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Government Responses to International Refugees and Emerging Global Threat: Insights from Türkiye and Indonesia

Gia Ayu Fita[1] & Aprinisa[2]
[1]Universitas Sulawesi Barat
[2]Universitas Bandar Lampung
[1]Correspondence: giaayufita@unsulbar.ac.id

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Abstract

This article examines how Türkiye and Indonesia, as emerging powers with distinct geopolitical roles, respond to the global refugee crisis through a comparative lens informed by Migration Transition Theory and Securitization Theory. Türkiye's transformation into a major refugee-receiving country following the Syrian conflict has been accompanied by regulatory and integration-oriented policies, yet their implementation remains uneven at the local level. By contrast, Indonesia, despite its non-signatory status to the 1951 Refugee Convention, has evolved into a key transit and host context, relying primarily on humanitarian approaches and cooperation with international organizations. Using qualitative content analysis and thematic coding of secondary sources, this study identifies five central patterns shaping refugee governance: securitization of refugees, ad hoc humanitarian responses, labor market integration of refugees, socio-economic burdens on host communities, and coordination with international organizations. The findings indicate that Türkiye's relatively institutionalized framework is constrained by resource disparities and administrative fragmentation, while Indonesia exhibits a hybrid governance model that balances humanitarian commitments with security considerations. Overall, the article highlights the adaptive yet fragmented character of refugee governance in the Global South and underscores persistent policy dilemmas between humanitarianism, sovereignty, and security in non-Western refugee-receiving states.

Keywords: *humanitarian-security nexus, geopolitical roles, global organization, refugees, asylum seekers*

Introduction

The ideal of a peaceful and secure state remains a universal aspiration shared by societies across the globe an environment free from disruption and threat. However, such disturbances are not confined to times of war; they increasingly manifest in times of peace. Changes in both domestic and international environments contribute significantly to the emergence of threats to state sovereignty and societal stability. Given the dynamic nature of statehood and its position as an integral member of the international community, no state can remain immune to these transformations. Although states continue to be the principal actors in international relations, the conception of security has gradually shifted away from a traditional, state-centric, war-based framework to one that also acknowledges the growing

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influence of non-state actors and the fragility of existing international norms and regulations (Bandoro, 2018). This reconceptualization has given rise to the discourse on non-traditional security threats. Among these, refugee and asylum-seeker issues have become defining concerns of the 21st century.

The cross-border movement of people particularly in the form of forced migration, can under certain circumstances, produce significant political, economic, cultural, and security implications for host states. In Europe, for instance, even a regionally integrated and structurally mature supranational entity such as the European Union has characterized the influx of refugees into its member states as a crisis. A similar trend is observable in other regions where even well-established supranational organizations struggle to manage the intense flow of migrants originating from fragile or failed states in the Middle East. Over the past two decades, the international refugee issue has evolved into one of the most complex challenges in global governance and international affairs. Armed conflicts, climate crises, and widespread state failure have driven millions to flee their countries of origin. According to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR, 2023), more than 110 million people were forcibly displaced worldwide, underscoring the multidimensional nature of the refugee crisis and its demand for transnational, multi-actor, and cross-sectoral responses.

The global movement of refugees and asylum seekers has long drawn the attention of the international community. Their transboundary mobility is frequently perceived as a potential threat to the host state's stability and national security. The post–Cold War era and the expansion of globalization have significantly transformed Western states' approaches to refugee issues. Increasingly, these states have adopted restrictive migration policies and begun to frame refugees as a burden. Nevertheless, recent studies challenge the assumption of rapidly accelerating international migration, suggesting that the pace of global migration remains proportionate to global population growth (Czaika, 2014). Notably, the shifting patterns of migration toward Europe have been associated not solely with rising volumes, but with the liberalization of migration policies, particularly policies that emphasize the selective admission of migrants rather than merely controlling their numbers (Haas H. d., 2011).

The media has played a pivotal role in shaping public perceptions of refugees and asylum seekers. In many instances, mainstream media narratives tend to portray refugees as threats to the native population, particularly in relation to religious identity, national security, and social stability. These representations not only foster fear among local communities but also reinforce negative stereotypes against refugees, ultimately contributing to the development of more restrictive immigration policies. This dynamic has been instrumental in fueling political radicalization, particularly in Western countries, where the rise of right-wing populist parties and exclusionary migrant policies has become increasingly prominent. Within this context, the nexus between refugee protection and humanitarian intervention has also emerged as a significant area of scholarly concern. Humanitarian interventions in refugees' countries of origin are often viewed as pre-emptive strategies aimed at curbing mass refugee movements into neighboring countries or specific regions.

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Empirical studies underscore the extent to which public attitudes toward refugees are shaped by the media's framing of forced displacement narratives. Brosius and Eps (1995) demonstrate that media coverage emphasizing criminality, economic burdens, and cultural incompatibility contributes significantly to the formation of negative public attitudes toward asylum seekers. Media framing, in this sense, functions as a cognitive mechanism that channels public attention toward perceived threats rather than humanitarian needs (Brosius., 1995) (Esses, Medianu, & Lawson, 2013). Consequently, increases in refugee numbers are frequently misinterpreted as the byproduct of overly permissive migration policies rather than as outcomes of armed conflict or humanitarian crises.

The global proliferation of refugee and asylum seeker flows has become normalized, yet it continues to pose complex economic and social challenges for host states. The arrival of displaced individuals often sparks concerns over labor market disruptions, resource competition, and potential security threats (M.F., 2022) (Wood, 1994). One of the primary anxieties associated with refugee migration is its potential impact on domestic labor markets. Several studies have found that the influx of low-skilled refugee workers may exacerbate unemployment among local populations, particularly those employed in low-wage sectors. This is often attributed to the increased supply of labor, which can depress wages and reduce job opportunities for native workers. However, these same studies also highlight refugees' potential to contribute to economic growth by stimulating consumer demand and enhancing producer productivity, factors that can lead to inflationary pressures and, in turn, incentivize local producers to expand output.

