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# Refugees Challenges In Their Cultural Identity

Considering that refugees' cultural identity is distinct from the majority of the host society, it is inevitable that refugees will face some challenges in the enjoyment of rights.

## Introduction

Refugee movement has increased significantly in the last decade as the world develops to a rapidly increasing population of humans causing a multitude of people to be displaced as refugees. A Refugee defined as someone who a person who has been forced to leave their country in order to escape war, persecution, or a natural disaster. In more detail, the legal definition of a refugee is someone who has conventional reasons for leaving their home country such as due to race, religion, nationality and opposing political opinions, someone with no protection for instance the police force may not be effective, someone with a well-founded fear such as persecution or other serious harm and finally this person must be outside their own country to make a claim. The host country they move to are obligated to accept them and they cannot be sent back. Whereas, Migrants are people who leave their countries of origin voluntarily, in order to search for a better quality of life or work. These migrants are willing to leave, by choice, however the host country they migrate to are not obligated to accept them as a result they can be sent back to their country of origin. An example of refugees are the Rohingya people.

Rohingya people are Muslims residing in the Republic of the Union of Myanmar (previously known as Burma), however they account for less than 4% of the country's population, the largest concentration of them are ethnically enclaved in the North of Rakhine State, Myanmar. The Rohingya people first arrived during the British Colonial Period (between 1824 and 1948) and they self-identify as indigenous to this region of Myanmar of which they first arrived in, however the Myanmar Government see them as simply descendants from the British Colonial and do not recognize the term 'Rohingya' and prefer to refer to the community as 'Bengalis' in a pejorative manner, despite the vast majority of Rohingya people's refusal to accept this designated ethnic term. For instance, in early 2015 approximately 500,000 Rohingya Muslims where 'stripped of their temporary identification cards as well as any remaining voting rights due concerns about their citizenship', derived from their refusal to accept the ethnic term 'Bengalis' by the Government in exchange for citizenship. It is in Bangladesh where these people are counted as refugees as it is outside their own country- Myanmar.

Due the Rohingya being such a minority, violence and hate is prevalent against them in the modern era and has rapidly developed into a humanitarian crisis. Moreover, the Rohingya have been essentially stripped of their basic human rights including their voting rights, access to higher education, healthcare and employment opportunities as well as receiving unprovoked violence. The eruption of Anti-Muslim violence (starting in 2012) was incentivised by fear, fear of the Rohingya people taking over through overpopulation, hence the decision of the Burmese Government to reaffirm its two-child policy, re-enforcing xenophobia and Islamophobia in Myanmar. The increasing levels of violence and hate against Rohingya people have caused many of them to attempt to flee Burma in boats and become refugees. Refugees are people who have fled their country and cannot or do not want to go back due to a well-founded fear of

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persecution, unfortunately for the Rohingya people, they were also turned away by the neighbouring country: Bangladesh and currently the Rohingya people are regarded as stateless due to the reluctance of the Burmese Government to give citizenship to Muslims who identify as Rohingyas.

On the other hand, Turkish workers arrived in Germany in the 1960s due to the booming post-war economy where there were many gaps in the workforce for cheap labour. This was an invited temporary stay from the German Government, however to prevent immigration, recruited workers could not bring their families so that they have incentive to return back home. This was true up until 1964 where the treaty was changed and allowed the Turkish workers to stay for longer as well as bring their families because it was becoming 'too expensive and time-consuming' to continuously hire and train new recruitments every two years. Turkish workers in Germany are migrants; a migrant is a person who is moving or who has moved away from where they usually live; this could be for a variety of reasons including to find work or to join family, some leave voluntarily whilst others are forced to leave. These Turkish workers are migrants because they are willing to leave for work and it's 100% by choice. In the modern era, there are more than 2.5 million people with a Turkish Background living in Germany, this is due to so many of these workers choosing to remain in Germany during the economic recession in the 1970s. More specifically, census data from the 21st century showed that around 700,000 Turkish Migrants had German citizenship and those with dual citizenship had to choose which one to possess before their 23rd Birthday.

