Analysis of the Dilemmas in Managing Ukrainian Refugees under the Context of Globalization

— Taking Western Countries and the UN Refugee Agency as Examples

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Abstract: In 2022, Russia's special military operation against Ukraine led to the most severe refugee crisis in Europe since the end of World War II, and it's also one of the largest refugee crises of the 21st century. This article will briefly outline the causes of the Ukrainian refugee crisis and current international solutions. It will then examine the challenges faced by two governing bodies-Western countries and the UN Refugee Agency-in managing the Ukrainian refugee situation. First, the challenges for Western countries include significant economic and social pressure imposed by the influx of refugees. While the arrival of refugees may help alleviate aging populations, it could also encourage human trafficking activities. Moreover, the economic and social stress from the refugee crisis could deepen divisions among EU member states and impact domestic political stability. Additionally, the influx of Ukrainian refugees can disrupt local job markets, potentially leading to lower wages or even unemployment for local residents. Second, the UN Refugee Agency faces dilemmas between time-sensitive governance and ethical principles, as well as issues of homogenization in competition with related organizations.

Keywords: Global Refugee Governance, Ukrainian crisis, western countries, UN Refugee Agency

1.   Introduction

Since the outbreak of the Crimea crisis in 2014, the Donbas region in eastern Ukraine has been in constant conflict due to the inability of the parties to reach a consensus. Starting in March 2021, the conflict in Donbas escalated, and the indirect involvement of NATO, led by the United States, led to a stalemate in Russia-Ukraine relations. On January 26, 2022, the United States and NATO officially rejected Russia's proposal that "NATO would not expand eastward, and Ukraine would not join (NATO)," further worsening the situation between Russia and Ukraine. On February 21, 2022, Russian President Putin gave a televised speech, announcing the recognition of Donetsk and Luhansk as independent states. He then signed an order directing the Russian Ministry of Defense to deploy troops to these regions for "peacekeeping missions," and on February 24 authorized a special military operation in the Donbas region. As of July 19, 2022, this special military operation has caused 9.567 million people to leave Ukraine [1], and another 6.3 million people are internally displaced within

Ukraine. This has directly resulted in the largest refugee crisis in Europe since the end of World War II and is one of the largest refugee crises of the 21st century.

2. Overview of the Ukrainian Refugee Crisis

2.1. Causes of the Ukrainian Refugee Crisis

Western media generally attribute the Ukrainian refugee crisis to Russia's special military operations against Ukraine. While this is an obvious direct cause, there are also complex domestic and international political, economic, and social factors behind it.

Firstly, international factors, also direct causes. On one hand, NATO's "soft" eastward expansion in Ukraine forced Russia to respond. The United States, disregarding Russia's multiple objections, kept increasing military drills and base construction in Ukraine, effectively inviting Ukraine to join NATO "softly," which Russia saw as a substantial threat [2]. On the other hand, the United States instigated Ukraine, triggering a Russia-Ukraine conflict aimed at damaging Russia-EU and Russia-Ukraine relations while also strengthening NATO's significance to the EU and expanding NATO's influence in Europe.

From a domestic perspective, the lack of national identity among Ukrainians has facilitated the large-scale movement of refugees. Ukraine's political, economic, and socio-cultural transition has not been smooth or effective over the last 30 years. This has led to a population decline of about 10 million people since independence, and millions of Ukrainians are working in Russia and the EU annually [3].

Therefore, after the outbreak of the military operations, a large number of people took the opportunity to move to neighboring countries. If evaluated strictly by EU standards for Middle Eastern and North African refugees, very few from Ukraine would qualify as actual refugees; most would fall under the category of migrants, including a significant number of elites and the middle class.

2.2. Western Countries' Aid to Ukrainian Refugees

The European Union has taken an active and unified stance in addressing the Ukrainian refugee crisis. The main actions taken by the EU include political mediation efforts to encourage talks between Russia and Ukraine, aiming to restore peace quickly and thereby reduce the flow of refugees at the source. In response to the sudden large-scale refugee crisis, the EU initiated the Temporary Protection Directive (2001/55EC) on March 4, 2022.[4] According to this, Ukrainian refugees can apply for temporary protected status in any EU member state, with successful applicants receiving temporary residence permits and access to employment, healthcare, education, and other social benefits. This status is valid for one year and can be extended by up to two years depending on the situation [5]. On the humanitarian front, the EU has allocated €500 million from its budget to address the dire humanitarian conditions caused by the war in Ukraine. In addition, EU member states are supplying over €100 million worth of goods through the EU Civil Protection Mechanism.