Beyond labor market implications, the presence of refugees and asylum seekers may also exacerbate or trigger social tensions within host societies. Refugees are frequently perceived as burdens on public resources, leading to contestation over access to housing, healthcare, and other essential services (A. Betts, 2017). Moreover, cultural and religious differences between host communities and refugee populations can fuel social frictions, occasionally escalating into acts of violence. In several documented cases across Europe and the Middle East, clashes between specific ethnic or religious groups have resulted in violent incidents and widespread public resistance to refugee resettlement (Skleparis, 2018).

Contrary to dominant narratives that focus predominantly on the negative repercussions of refugee and asylum-seeker migration, such movements also generate substantial positive impacts. One notable benefit is the flow of remittances sent by refugees to their countries of origin. These financial transfers play a significant role in reducing poverty, enhancing household living standards, and fostering local economic development. Remittances serve not only as a vital source of income for recipient families but also as a means to stimulate small business growth and local investment (IMF, 2020). Furthermore, the integration of refugees into host country labor markets can provide valuable skills and expertise, thereby contributing to innovation and long-term economic development. A study by Refugee Council USA (2019) revealed that refugees exhibit high labor force participation rates and substantial levels of entrepreneurship. These dynamics contribute positively to job creation and regional economic growth in the communities where refugees settle (Refugee Council USA, 2019). In short, the effects of refugee and asylum-seeker migration on host countries are

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multidimensional posing challenges such as labor market competition and social tensions, while simultaneously presenting opportunities for socio-economic advancement. Policymakers must approach this complexity with nuanced strategies that aim to maximize the benefits and mitigate the adverse impacts of forced migration.

Historically, the formulation of international legal norms concerning refugees dates back to the early 20th century, particularly in the aftermath of the First and Second World Wars. The 1951 Refugee Convention and its 1967 Protocol represent the cornerstone of international legal protection for refugees. These instruments define who qualifies as a refugee, delineate their rights, and outline the obligations of host states. While the 1951 Convention was initially Eurocentric designed to protect those displaced by World War II, the 1967 Protocol expanded its scope in response to the global proliferation of refugee movements. These foundational instruments have subsequently inspired important regional frameworks, such as the 1969 OAU Refugee Convention in Africa, the 1984 Cartagena Declaration in Latin America, and the development of a Common European Asylum System within the European Union.

Refugees are individuals compelled to flee their countries due to a well-founded fear of persecution, and who lack effective protection from their state of origin. By contrast, migrants may leave their countries for various reasons unrelated to persecution, such as employment opportunities, family reunification, or education. A person may cease to be a refugee when the conditions justifying their refugee status no longer exist for instance, when they voluntarily repatriate under safe conditions, or become integrated or naturalized in the host country. The 1951 Refugee Convention articulates a clear legal definition in Article 1A(2)[1], identifying a refugee as someone who, "owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership in a particular social group, or political opinion, is outside the country of their nationality or habitual residence" (UNHCR, 2010).

Refugees are thus entitled to international protection based on their recognition as persons fleeing persecution or serious harm. According to the Convention, refugees enjoy a range of rights, including protection against refoulement (forced return), lawful residence, access to education, employment, and public services (UNHCR, 2021). In contrast, an asylum seeker is an individual who has applied for refugee status but whose claim has not yet been adjudicated. While awaiting a decision, asylum seekers may face restricted rights depending on the host country's legal system. Their access to employment, healthcare, legal assistance, and education often varies considerably, reflecting divergent national approaches to asylum governance (Türk, 2023) (UNHCR, 2021).

The global refugee crisis has emerged as an urgent concern, with millions of individuals fleeing their countries of origin in search of safety and stability. Among the key host and transit states in this context are Türkiye, which functions both as a major transit and

[1] "A refugee is a person who, owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership in a particular social group, or political opinion, is outside their country of nationality and is unable or, owing to such fear, unwilling to avail themselves of the protection of that country; or a person who, not having a nationality and being outside the country of their former habitual residence, is unable or, owing to such fear, unwilling to return to it."

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destination country, and Indonesia, which serves as a regional transit state. Türkiye has transformed into the world's largest refugee-hosting nation, accommodating over 3.6 million registered Syrian refugees as of 2022 (Kaya, 2023), in addition to approximately 222,000 refugees and asylum seekers from other countries. Despite some reports of voluntary returns to Syria following political changes, the Syrian refugee population in Türkiye remains significant in 2025. This indicates that many refugees continue to assess security, stability, and socio-economic conditions before deciding whether to repatriate.

Indonesia, on the other hand, is classified as a regional transit country in the global refugee regime, as it is not a final destination. Most refugees in Indonesia, including Afghans, Rohingya, and Somalis await resettlement to third countries such as Australia, Canada, and the United States (UNHCR, 2024). The responses of Türkiye and Indonesia to refugee inflows reflect different political, legal, and institutional dynamics. Türkiye has embedded refugee protection within a partially institutionalized legal framework, most notably through its Temporary Protection Regulation. In contrast, Indonesia neither a signatory to the 1951 Refugee Convention nor the 1967 Protocol relies on ad hoc humanitarian mechanisms, coordinated with international organizations such as UNHCR and IOM. These two cases highlight the tension between global moral obligations and domestic political calculations in refugee governance. In certain instances, the refugee issue is also securitized that is, framed as a threat to national stability, public order, or societal security. This securitization generates a friction between humanitarian and realist state approaches, with the latter emphasizing border control and sovereign authority.

Refugees and Asylum Seekers in Türkiye: Legal Evolution and Practical Limitations

Historically, Türkiye's refugee regime was limited to accepting and resettling individuals of Turkish descent. However, the large-scale influx of Syrian refugees has compelled the government to adopt new legislative initiatives and migration policies to manage the growing asylum-seeking population. One notable development was the enactment of the Regulation on Work Permits for Foreigners under Temporary Protection in 2016, aimed at facilitating the integration of Syrian refugees into the labor market. Despite these efforts, refugee integration in Türkiye continues to face significant challenges. Limited financial resources and legal ambiguity surrounding the responsibilities of local governments in service provision remain major constraints. As a result, local actors have had to engage in "integration work," devising their own adaptive mechanisms to address refugee needs resulting in varying levels of collaboration even within the same province (Siviş, 2020).

