation, imperialism, and decolonisation, as well as its social, economic, and political components. In addition to analysing how colonised people and cultures are portrayed in media and art, it looks at how colonial interactions have influenced both individual and social identities. It also examines the power relationships between colonisers and colonised people, emphasising agency and resistance (Young, 2003). In addition, postcolonialism examines attempts to reclaim, decolonise, and indigenise linguistic and discursive environments while examining how language and discourse have been employed as instruments of colonial dominance.

Using a postcolonial lens to examine the experiences of diasporic communities and transnational networks affected by migration, displacement, and globalisation can provide insight into their identity, belonging, and cultural hybridity. The notion of postcolonialism is multidisciplinary and linked, reflecting the various ways that colonial legacies continue to influence modern global realities, such as the disparities in how migrants are treated and received (Young, 2003). The fact that displacement is usually a result of wars that are "directly linked to the impact of colonialism, foreign policies, and the actions of Western powers" is regrettably overlooked in a large portion of public discourse around refugees (Philo, Briant, & Donald, 2013). It is crucial to remember that refugees have a colonial past, and that history links the global North to the conflicts that lead to refugee crises. For example, the complex network of events that make up the Syrian civil war is a historical reminder of the fall of the Empire and the colonisation of the Arab world by the Europeans. Colonial divides turned 'what had been relatively tranquil provinces of the Ottoman Empire into some of the least stable and globally volatile states in the world' (Fildis, 2011). Edward Said's critical writing, Orientalism, is usually regarded as the foundation of postcolonial theory.

Said highlights in the book how the Western world has produced a notion of the "other" via the practice of Orientalism (Hamadi, 2014). The East, especially the Middle East, was portrayed by the West in a skewed and prejudiced manner. Said claims that Orientalism is a collection of presumptions, ideals, and convictions that paint the (Middle) East in a negative light as being risky, exotic, and inferior. Current refugee policies continue to reflect this idea of the other. Depending on their nationality, refugees receive different treatment. Refugees from the "Orient" are frequently treated differently than those from Western nations, such as Ukraine. Said outlines a negative set of Eastern assumptions, ideas, and beliefs that frequently serve as the foundation for this unequal treatment. According to Said, Western supremacy over the East has been justified by the formation of the concept of the "other" through the practice of Orientalism. Stereotypes and distorted perceptions of Orientalism have often been used to defend Western conquest and imperialism (Said , 1979). Additionally, Said highlights that Orientalism is a generic phenomenon that arises whenever one culture tries to comprehend another, not just in the context of the West's interaction with the East.

The idea of Orientalism, as defined by Edward Said, emphasises how Western societies have traditionally portrayed and constructed the "Orient" (Eastern cultures) in ways that uphold Western dominance and superiority (Said , 1979). This idea pertains to how Ukrainian migrants' circumstances are viewed and depicted in contrast to those of other refugee groups (Moise & Oana,2022). Since Ukraine is frequently perceived as having a more Western culture than nations in the Middle East or Africa, Ukrainian refugees may be considered more favourably (Moise, Dennison, & Kriesi, 2023). Their experiences' framing, the degree of empathy they trigger, and the political reactions they elicit can all be impacted by this view. As a result, prejudices originating from Orientalist narratives may be reflected in the disparate treatment of Ukrainian and non-European refugees for example-Syrian Refugees. Postcolonial thinker Mayblin claims that colonial legacies that have produced poverty, violence, and political instability in many regions of the world are partially to blame for the current worldwide refugee problems. When discussing the problem of refugees, postcolonialism highlights the necessity of rejecting essentialist and simplified notions of cultural identity, acknowledging that refugees are influenced by a variety of social and historical factors in addition to their national or cultural origins (Costello & Foster, 2022). Postcolonialism also emphasises how these crises have historically been used by powerful nations to justify their own objectives and interests. Like other theories, postcolonial theory has been criticised for its heavy emphasis on colonialism's and imperialism's legacies, which occasionally causes it to overemphasise historical circumstances at the detriment of discussing current problems and difficulties in postcolonial states (Houtum, H.,, & Lacy, 2020). Non-European refugees are frequently excluded and portrayed through exoticized or dehumanising images, which reinforces negative stereotypes and social exclusion, while Ukrainians are more likely to be perceived as culturally similar and more easily accepted. Postcolonialism draws attention to the ways in which powerful nations have justified their own objectives and interests. European refugees are frequently portrayed as economic migrants, security risks, or fortune seekers, which influences public opinion and governmental reactions and may result in more stringent border restrictions and difficulties integrating (El-Enany, 2020).

