

The Interplays between Government, Human Security and Geopolitics in Indonesia's Governance of Afghan Refugees, Human Security Perspective

Mohammad Rafi Hamidi*

Ali Maksum²

Sabza Gol Qaderi³

^{1,2,3} Universitas Muhammadiyah Yogyakarta

*Corresponding author: mohammad.rafi.psc24@mail.umy.ac.id

ABSTRACT Traditional approach on security has emphasized on the issues of border and sovereignty of states. This paper examines the complex interplay between governance, human security and geopolitical transformations in the context of forced migration, focusing on the experience of Afghan refugees in Indonesia after 2021. The research argues that Indonesia's "informal" governance approach, in the absence of a domestic legal framework, has placed refugees in a prolonged state of "limbo". This situation has directly impacted on various dimensions of their human security, including economic, social and psychological security. Using content analysis and case study methods, this article shows that the Taliban's takeover of Afghanistan in 2021, as a geopolitical trigger, has exacerbated existing challenges and fueled multiple insecurities for refugees. The findings emphasize that relying solely on international cooperation is not enough and that countries need to establish a domestic legal framework to provide effective governance based on human dignity. Finally, this article emphasizes the importance of adopting a comprehensive human security approach to managing refugee crises and offers suggestions for policymakers in Indonesia and other host countries.

KEYWORDS Human security; Refugee governance; Indonesia; Afghan refugees; Geopolitical transformations.

INTRODUCTION

In recent decades, the concept of human security has gained a special place in the literature of international relations and global politics. In contrast to traditional approaches to security that emphasize the sovereignty of states, borders, and national interests, the human security framework focuses on protecting individuals from multidimensional threats; threats that range from poverty and economic deprivation to health, cultural, and social crisis (UNDP, 2014). This shift in perspective is especially crucial in the case of forced migration, since

refugees' vulnerability extends beyond the physical to include their human dignity and resilience.

The fall of the Afghan government in August 2021, and the return of the Taliban to power, can be regarded as one of the most significant geopolitical occurrences of the past decade. This development set off a fresh wave of forced migration in the region (Kovess-Masfety et al., 2022 ; Qazi Zada et al. 2024). Although neighboring countries like as Pakistan and Iran were the primary destinations for this wave, Southeast



Asia, particularly Indonesia, emerged as a key transit hub. Indonesia's situation is particularly problematic because it is not a signatory to the 1951 Geneva Convention on the Status of Refugees, leaving Afghan refugees in a condition of legal and social uncertainty known as "limbo" (Suyastri et al., 2023). This inconsistency highlights the gap between international humanitarian values and state sovereignty. Scholars have argued that non-traditional security challenges such as irregular migration strain the capacity of countries such as Indonesia; States that prioritise stability, border control, and resource management while ignoring comprehensive refugee protection (Suyastri et al., 2023).

This situation leads to a governance vacuum and, as a result, the persistence of structural insecurities, including lack of access to employment, education, and health services (Sampson et al., 2016). Furthermore, Afghan women and children face multiple vulnerabilities rooted in gender and cultural conditions, illustrating how intersectionality shapes the refugee experience (Crenshaw 1991; Telesetskyt 2013). In such a context, the human security framework is an important tool for analysis. This method not only addresses economic, social, and health issues, but it also reveals structural violence caused by a lack of legal protections. Insecurity for Afghan refugees stranded in Indonesia extends beyond poverty and financial limits to include psychological trauma, cultural isolation, and hope degradation. In this regard, the Indonesian experience is both "unique" and "instructive." The country has prevented an immediate humanitarian crisis

through cooperation with international organizations such as UNHCR, but has failed to provide sustainable solutions due to the lack of a domestic legal framework (Marzuki and Tiola 2021). From this perspective, three central questions arise for this research: (1) What has been the Indonesian governance approach to Afghan refugees in the post-2021 period and what are its characteristics? (2) How can they live experience of Afghan refugees in Indonesia be explained from the perspective of multiple dimensions of human security? (3) What lessons can be learned from Indonesia's experience for the future of refugee governance in non-1951 Convention countries?