In recent years, the future of international refugee law and the relevance of the 1951 Refugee Convention and 1967 Protocol have been the subject of intense debate. Much of this discourse centers on the continued emphasis on legal practices within specific global regions, and the criticism of non-signatory states as legal outliers or deviations. Notably, 44 UN member states have yet to ratify either the 1951 Convention or the 1967 Protocol. This list includes major refugee-hosting countries such as Lebanon, Jordan, India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh.

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Türkiye, which has hosted the largest refugee population globally since 2014, is technically not among the non-signatory states. It ratified both the 1951 Convention and the 1967 Protocol, but with a key reservation: the optional geographical limitation (UNHCR, 2015). Under this restriction, Türkiye is only obligated to grant refugee status to individuals fleeing events occurring in Europe. Thus, nearly 4 million people seeking international protection in Türkiye do not qualify under this criterion. A 2018 parliamentary report revealed that only around 70 individuals had been granted full refugee status under the Convention framework (Engin & Kader, 2023). Additional records from January 2018 suggest that merely three people were formally recognized as refugees, despite the parliamentary data suggesting a higher figure (AIDA, 2019).

Although Türkiye ratified the 1967 Protocol which removes the temporal limitation on the refugee definition the country has maintained its geographical limitation. This means that only those originating from Europe are eligible for formal refugee status under Turkish law. For others, such as Syrians, Türkiye provides temporary protection, a framework outside the Convention system. This regime guarantees certain fundamental rights and protection from refoulement, but does not provide pathways to permanent integration or legal residency.

Asylum Seekers and Refugees in Indonesia: Legal Ambiguity and Humanitarian Practice

Although Indonesia is not a signatory to either the 1951 Refugee Convention or its 1967 Protocol, it has nonetheless become a key transit country for asylum seekers and refugees. Most displaced persons view Indonesia as a temporary waypoint before resettling in final destination countries such as Australia, Canada, or the United States (UNHCR, 2024). Their decisions to remain in Indonesia or continue onward are shaped by shifting circumstances and a complex interplay of factors, including the policies of transit states, geopolitical pressures, and local socio-economic conditions (Missbach, 2019).

The experience of asylum seekers and refugees in Indonesia is characterized by legal uncertainty, limited access to essential services, and a domestic policy approach that is largely ad hoc. Scholars have emphasized the ethical and methodological challenges involved in understanding refugee decision-making, as their plans and actions are profoundly influenced by evolving local and international sociopolitical contexts (Eliçin, 2019) (White, 2021). While Indonesia has demonstrated humanitarian commitment by hosting displaced populations, it has yet to ratify the 1951 Refugee Convention or the 1967 Protocol. The principal barriers include economic constraints, national security concerns, the absence of a legal and administrative asylum infrastructure, and regional-historical considerations. Although Indonesia lacks a formal national asylum system, it maintains a degree of humanitarian responsibility through collaboration with the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and the International Organization for Migration (IOM). These partnerships provide limited shelter and access to education and healthcare for refugees and asylum seekers. The issuance of Presidential Regulation No. 125 of 2016 on the Handling of Refugees from Abroad represents a significant step toward establishing an operational framework for refugee management at the national level. Nevertheless, the implementation

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of this regulation is highly contingent on local government initiatives and the logistical support of international organizations.

Taken together, the refugee experiences in both Türkiye and Indonesia illustrate the complex and layered nature of the global refugee crisis. Both states face similar challenges, including the absence of comprehensive legal frameworks, insufficient resources, and difficulties integrating refugees into local sociopolitical systems. Further research and context-sensitive policy interventions are urgently needed to ensure the protection of human rights and the well-being of refugee populations in these region (Siviş, 2020) (Missbach, 2019). The 1951 Refugee Convention establishes a core set of rights that form the normative foundation of international protection for asylum seekers. Central to these protection is the principles of *non-refoulement*, which prohibits the forcible return of individuals to territories where they may face perseution or serious harm. The Convention also safeguards refugees from penalization fo irregular entry or presence, recognizing the often-forced nature of their displacement. In addition, it guarantess access to fair and efficient asylum procedurs, ensures non-discrimination and equitable treatment, and provides for the issuance of identify documents and freedom of movement. Beyond legal status, the Convention affirms refugees' access to essential services, including education, healthcare, and public assistance, as well as legal protection and eccess to judicial mechanism, thereby reinforcing their fundamental rights and dignity under international law.

Although the practical implementation of these rights varies widely across countries, the Convention establishes a universal legal standard that ensures minimum safeguards and procedural transparency for individuals seeking asylum.

Literature Review

Research on refugees and asylum seekers in Türkiye and Indonesia has generated important insights that deepen our understanding of policy dynamics and implementation challenges in both countries. In the context of Türkiye, numerous studies have examined the evolution of the refugee regime, particularly following the arrival of more than three million Syrian refugees since 2011. Although the Turkish government enacted the Regulation on Work Permits for Foreigners under Temporary Protection in 2016 to facilitate the formal labor market integration of Syrian refugees, the majority of them remain employed in the informal sector (Siviş, 2020). Siviş (2020) notes that key obstacles to effective integration include limited financial resources, institutional capacity mismatches, and legal ambiguity regarding the responsibilities of local governments. Consequently, the provision of refugee-related services is highly dependent on local initiatives, resulting in divergent responses across administrative regions.

In contrast, the literature on Indonesia highlights its position as a strategic transit country for asylum seekers and refugees, particularly those originating from South Asia, the Middle East, and Africa. Although Indonesia is not a final destination and has not ratified the 1951 Refugee Convention or its 1967 Protocol, the country remains a critical node in global migration routes. Missbach (2019) and White (2021) emphasize that decision-making

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processes among asylum seekers in Indonesia are characterized by high levels of uncertainty and are shaped by shifting policies, local socio-economic dynamics, and pressure from international actors. These studies further underscore that in the absence of a national asylum system, asylum seekers in Indonesia rely heavily on the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and the International Organization for Migration (IOM) for protection and administrative processing.