4. Background: Syrian crisis and Ukrainian crisis

The crisis in Syria commenced more than a decade ago, triggered by a wave of popular uprisings that spread across the Arab world, commonly referred to as the Arab Spring. Pro-democracy supporters sought an end to Bashar al-Assad's regime's authoritarian practises in March 2011, creating an unprecedented challenge to his rule. To put down protests, the Syrian government employed paramilitary, military, and police forces. Right from the beginning, the uprising and the subsequent actions of the regime exhibited a communal dimension. A significant number of protesters belonged to the Sunni majority of the country, whereas the ruling Assad family hailed from the Alawite minority. Notably, the Alawite community retained a commanding role within the security forces and the irregular

militias responsible for some of the worst acts of brutality against protesters and other perceived enemies of the regime (Mariwala, 2013). The Syrian rebellion was greatly influenced by the environmental issue as well. Syria experienced its worst drought in modern history from 2006 to 2010. This prolonged drought pushed hundreds of thousands of farming families into poverty, leading to a massive migration of rural residents to makeshift urban settlements (Britannica , 2023).
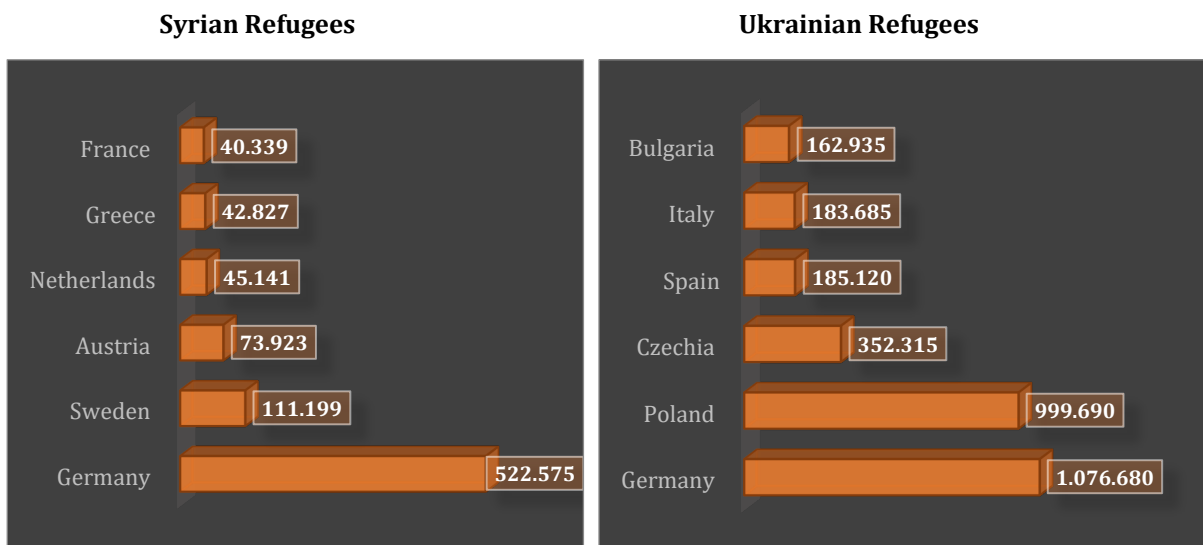
After the emergence of resistance groups, the conflict developed into a full-fledged civil war in 2012 that dragged the combatants from both within and outside the region (UNHCR , 2023). Syria was engulfed in a civil war, with many rebel groups engaging in intra-rebel combat in addition to fighting against government forces. Syria's neighbouring nations and major world powers began to split into groups that supported and opposed Assad by the summer of 2011 (Ford, 2019). As Assad kept up his suppression, the United States and the European Union began to criticise him more while Russia and Iran supported the Syrian government. Western countries, including US allies in Western Asia, intervened militarily to defeat ISIS (Watson Institute For International and Public Affairs , 2018). The impulsive outbreak quickly accelerated the Syrian Civil War, creating a refugee crisis that forcibly uprooted millions of Syrian families from their homes. When the conflict first began, the European Union, levied severe sanctions against the regime and as previously indicated, voiced its opposition to President Assad's administration. However, the EU found it difficult to create a fully cohesive Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP). The EU's involvement in Syria has shifted between actively supporting the Syrian regime and isolating it. The Syrian Civil War-induced refugee crisis has revealed internal instability and limitations within the EU (Cavatorta & Turcotte, 2020). Syrian refugees are currently dispersed over more than 130 countries, and 70 per cent of them live in poverty, making it difficult for them to gain access to basic services like education and employment opportunities (UNHCR , 2023).