On a national level, countries like Germany and Poland have been particularly welcoming to Ukrainian refugees, many of whom have professional skills such as nursing, medicine, or coding. However, Poland has been criticized for selectively accepting only white Ukrainian refugees [6]. The United Kingdom, after Brexit, has a new border and immigration system and has faced criticism for its complex procedures for accepting refugees [7].

International organizations have also participated in refugee relief efforts. Organizations like UNICEF, the UN Refugee Agency, the International Rescue Committee, and the Ukrainian-American Joint Relief Committee are actively calling for financial assistance for refugees. Other organizations like the Kyiv Independent have initiated Go Fund Me campaigns to raise funds and are calling for

individual donations of goods. In addition, organizations such as the European Commission's Group of Experts on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings (GRETA), the Human Trafficking Foundation, and World Vision are increasing awareness about refugee safety to prevent them from falling into human trafficking, exploitation, and violence. UNICEF has set up dozens of "Blue Dot" safe spaces in Ukraine's western neighboring countries, aiming to provide support for unaccompanied children and information services, psychosocial support, and hygiene services for transiting refugee families. Each Blue Dot center can serve 3,000 to 5,000 people per day [8].

Family assistance has played a very important role in this Ukrainian refugee crisis. There are mainly three types of family assistance. The first is from the families and friends of the refugees. Ukrainian refugees in European countries are finding shelter by turning to relatives and friends. The second is assistance from expatriates based on shared language and culture. Ukrainians living in the EU are offering help to their compatriot refugees, who also prefer to seek refuge in Ukrainian expatriate communities in Europe due to language factors. The third type is the acceptance of refugees by local families in the receiving countries. Out of humanitarian responsibility and sympathy for female refugees who are traveling alone with children, many warm-hearted families across EU member states are willing to make room and actively apply to take in refugees from Ukraine to live together with them. Some even drive to the Polish-Ukrainian border or nearby transit airports and stations, holding signs with their city's name to welcome refugees.

3. Governance Challenges Faced by Western Countries and the UN Refugee Agency

3.1. Challenges in Governance by Western Countries

3.1.1. Huge Financial and Social Stresses of Refugee Importing Country Caused by Refugees

Unlike previous refugee crises, the EU has not implemented a burden-sharing plan among member states for the influx of refugees this time. Instead, refugees are allowed to move freely within the EU, with mutual free choice. Tracking the flow of Ukrainian refugees shows that the vast majority choose to stay in Ukraine's western neighboring countries, considering language and mobility costs. Compared to the developed countries of Western and Northern Europe, these countries are relatively less developed and already have a range of economic and social development issues. Accepting refugees equivalent to one-tenth of their own population has severely exceeded their capacity. Zsolt Darvas, an analyst from a Brussels think tank, estimated in April 2022 that the EU countries could face losses exceeding 40 billion euros due to receiving Ukrainian refugees [9]. However, this estimate only covers the first two months of the refugee crisis, and the number of Ukrainian cross-border refugees had already exceeded 9 million by early July 2022. The conflict is ongoing, so the economic loss to the EU is incalculable.

Furthermore, after the outbreak of special military operations, a large portion of Ukrainian males who were previously engaged in heavy labor jobs in construction, machinery, and mining industries in EU countries have returned to Ukraine to join the war. This has led to work stoppages in related businesses due to staff shortages. Of the 110,000 Ukrainian truck drivers who worked in Poland before the war, approximately 40,000 have returned to join the military [10]. Since the majority of refugees flooding into EU countries this time are women and children, rather than predominantly men as before, and are also restricted by language, they can only engage in simple service industries and are not able to perform heavy labor. Most women are unable to work as they need to take care of their children.

3.1.2. Refugees' Influx May Mitigate Aging but Exacerbate Human Trafficking

Although existing research has not explicitly pointed out that female refugees bring specific social

crises to host countries other than exacerbating economic and social pressures, the plight of refugees intensifies the objectification of female refugees. The Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) has reported that after the outbreak of special military operations, global online searches for sex workers from Ukraine have surged by 600% [11]. In Poland, a man was arrested for raping a 19-year-old Ukrainian refugee under the guise of offering help. In Germany, two men assaulted a young Ukrainian. An estimated one-fifth of refugee women and girls experience sexual violence en route and in refugee camps and shelters [12]. To ensure the safety of refugees, German and Polish police advise them not to accept cash or overnight assistance from locals. Nevertheless, Ukrainian women are still openly priced and sold on Western websites, and even children are not spared. Human trafficking remains an unavoidable challenge for Ukrainian refugees fleeing conflict [13].