Based on this body of literature, it becomes evident that the governance of refugees and asylum seekers in Türkiye and Indonesia displays distinct characteristics with regard to policy approaches, institutional capacities, and the interaction between domestic and international actors. To conceptually understand these divergent dynamics, this study employs two relevant theoretical frameworks: Migration Transition Theory to analyze migration patterns and integration policies in Türkiye, and Securitization Theory to examine how refugee and asylum issues are framed within domestic security discourse in Indonesia. These theoretical lenses offer analytical tools to interrogate both the structural and discursive dimensions of government policy toward refugees and asylum seekers in each country.

Migration Transition Theory is a conceptual framework used to understand how patterns of migration evolve as states progress through different stages of socio-economic development (Haas D. H., 2010). The theory posits that migration tends to increase during early phases of development and subsequently stabilizes or declines as states reach higher levels of economic maturity. In this context, Migration Transition Theory explains Türkiye's transformation from a country of emigration to a major destination and transit state for refugees particularly from Syria, Afghanistan, and Iraq. During the mid-20th century, Türkiye was known primarily as a sending country, with significant emigration flows to Europe. However, since the 1980s, a combination of economic growth and Türkiye's strategic geographical position has turned it into a central hub for transit and refugee reception from neighboring conflict zones (İçduygu, 2014).

Following the tightening of European border policies in the aftermath of the 2015 refugee crisis, Türkiye has become a long-term host country for many refugees. The previously implemented "open-door" policy gradually shifted toward more restrictive measures, aligning with the assumptions of Migration Transition Theory, which suggests that developing countries tend to adopt stricter migration policies over time. Major cities in Türkiye, such as Istanbul and Gaziantep have witnessed growing trends of refugee urbanization. The 2016 EU–Türkiye Agreement further institutionalized Türkiye's role as a buffer zone for migration into Europe, reinforcing the notion of developing countries acting as key gatekeepers in the global refugee regime. The theory also implies the possibility of return migration if stability is restored in the refugees' country of origin; however, such conditions remain uncertain.

In the Indonesian context, Securitization Theory as developed by the Copenhagen School (Buzan, Wæver, & Wilde, 1998) provides a relevant analytical lens to examine how the state perceives and responds to refugee and asylum-seeker issues. This theory posits that non-traditional issues such as migration and forced displacement can be framed as existential

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security threats, enabling the adoption of extraordinary policy measures. In Indonesia, the absence of formal accession to the 1951 Refugee Convention and the 1967 Protocol has contributed to an ad hoc and largely security-oriented approach to refugee governance, in which refugees are often framed as challenges to national stability rather than as rights-bearing individuals. This securitized framing is reflected in practices such as detention, mobility restrictions, and the absence of long-term integration policies.

At the same time, Indonesia's response to refugee inflows is not uniform across regions. In contexts such as Aceh, humanitarian responses have emerged through cooperation with UNHCR and local organizations, while in administratively central and urban areas, refugee governance remains more tightly regulated and security-driven. This variation aligns with the thematic findings of the content analysis, particularly the coexistence of securitization and ad hoc humanitarian responses. By contrast, variation in Türkiye's refugee governance is shaped primarily by institutional and administrative differentiation rather than localized humanitarian discretion (BPK, 2010) (UNHCR, 2024). his reflects the role of humanitarianism in international relations, whereby states engage in moral obligations and global solidarity even in the absence of binding legal commitments. Therefore, although Indonesia often adopts a securitized stance toward refugee issues, there remains space for more humanistic and collaborative responses. This duality highlights the ambivalence of state policy, caught between security logic and ethical imperatives.

Taken together, Migration Transition Theory and Securitization Theory offer complementary frameworks for understanding the dynamics of refugee and asylum policies in Global South countries such as Türkiye and Indonesia. Migration Transition Theory provides a historical and structural understanding of Türkiye's transformation from a migrant-sending to a major refugee-receiving and transit country, particularly in the wake of the Syrian crisis. It links economic development, regional geopolitical pressures, and evolving migration policies with Türkiye's changing role in global refugee movements.

In contrast, Securitization Theory rooted in constructivist International Relations sheds light on how Indonesia, in the absence of a formal asylum system, frames refugee issues through a lens of domestic security. This securitized framing manifests in the state's tendency to treat refugee arrivals as challenges to public order and national stability, rather than as subjects of international legal protection. Yet, Indonesia retains a degree of humanitarian responsiveness through partnerships with actors such as UNHCR and IOM. These two theoretical approaches enrich our understanding of how non-Western states manage the pressures of the global refugee regime while navigating their own domestic political and institutional constraints. By combining structural and discursive perspectives, this study aims to provide a more holistic analysis of the differentiated refugee policy responses in Türkiye and Indonesia.

Methods

To investigate the experiences of refugees and asylum seekers in Türkiye and Indonesia, this study adopts a qualitative research approach, relying primarily on secondary

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data sources. While primary data, such as interviews with government officials, NGO representatives, and local community leaders would ideally enrich the analysis, constraints related to access and resources have led this research to focus on qualitative content analysis of relevant secondary materials. The secondary data utilized in this study include academic journal articles, national and international policy reports, official documents from UNHCR and IOM, and news coverage from credible media outlets reporting on recent developments in refugee governance and policy dynamics in both countries. The analysis is conducted through thematic coding, a method that enables the researcher to identify key themes such as integration, securitization, humanitarian response, and ad hoc policymaking. This technique allows for the mapping of both consistent and contradictory narrative patterns across various sources (Clarke, 2006) (Flick, 2014).

In particular, the method facilitates a deeper interpretation of policy discourse and social representations concerning refugees, including how both state and non-state actors frame challenges and proposed solutions. The use of qualitative content analysis enables the examination of both discursive practices and policy narratives, offering insights into the underlying assumptions, ideological orientations, and strategic considerations embedded within refugee-related policies. By adopting this approach, the study aims to provide a rich contextual understanding of the similarities and differences in how Türkiye and Indonesia respond to refugee and asylum-seeker issues. The methodological framework is particularly suited for uncovering the intersection of structural, institutional, and discursive elements that shape national responses in non-Western contexts.