## Refugee convention

Human migration is nothing new, but was more apparent in World War 1 (1914–1918) and World War 2 (1939 – 1945) where people migrated from their home countries, therefore the UN was created in 1945 to ensure friendly relationships are sustained. Then, in 1948 the universal declaration of rights was created which was the name of the legal instrument that right to asylum recognised as a human right. In 1951, the Refugee Convention was drafted, however it had time and geographic limitations. More specifically, the Refugee Convention was created to allow persons who became refugees due to the events occurring in Europe and before 1st January 1951. With the 1967 Protocol, the limitation was removed which meant everyone outside Europe and after 1951 could be counted as a refugee.

The European Union (EU) plan is rules and regulations set up to ensure refugees have rights in foreign countries. A country that is effectively meeting these regulations include Ireland. More specifically, Ireland disregarded their old policies of disallowing asylum seekers work, now under the new policy refugees in Ireland can feel more integrated into society due to the 20 hours of language learning they are given per week as well as the right to work or study with no restrictions.

Similarly, Finland seems to be effectively meeting their obligations under the Refugee Convention. More specifically, refugees are provided with state-financed housing for at least 3 years as well as many cash grants which they are allowed to return homes. As well as this, to make refugees feel more integrated, they cannot do unpaid community service so they don't feel like prisoners or outsiders. On the other hand, even though the policy says they must do unpaid community service, this policy is not really helping them feel more integrated.

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On the other hand, I would say that Cyprus is failing to adequately accommodate for Refugees under the Refugee Convention. More specifically Cyprus only allows refugees the right to work if the decision on the asylum claim has exceeded six months. As a result, asylum seekers have to live in Cyprus for months without the ability to work. Instead, most refugees are given 'subsidiary status' which means they can get most of the rights of refugees, minus travel papers and family reunification as well as the burden of having to reapply for this status every three years.

Similarly, I would also say that Denmark is also failing to meet their obligations under the Refugee Convention, this is because not all asylum seekers get Danish unemployment benefits, about 50%. In addition, only asylum seekers who pass the Danish Language exam can get additional money, this is against the rights of refugees under EU policy because it discriminates against them due to the language they speak, as well as the fact family members have to wait a whole year to join them.

## **Rights of refugees (health and education)**

Despite those eligible being acknowledged as refugees, in the terms of rights to health, accessing this is made more difficult for refugees due to linguistic and cultural barriers. This inevitably results in a poorer quality of care as patient- doctor communication may be minimal. For instance, it may be difficult for a doctor to understand the problems and symptoms of the refugee as well as this, the patient may have a poor understanding of current treatment or follow-up care which could lead to misleading or inaccurate diagnosis or prescription. Other problems refugees face is: cultural differences may lead to lack of trust on the part of patients towards doctors and patients and they may feel as if the service provider doesn't care much for their physical well-being. Furthermore, the absence of language support at the moment of discharge may also lead to having discharge instructions given in writing but in the local language, this is more troublesome and inconvenient than if there was a translator which may make it difficult to obtain informed consent for treatments. Another problem is often older refugees don't adapt to the language as quickly as children because children go to school every day, therefore young children may have to translate sensitive issues and it may be hard to translate specialist words.

Evidence of this barrier has been shown through insufficient professional interpreters or intercultural mediators, the lack of adequate language support may increase medical error. Additionally, many people's cultures' inhibit them to be treated by a care provider of the opposite sex, if carers of both genders are not available if we limit the amount of refugees that can access healthcare.

Whilst it may be challenging for governments to host so many refugees, they should consider adapting their methods. For example some solutions would include hiring refugees would speak multiple languages as interpreters in common places such as GPs, schools and hospitals. Despite this potentially being costly to the government, it has a societal benefit as it secures money and employment for some refugees leading to a better quality of life and allows other refugees to convey communication effectively with others which decreases chances of misconceptions and discrepancies in what refugees are communicating with professionals such as doctors and lawyers. Another solution is to recognise refugee's diplomas, certificates or qualifications they have brought from the home country. Alike all people (from High-Income Countries) with degrees and jobs from professional qualifications they have worked hard the get

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w here there are- so what's different about doctors or nurses who just so happen to be refugees. The government could even fund short courses for refugees to learn in case there are differences in how things are done in the host country and their home country, this would mean- teachers for instance who are refugees can continue to earn a living and their career. Finally, in schools, teachers should arrange for a student or teacher who is from the same country as the refugee and speaks the same language to guide and help the refugee as they transition into the new school; this way children who may feel more vulnerable in a new country will feel less isolated and secluded.