On the other side, the eight-year struggle, which started with Russia's annexation of Crimea, was dramatically escalated by Russia's invasion of Ukraine, signalling a critical turning point for European security (Masters, 2023). The conflict in Ukraine also has had a substantial impact on globalization, multilateralism, and the financial systems that evolved following the ending of the Cold War. A dire political scenario is the root of the current Ukrainian refugee problem. President Biden's United States and NATO are aligned against President Putin's Russia in the Ukraine conflict. Such a conflict could have catastrophic effects on the economies of European Union member countries. The problem can be traced back to the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991 and Ukraine's subsequent independence, marking a distant starting point for these issues (Abdi, 2023). The transition has proven to be more complex compared to other former Soviet republics, with ongoing political and identity concerns that demand attention. These challenges are closely tied to the nation's economic relationship with Russia. This situation has led to the current diplomatic conflict. Various stages elucidate the progression of relations between Ukraine and Russia (Åslund, 2022). However, the turning point came with the outbreak of the Donbass war on 6th April 2014. This conflict arose as the separatist People's Republics of Donetsk and Lugansk declared their independence, mirroring the events in Crimea. On 21st February 2022, Putin formally acknowledged the independence of the two Donbass Republics, which then precipitated the war. This war, commencing on 2022, involves Putin's Russia pitted against Ukraine, with the backing of Biden's US and NATO. Negotiations had broken down, and diplomatic initiatives had proven ineffective. Russia conducted bombings in several Ukrainian cities, including Odessa, Kharkiv, Mariupol, Lviv, and the capital, Kyiv (Masters, 2023). This military operation was undertaken with the aim of safeguarding the population in the Donbass region. Its targets included airports and military bases (International Rescue Committee, 2022). When Russia initiated a military offensive against Ukraine, it resulted in the destruction of the country's infrastructure. This destruction led to challenges in obtaining essential utilities such as heating, lighting, water and hospital facilities. Additionally, it led to a significant influx of Ukrainian refugees into Europe (International Rescue Committee, 2022).

The initial waves of refugees had predominantly comprised women, children, the elderly, and foreign citizens, as adult Ukrainian males are obligated to register for military service. Among the foreign nationals joining this immediate exodus, there is a diverse mix of people from various countries, including Moroccans, Chinese, Indians, and Latin Americans, among others. Some of these individuals had been enrolled in Ukrainian universities before the conflict began. Additionally, even before the conflict, Ukraine was already hosting at least 5,000 refugees from countries like Afghanistan and Syria. Unfortunately, there have been distressing reports of refugees from the Mediterranean, South Asia, and Africa facing racial discrimination at the Polish border (Schultz, et al., 2022). In present time, the main Syrian and Ukrainian refugees hosting country is Germany. The figure shows below the presence of these two refugee groups in different EU countries.

Figure 1

Major Syrian and Ukrainian Refugee Hosting Countries in the EU in 2023

Syrian Refugees

Country	Refugees
France	40.339
Greece	42.827
Netherlands	45.141
Austria	73.923
Sweden	111.199
Germany	522.575

Ukrainian Refugees

Country	Refugees
Bulgaria	162.935
Italy	183.685
Spain	185.120
Czechia	352.315
Poland	999.690
Germany	1.076.680

Source: Statista, 2023

Ukrainian refugees are grappling with similar challenges as Syrian refugees, including restricted access to education and job opportunities, language barriers, and prejudice. However, in contrast to Syrian refugees, Ukrainian refugees have received somewhat better treatment from European countries, partly due to their proximity and shared cultural ties (Karasapan, 2022). This special attention is evident in a variety of ways, including accelerated asylum and residency procedures under temporary protection directives, open-border policies in countries such as Poland and Germany, where Ukrainian refugees confronted few restrictions, and improved living conditions, with many being housed in private homes and community shelters. As a result of European governments and media presenting the need of solidarity, they also garnered significant public and political backing. In addition, prompt legal and financial support allowed Ukrainian refugees to access educational, medical, and job opportunities (Mickelsson, 2025). Despite these differences, both groups of refugees are still seeking safety and stability in new countries, facing uncertain prospects for their futures (Alsbeti , 2023).