Discussion / Research Results

The findings of this research highlight the complexity and diversity of refugee and asylum-seeker experiences in both Türkiye and Indonesia. In Türkiye, the large influx of Syrian refugees has prompted the government to introduce new legislative and immigration policy initiatives, such as the *Regulation on Work Permits for Foreigners under Temporary Protection*. However, the integration of refugees into Turkish society continues to face substantial challenges, particularly at the local level. Limited financial resources and legal ambiguities regarding the responsibilities of municipal governments have led to fragmented implementation across different cities. Some municipalities have taken part in "integration work" to address the needs of refugee populations, though these efforts often lack coherent coordination and strategic oversight (Siviş, 2020) (Özçürümez & D.Y. Aker, 2014) (Bayırbağ, 2019).

In Indonesia, its role as a transit country has shaped the way asylum seekers and refugees perceive their stay primarily as a temporary stopover en route to final destination countries. Their decision-making processes are deeply influenced by complex political, social, and economic dynamics. Despite not being a party to the 1951 Refugee Convention, Indonesia continues to demonstrate humanitarian commitment through ad hoc responses and collaboration with UNHCR and IOM. Within this context, two key findings emerged from the study.

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First, lack of comparative analysis on the effectiveness of local-level integration policies. Although national-level refugee policy frameworks exist in both countries, there remains a significant gap in evaluating the effectiveness of implementation at the subnational or municipal level. In Türkiye, a World Bank study (2023) emphasized limitations in inter-agency coordination at the local level, despite the existence of national integration frameworks. Similarly, in Indonesia, research by Shahnaz (2019) identifies critical challenges in the implementation of Presidential Regulation No. 125/2016, including budgetary constraints and local-level resistance.

Second, insufficient formal assessment of local community perceptions toward refugees. There is a notable lack of empirical studies that systematically assess public perceptions of refugees, particularly differentiating between urban and rural communities. Research by Amalia (2020) and RDI-UREF highlights ambivalent public attitudes in Indonesia, while Özden (2023) notes that in Türkiye, negative perceptions are often shaped by local economic conditions (Ramadhani, 2022).

To present the findings more systematically, the results of the content analysis are summarized in a Thematic Findings Table. To synthesize these findings more systematically, the results of the qualitative content analysis are summarized in Table 1. This table categorizes five recurring themes identified across the literature and policy documents:

Tabel 1. Thematic Patterns in Refugee Governance in Turkiye and Indonesia

Theme	Country	Representative Source	Frequency of Occurrence[2]
Securitization of refugees	Indonesia	Refugee Status Determination by UNHCR in Indonesia (UNHCR, 2020)	4
Ad Hoc Humanitarian Response	Indonesia	History of Refugee Presence in Indonesia and the Role of UNHCR (Farhanditya, 2024)	5
Labor Market Integration of Refugees	Turkiye	ILO Report on the Syrian Refugee Labor Market in Türkiye (ILO, 2017)	3
Socio- Economis Burdens on Host Communities	Turkiye	AEA Study: Impact of Syrian Refugees on Local Communities (Tumen, 2016)	4
Coordination with International Organizations (UNHCR & IOM)	both	Community-Based Protection and Cooperation by UNHCR (UNHCR, 2020)	5

The thematic content analysis reveals five dominant patterns shaping refugee governance discourse in Türkiye and Indonesia. Among these, themes related to Indonesia, ad hoc humanitarian responses and coordination with international organizations (UNHCR and IOM) exhibit the highest frequency of occurrence, each appearing in five coded sources. This prominence underscores the centrality of humanitarian governance mechanisms in Indonesia,

[2] Frequency refers to the number of sources in which the theme appeared during the qualitative coding process.

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particularly in the absence of a formal national asylum system. The theme of securitization of refugees in Indonesia also appears with relatively high frequency (four sources), indicating the persistent framing of refugee issues through security-oriented narratives alongside humanitarian practices.

In contrast, Türkiye's policy discourse is more prominently characterized by themes associated with long-term hosting and integration challenges. Socio-economic burdens on host communities emerge in four sources, reflecting concerns over labor competition, public service strain, and social cohesion, while labor market integration of refugees appears in three sources, highlighting both policy efforts and structural limitations in formal employment access. Overall, the distribution of thematic frequencies illustrates divergent national priorities and policy trajectories, shaped by differences in legal frameworks, institutional capacity, and the degree to which refugee governance is influenced by securitization dynamics in each country.

Indonesia: Between Humanitarianism and Securitization

Although Indonesia has not ratified the 1951 Refugee Convention or the 1967 Protocol, its approach to refugee governance is heavily influenced by humanitarian considerations. The thematic prevalence of Ad Hoc Humanitarian Response and Coordination with UNHCR & IOM reflects a model based on international collaboration and moral responsibility. For instance, Presidential Regulation No. 125 of 2016 provides an operational framework for managing foreign refugees in coordination with UNHCR and IOM (UNHCR, 2024).

However, securitization tendencies are also clearly visible, particularly in practices such as mobility restrictions, administrative detention, and local government narratives that frame refugees as security risks. This aligns closely with Securitization Theory as developed by the Copenhagen School, wherein states construct refugee issues as existential threats rather than purely humanitarian concerns. In this context, threat discourses and national stability are often invoked to justify exclusionary policies, particularly toward Rohingya and Afghan asylum seekers.

Türkiye: Migration in Transition

Conversely, Türkiye represents a compelling case for the application of Migration Transition Theory (Zelinsky, 1971). The country has undergone a transition from being a migrant-sending state to a major transit and destination country, particularly in the wake of the Syrian conflict. The prominence of themes such as Labor Market Integration and Economic and Social Burden on Host Communities illustrates this complex transformation. Although Türkiye introduced work permit regulations for Syrian refugees in 2016, in practice, most remain employed in the informal sector and continue to face social exclusion (ILO, 2020). The economic strain and increased pressure on public services have also shaped ambivalent host community attitudes. These developments correspond to the third stage of Migration Transition Theory, in which economic growth transforms a country into a migration magnet

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legal or otherwise. However, as migration pressures mount, states often adopt more restrictive policies, as evidenced in Türkiye's post-2016 migration shift following its agreement with the European Union (European Council, 2016) (Migration Policy Institute, 2021).