However, despite all of this, Governments must ensure that there's clear difference between assimilation and integration in the methods. More specifically integration is helping refugees adapt into the host country's culture by making them feel welcomed and comfortable and it is considered to be good. Whereas, assimilation is the opposite and is essentially making refugees forget their culture and traditions to adopt the new culture of the host country completely, this is considered derogatory and the indoctrination of refugees is largely frowned upon. Therefore, whilst implementing ways to allow refugees to seek employment, earn money and feel more comfortable in the new society, they must be sure to be mindful and considerate to refugee's original culture as many would be reluctant to give it up.

## **Cultural identity**

Cultural identity means different things to different people; for some people it's about embracing their culture, food, music and traditions in the host country they may have migrated to, to others it's simply about staying connected and acknowledging their roots; whether that be visiting family members or regularly contacting them to ensure they are safe and healthy. Many people who have migrated from war-torn or lowly developed countries stay linked with their home country through language. Despite contrary belief, simply knowing the language of your ancestors is a blessing and can help individuals to feel integrated and more at home in new environments and surroundings. For instance the beauty of/ essence of sharing a mother tongue can lead to unintended relationships as you can relate to the other person in a way others cannot.

For refugees holding onto their cultural identity is almost essential as a form of a coping mechanism. More specifically, refugees leave everything they know behind; their possessions, their jobs, their local corner shop and have no choice in the matter, as escaping in some cases (such as in war-torn countries and persecution or countries with corrupt governments) is mandatory for their survival. However the thing that they are able to cling onto is their culture. As a result it may be hard for many of these people to adapt and forget their old cultures and traditions- and they shouldn't have to! The fact refugees want to hold on to their culture and language should be understandable to host countries especially considering the hardship they have gone through. Many people may find it difficult to learn a new language or perhaps simply would prefer not to- however this shouldn't inhibit their access to healthcare and education. More precisely refugee's language and culture constitutes barriers to the range of access to services they available, which is no fault of their own and the government should take responsibility for catering for their needs because if the roles were reversed African Tribes and middle-Eastern countries are known to be very welcoming and its likely if HICs were in the situation countries like South Sudan and Syria are currently in, African Tribes and middle-eastern countries would be more than happy to help adjust them into their culture. For instance

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currently despite Uganda being a Low-income country, they are still effectively adjusting to the large influx of South Sudan refugees.

## Conclusion

Overall, there are various different management strategies-such as the refugee convection-to aid refugees, however world governments especially in well- developed countries need to do more to cater for the refugees they host, by employing refugees- specifically those who held professional qualifications in their home country. Similarly, the experience of the Turkish Workers differs majorly from the experience of the Rohingya people because the Turkish workers migrated by choice after world war two to fill in gaps in the economy and were treated fairly with wages, good working conditions and they were given knowledge and specialist expertise in a range of skills. Nevertheless, thousands of Turkish workers were welcomed by the German Government with citizenship, making them the largest migrant group in Germany. Whereas, with the Rohingya Muslims the Government were not very welcoming and were reluctant to give them citizenship and let them self-identify as 'Rohingya Muslims' causing tension between them and caused the Rohingya Muslims to socially cluster in Rakhine State. Not only this, the Rohingya Muslims were stripped of their basic human rights (unlike the Turkish workers), tortured and raped causing many to attempt to flee the violence but were ultimately unsuccessful particularly due to the high malnutrition rates in the temporary evacuation camps. Additionally, people often get confused between refugees, migrants and asylum seekers however asylum seekers are people who are simply in the process of getting approved by the host country's government as a refugee; so all refugees' start of as asylum seekers before becoming refugees if their applicant is accepted. It is important to distinguish the difference between migrants and refugees, refugees are normally less willing and forced to leave the land they love (more so than migrants). Finally, cultural identity is essential to refugees to hold onto as a form of coping mechanism so governments mustn't try to assimilate them into a new culture, they should only integrate.