5. The European Union: Policy and Legal Responses Towards the Refugee Crisis

The EU has responded to crises and disintegration situations by making institutional and operational changes (Niemann & Natascha, 2018). The EU formulated a distinct policy for Ukrainian refugees, whereas its previous policy on political refugees was not intended for Syria. EU also bounded on international refugee law and also implemented many laws within the members of European Union. The European Convention on Human Rights includes several provisions related to the treatment of refugees. Member States have a duty to adhere to Article 14 of the 1948 Declaration, which guarantees everyone

the right to seek and enjoy asylum from persecution (United Nations, 1948). The 1951 Convention describes the legal safety, rights, and support that refugees are entitled to and offers the generally accepted definition of a refugee. It defines a refugee as a person who is unable or unwilling to return to their country of origin due to a well-founded fear of persecution based on race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group, or political opinion, is binding on the other 27 Member States as well (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, 1951). Article 3 of the 1967 Protocol explicitly prohibits discrimination against refugees based on their race, religion, or country of origin (UN High Commissioner for Refugees, 2011). In October 1999, in Tampere, Finland, the European Union made the decision to establish a Common European Asylum System (CEAS). It offers legal support based on the Dublin Regulation, the Eurodac Regulation, the Qualification Directive, the Asylum Procedures Directive, and the Reception Conditions Directive. These establish specific guidelines on asylum requests and processes under EU law. The Dublin system mandates that an asylum seeker's application be handled by the first Member State they enter. The CEAS was planned to encompass various elements, including criteria for determining which Member State would be responsible for evaluating an asylum application, standards to ensure fair and efficient asylum procedures, minimum standards for the reception of asylum seekers, and the alignment of guidelines for accepting refugees (European Parliament , 2022). In response to the 2015 refugee crisis, the European Commission suggested changing the asylum process. In order to modernise processes for border management, screening, and asylum assessments, the 2020 new pact on migration and asylum establishes clearer obligations for Member States (European Parliament , 2022). A contentious deal between the EU and Türkiye was struck on March 18, 2016, with the intention of limiting the influx of unauthorised immigrants through Türkiye into Europe. The agreement said that any unauthorised immigrants who arrived on Greek islands should be sent back to Türkiye and that the EU would accept one Syrian refugee for every one sent back to Türkiye (European Council, 2016).

To safeguard Europe's collective external borders and address emerging migration and security challenges collaboratively, a new European Border and Coast Guard (EBCGA-Frontex) was established in October 2016. Its budget, which stood at 254 million euros in 2016, has increased over time and reached 543 million euros by 2021. Additionally, the roles of Eurojust and Europol within the EU have been expanded. Similar transformations have been taking place in other EU agencies. The European Asylum Support Office (EASO), based in Malta and responsible for supporting and enhancing the Common European Asylum System (CEAS), has been replaced by the EU Agency for Asylum (EUAA) with an initial budget of 172 million euros for 2022 (Balla, 2023).

In terms of external matters, the Treaty on European Union (TEU) introduced the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) of the European Union back in 1993. Its aims include the preservation of peace, the advancement of global security, the promotion of international collaboration, and the support of democracy, the rule of law, and the protection of fundamental freedoms (Malovec, 2023). The Union has also carried out humanitarian and rescue missions within the confines of its Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP). As soon as the Ukrainian refugee crisis began, the EU also put into effect the long-debated temporary protection directive.

6. What is Temporary Protection Directive?

Temporary protection is a rare provision that offers urgent and short-term safety in the scenario of an enormous or impending mass influx of displaced people from non-EU countries who are unable to head back to their place of origin (European Commission , 2022). A proposal to implement the EU Temporary Protection Directive (TPD) was made by the European Commission on March 3, 2022. Following the wars in the former Yugoslavia, this directive was initially adopted in 2001, but it was essentially ignored and never implemented. The Implementing Decision was passed by the Council on March 4, 2022, and it went into force that day. Its beginnings go all the way back. The Council of European Union established