These findings underscore that despite operating within divergent legal and political frameworks, both countries face multidimensional challenges in addressing refugee issues. In Indonesia, the tension between humanitarianism and securitization highlights a moral dilemma, particularly in the absence of a formal asylum system. In Türkiye, economic and social pressures challenge the state's capacity to fulfill protection commitments while maintaining internal stability.

The relevance of the applied theoretical frameworks Migration Transition Theory for Türkiye and Securitization Theory for Indonesia is further validated by the findings. Migration Transition Theory aptly captures Türkiye's transformation from an emigration to a transit and immigration country, consistent with shifting labor policies and the urbanization of refugee populations. Meanwhile, Securitization Theory illuminates how Indonesia frames refugee issues as threats to domestic stability, explaining its cautious yet morally responsive approach to refugee management.

Türkiye's Migration Policy in Historical and Strategic Perspective

Türkiye's migration policy has undergone significant evolution over the past two decades, transforming in parallel with the country's changing role from a labor-exporting state to a principal destination and transit hub. This shift is largely influenced by Türkiye's strategic location between Europe and Asia and the humanitarian crises in neighboring countries such as Syria, Iraq, and Afghanistan. According to İçduygu and Aksel (2012), Türkiye's migration policy was historically centered on labor emigration especially to Europe, but the Syrian crisis necessitated significant legal reforms to accommodate the arrival of millions of refugees. Türkiye's response included the enactment of the Law on Foreigners and International Protection (LFIP) in 2013 and the Temporary Protection Regulation (TPR) in 2014, designed to provide temporary shelter and basic rights to Syrian nationals. However, these protections are not equivalent to full refugee status under the 1951 Convention, due to Türkiye's maintenance of the geographical limitation in its ratification of the Convention (Kirişci, 2014).

Türkiye's migration strategy has also been deeply shaped by the 2016 EU–Türkiye agreement, under which Türkiye agreed to prevent irregular migration flows to Europe in exchange for financial aid and political concessions from the EU. This illustrates Türkiye's role as a critical actor in regional migration governance, while simultaneously revealing internal pressures, including public backlash, overstretched social services, and economic exclusion (Aksel, 2012) (European Commission, 2016) With more than 3.6 million registered Syrian refugees, Türkiye has become the world's largest refugee-hosting country. Yet, as Erdoğan (2020) observes, integration efforts remain hindered by administrative fragmentation and

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significant fiscal burdens highlighting the need for inclusive, rights-based, and long-term policy solutions.

The lived experiences of refugees and asylum seekers in Türkiye and Indonesia reflect the complex, multilayered nature of the global refugee crisis. While both countries have undertaken significant steps to address the needs of vulnerable populations, they continue to face formidable challenges in terms of legal frameworks, resource allocation, and the integration of refugees into host societies (Missbach, 2019) (Bayırbağ, 2019) (Siviş, 2020) (Eliçin, 2019). In Türkiye, government efforts to implement new laws and policies have yielded mixed outcomes at the local level, constrained by financial limitations and a lack of legal clarity surrounding municipal responsibilities. In Indonesia, the country's status as a transit state has created a fluid and dynamic refugee landscape, with populations navigating complex political, social, and economic factors in their decision-making.

These findings underscore the urgent need for comprehensive and coordinated approaches to refugee governance approaches that account for the unique local contexts and the dual challenges faced by host communities and refugee populations alike. Further research and targeted policy interventions are essential to ensure the protection and well-being of asylum seekers and refugees in these regions and to foster successful long-term integration into local communities.

Indonesia has not ratified the 1951 Refugee Convention nor its 1967 Protocol. This decision is rooted in a range of multidimensional challenges: spanning economic, security, legal, political, and sociocultural considerations that shape the country's refugee policy stance. The following subsections summarize the key barriers impeding formal accession to these international legal instruments.

1. *Economic Constraints*

Unlike many European states, Indonesia remains a developing country, as evidenced by persistently high poverty and unemployment rates. The Convention and Protocol impose legal obligations on signatory states to guarantee refugee rights, including access to education, freedom of religion, safety, and security. These obligations are considered burdensome by Indonesian policymakers, particularly in light of pressing domestic priorities, such as public-school renovations and basic infrastructure development. By remaining a non-signatory, Indonesia is not legally obligated to supply food or basic logistics for refugees within its territory. Instead, these responsibilities fall under the mandate of UNHCR, which is expected to meet the humanitarian and livelihood needs of refugees, including access to income-generating employment.

2. *National Security Concerns*

National security considerations play a central role in shaping Indonesia's approach to refugee governance. In the absence of a comprehensive national system for monitoring, registering, and regulating refugee mobility, the Indonesian government often perceives unmanaged refugee flows as potential threats to domestic stability. These concerns are frequently articulated through security-oriented narratives that associate refugee movements

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with risks of radicalization or extremist influence within refugee communities (Missbach, 2017). In addition, policymakers have expressed apprehension about the possible infiltration of transnational terrorist networks through refugee routes, particularly those originating from conflict-affected regions such as Afghanistan, Somalia, and parts of the Middle East. Beyond these transnational security fears, refugee arrivals are also linked to local-level anxieties, where host communities perceive refugees as competitors for limited economic opportunities and public services, thereby heightening the risk of social tension and communal friction. Together, these security discourses contribute to the framing of refugees not solely as subjects of humanitarian protection, but also as potential challenges to national security and public order.