3.1.3. Refugee Crisis May Exacerbate Divisions among EU Member States

Since the Crimea crisis in 2014, Russia-EU relations have been damaged, but high-level dialogue between the two sides has not broken down [14]. After multiple rounds of eastern expansion, the new EU member states and the old member states have different attitudes towards Russia. Poland and the Baltic States are extremely anti-Russian within the EU, while the older EU countries have a more balanced attitude towards Russia. Some countries in Southeast Europe have traditional religious and cultural ties with Russia. Even after the outbreak of special military operations, while the US and the UK advocate taking a hard stance against Russia to create a deterrent, Germany, France, and Italy have repeatedly emphasized the importance of dialogue and negotiations. Bulgaria, Hungary, and Slovakia do not want to get involved in the dispute and are even less willing to send troops. As the situation evolves, the EU has shown rare unity.

The EU's energy dependence on Russia means that their relationship cannot completely break down. Geographical factors also mean that the EU cannot afford to ignore Russia in dealing with European affairs. For EU member states, particularly Germany and France, Russia is not always a threat, while the United States is often problematic. Germany publicly criticized the US for its extraterritorial interference in the Nord Stream 2 pipeline project. French President Macron has deeply realized that NATO not only fails to meet the EU's strategic autonomy interests but also serves as a tool for the United States to restrain the EU. He has explicitly stated that NATO is "brain-dead" and believes that only by forming its own "European army" to break free from NATO can the EU achieve strategic autonomy. The severe internal strain caused by Ukrainian refugees in the EU receiving countries could likely exacerbate internal divisions in these nations.

3.1.4. Ukrainian Refugees Impact Host Countries' Job Markets May Lead to Lower Wages or Unemployment for Locals

After the outbreak of special military operations, EU member states reached a consensus on receiving Ukrainian refugees and provided protection for them through a "Temporary Protection Directive." According to this directive, the EU allows Ukrainian refugees to apply for temporary protection status in any member state. Successful applicants will receive temporary residence permits and gain rights to employment, healthcare, education, and other social benefits. The temporary protection status is valid for one year, with subsequent policies to be jointly determined by EU member states, and can be extended for up to two more years. This means that Ukrainian refugees, once granted temporary protection status, can work in EU countries for up to three years and enjoy related benefits [13]. As of July 20, 2022, out of the 9.567 million refugees who have left Ukraine, 3.7093 million have already received EU temporary protection status. Language barriers in the short term are expected to be overcome through later learning and immersion in a language environment. To address the refugee

crisis, EU member states are rolling out various types of favorable policies to settle refugees. Poland alone has issued as many as a million passports, and this number is still rising. As "non-citizens" of the EU [15], Ukrainians enjoy the same salary and benefit levels as citizens of the host countries, except for voting rights. Obviously, this could disrupt local job markets, create industry squeezes, break the existing employment environment, and intensify salary and skill competition with locals, potentially leading to wage cuts or even unemployment for local high-paying, low-skilled workers.

3.2. Challenges Faced by UNHCR

In the practice of managing Ukrainian refugees, although national governments still play an indispensable role, similar to other global governance issues, they do not fully possess the capability to govern, as mentioned in the previous section. After World War I, due to the establishment of nation-states and the expansion of conflicts between them, the large-scale refugee crises and ensuing humanitarian crises have prompted the birth and continuous evolution of international mechanisms for refugee governance. Among various United Nations agencies, the UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR) is unique. It is represented by an individual-the High Commissione-and is also a bureaucratic organization with a unique culture and value system. The High Commissioner has almost no political authority but possesses considerable moral authority and legitimacy [16].

3.2.1. Conflict Between Governance Practices and Ethical Principles

To maximize the resolution, or even the ultimate solution of the refugee crisis within limited time and budget constraints, the UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR) can only reach a certain level of compromise with the countries hosting the refugees. The local settlement, resettlement, and return of refugees all need to be implemented based on specific circumstances. For instance, when dealing with the Ukrainian crisis, the UNHCR initially faced the dilemma of landmine clearance in Ukraine. The State Emergency Service of Ukraine (SESU) indicated that an area of 300,000 square kilometers, nearly half of Ukraine's territory, needs mine clearance, which would take decades to complete [17]. Secondly, there is a low willingness among refugees to return home. UNHCR statistics show that from February 24 to July 19, 2022, about 3.71 million Ukrainian refugees received temporary protection status in EU countries [18]. In addition to EU countries, tens of countries in Africa, South America, North America, Oceania, and Asia have accepted varying numbers of Ukrainian refugees, ranging from hundreds to hundreds of thousands. Countries like the EU, the US, Canada, and Japan provide high levels of welfare benefits to Ukrainian refugees. They also provide employment opportunities and language learning opportunities for children. All these favorable policies are conducive to refugees integrating into local society while simultaneously reducing their willingness to return to their home country.