a Resolution regarding the distribution of responsibilities concerning the reception and settlement of individuals who have been temporarily displaced as far back as September 1995, in reaction to the extensive displacement of people resulting from the conflicts in the former Yugoslavia (European Union, 1995). In March 1996, they approved a Decision pertaining to an early warning and emergency procedure for sharing the burden (European Union , 1996). The governments of Italy and Malta appealed for the activation of TPD in 2011 as a result of the surge of refugees from Middle Eastern and North African countries arriving in Italy. However, the requests were denied during a meeting of the Justice and Home Affairs Council (Ineli-Ciger, 2016). Further attempts to activate the TPD were made in February 2015, in response to the refugee crisis in Europe, and in 2021, members of the European Parliament argued for its activation to address the flow of refugees following the Taliban's takeover in Afghanistan. Unfortunately, these efforts to use the TPD were also unsuccessful (European Parliament, 2021). The EU's activation of the Temporary Protection Directive (TPD) marked a significant stride towards a more compassionate security framework and signalled a strong commitment from the EU to jointly address the humanitarian crisis triggered by the substantial influx of Ukrainians towards European borders (Venturi & Vallianatou, 2022). The TPD formally removed visa restrictions and specific protection categories, departing from the concept of fortress Europe and the influential Dublin asylum system. The Directive ensures access to national asylum processes through the freedom to apply for asylum at any time, although Member States are free to halt the review of applications for asylum if the applicant has temporary protection status (Parusel & Varfolomieieva, 2022). It granted Ukrainians the right to reside for a period of up to three years and also bestowed upon EU citizens consistent rights across all member states. These rights encompassed a work permit, automatic access to national healthcare and education systems, as well as housing subsidies (Carrera, et al., 2022). Receiving temporary protection does not prevent the acknowledgment of Convention refugee status or complementary/subsidiary protection. Many advantages and perks provided to these refugees and those granted subsidiary protection according to the Qualification Directive are not encompassed within the scope of the temporary protection system (Schultz, et al., 2022). However, the implementation of the temporary protection directive by the EU has sparked considerable backlash. This action has faced criticism for showing a preference in welcoming Ukrainian refugees compared to the response witnessed during the Syrian refugee crisis.

7. Critical Analysis of the EU's Different Responses Towards Syrian and Ukrainian Refugee Crisis

The uneven treatment of Syrian and Ukrainian refugees can be attributed to varying diplomatic relationships between the EU and the countries these refugees originate from. Ukrainian migrants got additional assistance due to tight relations to the European Union, particularly as a result of the conflict with Russia. On the other hand, the EU has been less directly involved in Syria's conflict. Because Ukrainians were perceived as being easier to integrate, cultural commonalities also played a part. Ukraine's border proximity with several EU nations allows for a faster and more organised reaction. Syrian refugees, on the other hand, take dangerous and erratic routes, including the Mediterranean Sea. Stricter border restrictions and deterrence tactics have resulted from it. Furthermore, popular and political sentiments were impacted by the media's portrayal of Ukrainian refugees as victims and Syrian refugees as occasionally connected to security issues (Esposito, 2022). Additionally, it reflects a tendency to perceive people from the Middle East as "other," which has been internalized within certain societies (Esposito, 2022). The world emphasised Europe's "double standard" towards Ukrainian and non-Ukrainian refugees and asylum seekers from the beginning of the Ukrainian refugee crisis. While asylum seekers from nations like Syria who have also fled the horrors of war and oppression were not treated with similar procedures in 2015 during the peak of the Syrian civil war, Ukrainians were promptly welcomed with extensive legal safeguards (Dhingra & Roehse, 2023).

Non-Ukrainian including Syrian asylum seekers are often push back by European countries by violating EU and international law, irrespective of the legitimacy of their claims. On June 14, 2023, for example, it

was projected that over 500 asylum seekers and refugees died in just one accident in the central Mediterranean where many were from Syria (Dhingra & Roehse, 2023). On the basis of inspections to immigration detention centres with appalling situations near to the EU's land and sea frontiers, the Committee for the Prevention of Torture (CPT) of the Council of Europe found many cases of maltreatment and cruel activities towards refugees (Non-EU nationals), such as punching, slapping, or blowing with truncheons by security forces, border, or coast guard personnel (Walker, 2023).