3. *Political and Sovereignty Considerations*

Political and sovereignty considerations significantly influence Indonesia's stance on refugee governance. The state places a strong emphasis on preserving political flexibility in managing migration and asylum-related issues, particularly by avoiding binding international legal commitments that could constrain its discretionary authority. Within this context, ratification of the 1951 Refugee Convention is often perceived as a step that could generate increased refugee inflows, thereby creating legal and administrative obligations that the government may be unable or unwilling to sustain. Rather than committing to a formalized international refugee regime, Indonesia has strategically favored ad hoc and humanitarian-based responses that allow greater policy maneuverability while minimizing juridical constraints (Prabandari, 2020). This approach enables the state to respond selectively to refugee situations in line with domestic political considerations and resource limitations, while maintaining sovereignty over migration governance decisions.

4. *Legal and Institutional Limitations*

Legal and institutional limitations constitute a fundamental constraint in Indonesia's refugee governance framework. The country does not possess a formal national Refugee Status Determination (RSD) mechanism, resulting in a heavy reliance on international actors for core protection functions. In practice, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) assumes primary responsibility for determining refugee and asylum-seeker status, underscoring the absence of a domestically institutionalized asylum system. This institutional gap is further compounded by the lack of a comprehensive national legal framework governing refugee protection, which has led Indonesia to depend on non-binding instruments such as Presidential Regulation No. 125 of 2016 as the principal operational guideline. While this regulation provides a degree of administrative structure, it does not establish enforceable legal rights or long-term protection pathways for refugees. Moreover, the absence of a dedicated refugee law has generated institutional ambiguity, with overlapping mandates and unclear divisions of responsibility among government ministries and agencies. As a result, refugee governance in Indonesia remains fragmented and reactive, shaped more by ad hoc coordination than by a coherent and legally grounded policy architecture.

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5. Social and Cultural Factors

Social and cultural factors further shape the dynamics of refugee governance in Indonesia, particularly through public perceptions and community responses. Public attitudes toward refugees remain mixed and are often marked by skepticism or resistance, with refugees frequently perceived as burdens on public facilities or as sources of social disturbance (Amalia, 2020). These perceptions are not uniform across the country; levels of social tolerance toward "foreigners" vary significantly between regions and tend to be lower in socioeconomically vulnerable areas where competition over limited resources is more pronounced. In several transit cities, including Medan, Makassar, and Kupang, such perceptions have translated into visible forms of community resistance to refugee placement, ranging from public protests to informal pressure on local authorities. These social dynamics closely align with the thematic pattern of socio-economic burdens on host communities identified in the content analysis, illustrating how local perceptions and cultural attitudes reinforce policy constraints and shape refugee governance outcomes at the subnational level.

6. Regional Geopolitical Interests

Regional geopolitical considerations also play a decisive role in shaping Indonesia's refugee policy stance. Indonesia's strategic geographic position along key maritime and migration routes has effectively placed the country as a transit point for refugees seeking onward movement, particularly toward Australia. Within this geopolitical context, ratification of the 1951 Refugee Convention is often viewed with caution, as it is associated with the risk of Indonesia being reclassified from a transit state to a destination country. Such a shift would substantially increase the state's responsibility for long-term refugee protection, resettlement, and integration. Moreover, policymakers express concern that formal accession to the Convention could alter international expectations, placing greater pressure on Indonesia to absorb and integrate a growing refugee population beyond its existing administrative and fiscal capacity (Brown, 2010). These geopolitical calculations reinforce Indonesia's preference for maintaining flexibility in refugee governance while managing its role within regional and global migration regimes.

Taken together, Indonesia's decision not to ratify the 1951 Refugee Convention and its 1967 Protocol is shaped by a constellation of interrelated security, political, legal, social, and geopolitical considerations. National security concerns contribute to the framing of refugee movements as potential risks to public order and stability, while political and sovereignty calculations encourage the preservation of policy flexibility and discretionary authority in migration governance. These concerns are reinforced by legal and institutional limitations, particularly the absence of a formal national asylum system and a binding refugee law, which constrain the state's capacity to assume comprehensive protection obligations. At the societal level, mixed and often negative public attitudes toward refugees, especially in socioeconomically vulnerable regions further complicate policy implementation and heighten local resistance. Finally, Indonesia's regional geopolitical position as a key transit state amplifies apprehensions that ratification could recalibrate international expectations, transforming the country into a long-term destination for refugee settlement. Collectively,

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these factors constitute the primary drivers of non-ratification, explaining why Indonesia has opted for an ad hoc, humanitarian-based governance model that balances moral responsibility with security considerations, institutional capacity, and the imperatives of state sovereignty.

The work of İçduygu and Aksel (2014) provides critical insights into Türkiye's evolving position as both a destination and transit country within regional and global migration regimes. Türkiye's migration policy has been shaped by a combination of geopolitical location, historical emigration patterns, and shifting international dynamics. In the post–World War II period, Türkiye was primarily a labor-sending country, particularly to Europe. However, since the late twentieth century, this pattern has gradually reversed, with Türkiye transforming into a major receiver and transit hub for migrants and refugees originating from the Middle East, Central Asia, and Africa. This structural transition was significantly accelerated by the Syrian conflict, which triggered an unprecedented surge in cross-border displacement and firmly repositioned Türkiye within global refugee movements.

Türkiye's dual role as both a destination and transit country is closely linked to its proximity to Europe and its centrality along regional migration routes. Refugees, irregular migrants, and labor migrants increasingly transit through or settle in Türkiye, driven by prolonged political instability and armed conflict in neighboring states such as Syria, Iraq, and Afghanistan. In response, the Turkish state has progressively shifted its migration policy orientation from emigration management toward migration governance and border control. This shift has been institutionalized through key legal and regulatory developments, including the enactment of the Law on Foreigners and International Protection (LFIP) in 2013, which formalized migration governance structures, and the Temporary Protection Regulation (TPR) in 2014, which introduced a structured—albeit limited—protection framework for Syrian nationals. At the same time, Türkiye has maintained the geographical limitation to the 1951 Refugee Convention, thereby restricting full refugee status to individuals fleeing events in Europe (Kirişci, 2014). his legal arrangement reflects a strategy of partial compliance, allowing Türkiye to uphold core protection principles while limiting long-term legal obligations.