These factors make it difficult for refugees to return to Ukraine, thereby prolonging the time for the country of origin to restore peace. However, given the UNHCR's authoritative status and natural advantages in shaping how the world understands refugees and their circumstances, it potentially controls the lives of refugees and determines their fate. Therefore, when the interests of refugees are severely damaged, it undermines the UNHCR's legitimacy rooted in international ethics, affecting its governance effectiveness [16].

3.2.2. Competition among Organizations in Related Fields

As global issues and their participants diversify, topics like international migration and internally displaced persons have come into focus [19]. The continuous spread of new global governance measures has endowed other types of systems with elements that parallel or overlap with refugee protection mechanisms, alleviating resistance to the diffusion of refugee protection norms from the

international community to the national level. However, not all mechanisms that balance or overlap with the refugee systems under the UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR) have a positive impact on refugee governance.

In the field of international migration, formal international multilateral governance systems have not evolved in tandem with refugee protection. Instead, regional and cross-regional informal governance frameworks are increasingly being used, and even mechanisms potentially competing or conflicting with refugee protection systems have emerged [20]. On newer global issues like global population migration and internally displaced persons, some countries have preemptively established regulations in areas where international norms are not yet clear. These new rules pose a certain degree of threat to the UNHCR's expanding governance role in the refugee sector. For example, the European Union's common "Justice and Home Affairs" system aims to establish a common asylum and immigration policy, which runs almost parallel to the International Organization for Migration (IOM) under the UNHCR.

During the Ukrainian refugee crisis, some EU countries have shown evident racial bias, accepting only white Ukrainian refugees while excluding people of color. They even attempt to counteract the perceived "threat" from future refugees of color to their own society by maximizing the acceptance of white Ukrainians. As these mechanisms gradually come into operation, their increasingly prominent roles in global migration governance have replaced some issues that should have been coordinated by the UNHCR, resulting in unfairness in refugee rescue and governance.

4. Conclusions

Russia's special military operation against Ukraine has led to an extremely severe refugee crisis. In terms of its speed and scale, the 2022 Ukrainian refugee crisis has broken the record set by the European refugee crisis of 2015 and is the largest in Europe since the end of World War II. Ukraine, located at the junction of European and Asian civilizations, has unique geopolitical characteristics that make it subject to both the influences of great power competition and domestic factors during crises; this one is no exception. Internationally, the crisis partly stems from NATO's "soft" eastward expansion, which forced Russia to respond. Additionally, the United States has provoked Ukraine, leading to Russo-Ukrainian conflict aimed at undermining Russia's relationships with Ukraine and Europe to maintain American global hegemony. Domestically, a lack of national identity among the Ukrainian populace has contributed to the mass movement of refugees.

Different from previous European refugee crises, Ukrainian refugees are predominantly women and children. As a result, Western countries led by the EU have shown unprecedented unity, taking various proactive measures from the national to societal levels to welcome the refugees. Out of sympathy for Ukrainian women and children displaced by the conflict, local residents have participated in refugee assistance by volunteering and donating supplies. In contrast, some EU politicians have exhibited clear racial bias. While accepting Ukrainian refugees, they have excluded non-Christian people of color based on factors like religion and skin color. Some countries have even tried to offset the perceived "threat" of future refugees of color by maximizing the intake of white Ukrainian refugees.

Such a large-scale influx of refugees will inevitably affect the economic and social development of the host countries. On one hand, Ukrainian refugees could alleviate the Western aging population issue and bring labor benefits. On the other hand, the large number of refugees will inevitably exacerbate the economic and social burdens of EU countries, especially the less economically developed nations bordering western Ukraine. Accepting refugees will drain national resources and intensify internal consumption. If the refugee issue is not resolved timely and adequately, it could trigger economic and social crises in the host countries and even cause a domino effect in the EU, deepening ideological divides and sparking new crises.

Moreover, this refugee crisis poses specific challenges and tests for non-state organizations like the UN Refugee Agency. Balancing governance practices with ethical principles and overcoming competition between organizations in related fields, as well as dealing with the post-war development issues in refugee-origin countries, are paramount concerns for the UN Refugee Agency.

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