The tremendous political and social mobilisation that has greeted Ukrainian migrants contrasts sharply with the legal rights of those seeking protection once they arrive in many nations throughout Europe, for example Poland (Dhingra & Roehse, 2023). Different factors impact on their behaviour like- Islamophobia- Most Ukrainian refugees are Christians, whereas the majority of Syrian refugees are Muslims. This distinction has resulted in additional challenges for the Syrian refugees, as they often have to contend with increased xenophobia and discrimination directed towards Muslim asylum seekers; the difference in how the EU treats Ukrainian refugees compared to non-Ukrainian refugees can be attributed to Europeans empathy towards Ukrainians and the tendency to view Middle Eastern refugees as outsiders (Esposito, 2022). Often, religious biases and other forms of prejudice are interconnected in this context. The Syrian crisis received significant coverage primarily from a security perspective, depicting refugees as a possible hazard to national security. The humanitarian viewpoint, underscoring the refugee's hardship and the requirement for assistance, was also evident but less widespread, as per extensive literature. The manner in which European media portrayed Syrian and Ukrainian refugees held great significance (Mascareñas, 2022).

Ukrainians are especially embraced by Eastern Europeans due to a sense of kinship and shared identity. Additional elements that affected the formulation of policies included a shared past between Ukraine and EU member states, particularly those with post-Soviet backgrounds, cooperative border programmes, EU diaspora living in both Ukraine and EU countries, as well as defence and geopolitical considerations (Mascareñas, 2022). In, Eastern Europe, where there is a significant amount of travel and interaction between nations, nationalities tend to be more flexible than in other regions of the world. Many Eastern European countries that have welcomed Ukrainian refugees have histories tied to the Soviet era and feel morally obligated to aid a fellow post-Soviet neighbour like Ukraine (Mascareñas, 2022). Additionally, beginning in 2017, Ukrainian citizens were granted visa-free travel inside the EU for up to 90 days. This development clearly shows that Ukrainians have been travelling across EU borders for a long time, keeping in touch with friends and relatives on both sides (Mascareñas, 2022). This connectivity has brought them into closer affinity with the European citizens who have welcomed them. Conversely, there is less empathy from Europeans towards refugees of different backgrounds due to differences in race, religion, culture, and ethnicity (Aslund, 2022).

The government of several Member States have made it explicitly clear that they do not welcome irregular migrants, particularly those of the Muslim faith. This stance has been notably adopted by countries such as Estonia, Hungary, Poland, and Lithuania (Esposito, 2022). These nations are currently accepting Ukrainian refugees. Public discourse in Poland, Hungary, Slovakia, and Romania is frequently polluted by racist and xenophobic statements towards refugees and migrants, particularly those from Middle Eastern and African nations, and hostile tactics such as border pushbacks and draconian detention measures have been implemented (Reilly & Flynn, 2022).

Many people have suffered significant injuries as a result of confrontations with both Polish and Belarusian border guards after receiving criticism for their harsh treatment of non-EU refugees and migrants (United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, 2022). In 2021, the distressing situation of migrants and asylum seekers, primarily hailing from the Middle East and Afghanistan, who found themselves stranded on the borders between Belarus, Poland, and Lithuania, stirred significant outrage throughout Europe (Mickelsson, 2025). Allegations were made against

Belarus, claiming that the nation had exploited the vulnerability of these individuals, enticing them to come to Belarus with the intention of using their predicament as a justification for admission into EU countries. This action was seen as a form of retaliation against EU sanctions. At present, Poland is playing a significant role in hosting Ukrainian refugees within the European Union (Statista, 2023).

Refugees in Poland were not given an affectionate welcome even prior to the tension between Poland and Belarus. Only 161 of 2,803 petitions for refugee status received approval in 2020, a very low number for asylum seekers (UNHCR, 2021). There has been a disturbing prevalence of anti-immigrant and racially biased hate speech expressed by politicians and political and media analysts. To underscore their unwelcoming stance towards certain migrants, some political organizations have run advertisements both within their own countries and internationally, as seen in Denmark, Hungary, and Sweden. As a stark example, during a discussion in the European Parliament, the leader of Poland's KORWiN party, Janusz Korwin Mikke, derogatorily referred to refugees seeking asylum in Europe as "human garbage" (Nwabuzo & Schaeder, 2016).

Hungary has consistently refused to take in refugees from non-EU nations ever since the "refugee crisis" of 2015 (BBC, 2020). Prime Minister Viktor Orbán has gone as far as referring to non-European refugees as Muslim predators and describing migrants as a poison (Pearson, 2018). He strongly criticised former German Chancellor Angela Merkel for allowing a million of refugees in Germany. In order to preserve its cultural and racial uniformity, he advocated that Hungary should abstain from accepting refugees from various religious and cultural backgrounds. The policy of Hungary of unfairly holding asylum seekers in transit areas along its border with Serbia was deemed unlawful by the European Court of Justice in May 2020 (BBC, 2020). On the other side, the same prime minister of Hungary, has promised that every refugee coming from Ukraine will be welcomed by friends in Hungary. He emphasised that it is not required to be a rocket scientist to distinguish between helping Ukrainian refugees who are looking for safety in Hungary because of the ongoing war and an enormous number of people entering from Muslim regions in pursuit of better opportunities in Europe (Brito, 2022).