Türkiye's strategic role in regional migration governance is further illustrated by the 2016 EU–Türkiye refugee agreement. Under this arrangement, Türkiye committed to curbing irregular migration flows toward Europe in exchange for financial assistance and political concessions from the European Union. While this agreement enhanced Türkiye's geopolitical leverage as a key gatekeeper in European migration management, it also intensified domestic pressures. Public backlash against refugees, growing strain on social services, and limited economic inclusion have emerged as persistent challenges, exposing the internal costs of externalized migration control (Aksel, 2012) (European Commission, 2016). Despite hosting over 3.6 million registered Syrian refugees, integration efforts remain fragmented and uneven across regions. As Erdoğan (2020) observes, Türkiye's migration governance landscape is characterized by administrative decentralization and substantial fiscal strain, underscoring the need for long-term, inclusive, and rights-based policy reforms that move beyond temporary protection toward sustainable integration.

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The Syrian refugee crisis has significantly shaped Türkiye's recent migration policies. As one of the largest host countries for displaced Syrians (Ferris, 2025), Türkiye faces a complex array of social, economic, and political challenges. Hosting millions of refugees has exerted substantial pressure on public services, labor markets, and public opinion. Türkiye's decision to grant temporary protection status as opposed to permanent refugee status has profoundly influenced both its short- and long-term migration strategies. Key policy themes likely include the dynamics of refugee integration, rising public resentment, and the role of international organizations such as the United Nations in supporting Türkiye's humanitarian response.

In assessing Türkiye's migration response, İçduygu and Aksel highlight the multifaceted governance challenges confronting the country as it navigates its dual role as both a transit and destination state. One of the most persistent challenges lies in the management of irregular migration, including the regulation of unauthorized migrant flows, the proliferation of human smuggling networks, and the control of illegal border crossings. Alongside these concerns, refugee integration constitutes a complex and politically sensitive issue. Although Türkiye has extended temporary protection to millions of refugees, particularly Syrians, meaningful social and economic integration remains difficult amid domestic debates over national identity, social cohesion, and access to employment. These internal governance challenges are further compounded by Türkiye's external relations, as migration policy has become closely intertwined with foreign policy considerations, most notably in its bilateral and multilateral engagement with the European Union. The 2016 EU–Türkiye refugee agreement exemplifies how migration governance functions not only as a domestic policy issue but also as a strategic instrument within Türkiye's broader diplomatic and geopolitical framework.

In response to these challenges, İçduygu and Aksel advocate for a more comprehensive and long-term migration strategy that goes beyond emergency relief and temporary protection mechanisms. They emphasize the need for policies focused on sustainable integration, social cohesion, and international cooperation. A balanced approach is proposed one that recognizes both humanitarian obligations and domestic imperatives such as national security and economic stability.

Fundamentally, Türkiye's migration policy stands at a critical crossroads. It is shaped by both domestic pressures and international commitments, as the country continues to grapple with its dual role as both a transit and destination country. Türkiye must navigate a broad spectrum of challenges from managing irregular migration and integrating refugees to mitigating the socio-political consequences of hosting a large displaced population. This situation calls for a sustainable, rights-based approach to migration governance, one that ensures the protection of migrants while maintaining national stability. Türkiye's experience also reinforces its importance within the global migration landscape. As such, the country's policies will have far-reaching implications not only for its own population but also for regional stability and international migration dynamics.

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Conclusion

This study delineates the complex and divergent landscapes of refugee governance in Türkiye and Indonesia, two emerging states responding to the global refugee crisis within asymmetrical legal and political frameworks. Türkiye has institutionalized a more structured approach through legislative instruments such as the Temporary Protection Regulation and the Law on Foreigners and International Protection. These frameworks have enabled Türkiye to position itself both as a transit and primary host country. However, despite its comprehensive legal architecture, the implementation of refugee policies remains inconsistent at the sub-national level. This inconsistency is largely attributable to resource limitations, administrative fragmentation, and rising societal resistance. These findings underscore the necessity of a long-term, inclusive migration strategy that is coherently integrated with socio-economic planning.

Conversely, Indonesia has adopted an emergency- and humanitarian-based governance model that relies heavily on collaboration with international organizations such as the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and the International Organization for Migration (IOM). Its reluctance to ratify the 1951 Refugee Convention and the 1967 Protocol is shaped by a combination of economic constraints, security concerns, legal and institutional limitations, and domestic political sensitivities. As a result, refugee governance in Indonesia remains fragmented, susceptible to securitization narratives, and largely unregulated by a formal national asylum system. Nevertheless, the Indonesian case illustrates an ongoing effort to balance humanitarian responsibility with the imperatives of state sovereignty under conditions of legal ambiguity. This study contributes to the refugee governance literature by demonstrating how Global South states operationalize humanitarian responsibility within fragmented legal frameworks and securitized policy environments, rather than through full compliance with international refugee law.

Building on these empirical findings, the study advances targeted policy recommendations to strengthen refugee governance in both cases. In Türkiye, the development of an integrated governance framework that enhances coordination between national and local authorities is essential to reducing disparities in policy implementation across provinces. A gradual transition from the existing temporary protection regime toward a long-term integration model is recommended, including clearer pathways to legal residency and improved access to education and healthcare. Such efforts should be supported by strengthened multilateral cooperation, particularly through more equitable burden-sharing arrangements with the European Union, and complemented by community-based integration initiatives aimed at mitigating public resistance and highlighting refugees' socio-economic contributions.

In the Indonesian context, a key priority lies in establishing a standardized national asylum framework, either through ratification of the 1951 Refugee Convention and its 1967 Protocol or through the adoption of binding domestic refugee legislation. Enhancing the capacity of local governments to deliver protection and basic services is critical, given their expanding role in frontline refugee management. In parallel, public education initiatives are

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needed to counter misinformation and reduce xenophobic narratives. Ensuring access to essential rights—such as healthcare, education, and limited employment—within a clear legal framework, alongside broader international support and burden-sharing mechanisms, would strengthen Indonesia's refugee governance without undermining national stability or sovereignty.

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