In fact, it has been strongly criticised the discrimination occurring at the borders of Ukraine for the non-EU asylum seekers, emphasizing that everyone has an equal right to cross international borders when fleeing conflict and seeking safety (Akinwotu & Strzyżyńska, 2022). At present, it's evident that the welcoming approach towards Ukrainian refugees hasn't made it easier for other refugee groups to enter into European territory. For instance, there hasn't been a reduction in the number of deaths or disappearances in the Mediterranean Sea, nor have there been any decreases in the severity of measures designed to deter migration. In fact, the European Union has continued to enhance its capabilities for surveillance and control of its external borders. This involves constructing new physical barriers, deploying advanced technology for surveillance, and engaging in proactive cooperation with third countries on routes taken by irregular migrants to Europe (Parusel & Varfolomieieva, 2022). Shedding light on these concerning trends at the EU's external borders, along with drawing public attention to violent conflicts and refugee crises around the world, could help shift the focus away from Ukraine alone.

8. Conclusion

There are serious societal repercussions for non-European refugees in the EU when Ukrainian refugees are treated differently from Syrian refugees. When examined from the perspectives of Orientalism and postcolonialism, this distinction draws attention to wider social ramifications, such as the effect on interpersonal relationships and the perpetuation of structural injustices that Syrian refugees must contend with (Bindsbergen, 2024). With their colonial pasts, European nations still allow these legacies to shape how they view non-Europeans. Since of these historical continuities, non-European migrants receive unequal treatment and chances since European identities are valued more highly than non-European ones. By portraying Syrian refugees as the "other" in a cultural sense. They are perceived as a threat to societal cohesiveness as a result of this othering process, which also breeds unfavourable

stereotypes and cultural biases. Ukrainians are viewed as being culturally and racially similar to Western Europeans. This postcolonial view is based on historical and cultural linkages, comparable religious backgrounds, and similar racial identities. The history of European solidarity and these alleged historical linkages shape contemporary perceptions of migrants. In contrast to these ideas and attitudes, refugees from non-European nations are frequently susceptible to orientalism, which portrays them as the "other" (El-Enany, 2020). Some migrants are classified as "illegal" under the modern category of "othering," which implies a criminal description. Other people, notably those from the Middle East, are painted as possible terrorists in the meanwhile. As a result, certain migrant groups are successfully stigmatised, racially profiled, criminalised, and othered. In 2022, the majority of applications in the EU are still submitted by Syrians after Ukrainians. This was a rise of 24 per cent from 2021 and the highest number of applications since the 2015-2016 refugee crisis (European Union Agency for Asylum , 2022). Hence, it is imperative to establish secure and lawful routes for Syrian refugees to access Europe and seek asylum. EU must ensure that all refugees receive treatment fairly, with dignity, and respect, regardless of their nationality, religion, or other characteristics, the EU should act quickly to address this issue.

The European Commission should reconsider and revise its existing migration, temporary protection, and asylum policies, which perpetuate an unequal treatment and dual standards towards non-European and third-country nationals. In this sense, the Dublin system should take into consideration the precedent set by the Temporary Protection Directive (TPD) and include uniform benefits for incoming asylum seekers across the EU. This approach would reinforce the concept of equal solidarity, ensuring that the same legal rights granted to Ukrainian refugees extend to future asylum seekers. Provisions such as housing, employment opportunities, and access to education should be equitable for all refugees. Preventing misinformation and prejudice at the heart of European institutions is critical to ensuring the long-term viability of the EU's refugee protection procedures and must work on Europe's biased approach to asylum. The European institutions need to refrain from promoting sensationalised allegations and negative perceptions.

In the end, it is essential to ensure that member states are held responsible for breaches of both international and EU regulations. This will enable the EU to prioritise protecting refugees who are vulnerable, such as children and those who have experienced torture and violence. Only by adopting concrete steps can the EU uphold its obligations to safeguard human rights and provide a safe haven for those who are in need.

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