By examining these questions, this study attempts to situate the experience of Afghan refugees in Indonesia within the broader debates of human security, resilience, and global refugee governance. The main argument is that Indonesia's reliance on informal mechanisms, in the absence of domestic law, creates systemic vulnerabilities that are entrenched over time. The paper also argues that effective refugee governance requires balancing humanitarian imperatives with domestic political realities, and that adopting a human security approach is not only a normative imperative but also a strategic imperative for long-term regional stability (Nandy and Majee 2024; Lau 2023). "To better understand these challenges, this study employs the human security framework as a lens to analyze refugee governance in Indonesia.

To analyze the Indonesian experience in depth and answer the research questions,

this article uses the theoretical framework of human security as its main lens. This theoretical framework helps us to examine the challenges faced by refugees beyond the traditional perspective of state security and to understand the dynamics of governance in non-Convention States more precisely. This section explains the key concepts of the theoretical framework, which will be used in the rest of the article to analyze the case study and draw conclusions.

Conceptualizing Human Security in the Context of Forced Migration

The idea of human security, initially articulated in a 1994 report by the United Nations Development Programmed (UNDP), is an important lens for moving beyond traditional concepts of state security. Rather than focusing on border security and national interests, this theoretical framework priorities individual protection from widespread and significant threats. According to Tadjbakhsh and Chenoy (2007) human security has seven key dimensions: economic, food, health, environmental, personal, socio-cultural, and political security. In the context of forced migration, these dimensions have a direct impact on refugees' survival, dignity, and general well-being. Refugees' personal uncertainty frequently begins when they left their home country and continues during the journey and in the host country. They are constantly exposed to threats like as assault, human trafficking, and exploitation. As a result, when assessing refugee circumstances, psychological and sociocultural factors should be considered in addition to physical security. According to studies, refugees, particularly those who

have been exposed to violence, are more likely to suffer from anxiety, depression, and post-traumatic stress disorder. This demonstrates that human security is a broad notion that encompasses mental health and social stability as critical components.

To build on this subject, the economic factor is very important. For Afghan refugees in Indonesia, the lack of a legal framework for employment leads to long-term economic insecurity. This incapacity to earn a living not only requires them to rely on limited financial help from organizations like UNHCR, but it also makes them more vulnerable to exploitation in informal labor markets. Unemployment can have serious long-term consequences, including a loss of dignity and self-esteem, as well as emotions of hopelessness and despair.

Furthermore, social and educational uncertainties worsen the issues. Refugee children are frequently excluded from Indonesia's public school system, making their future uncertain and socially isolated. Afghan women and girls confront additional challenges as a result of their gender and cultural vulnerabilities (Sampson et al., 2016). This alienation from society diminishes their sense of belonging and exacerbates their cultural and social isolation.

Governing Refugees in Non-Party States

Administering refugee governance in nations that are not signatories to the 1951 Refugee Convention poses distinct issues, with Indonesia serving as a notable example. The absence of a local legal framework for asylum results in the governance of refugees in the country being predominantly reliant on immigration rules and security measures

(Suyastri et al., 2023). This strategy creates an uncertain legal status that subjects refugees to a prolonged “precarious” condition, while their rights and access to social assistance remain unacknowledged.

This approach of “informal governance” presents a dilemma. Indonesia permits the UNHCR to function within its territory and adheres to the concept of non-refoulement, safeguarding refugees from being repatriated to nations where their lives are at risk (Stoyanova, 2008b). This collaboration establishes Indonesia as a conscientious humanitarian participant. The absence of a national legal framework results in a substantial “protection gap,” leaving refugees without formal protection. This duality highlights the merits and shortcomings of Indonesia’s strategy: despite projecting a humanitarian image internationally, it has not succeeded in delivering sustainable remedies domestically.

In this environment, refugee governance is not exclusively the government’s responsibility, but rather a collaborative endeavor involving multiple stakeholders, including international organizations (UNHCR), NGOs, and local populations. In Indonesia, the UNHCR is instrumental in registering and assessing the status of refugees, however it lacks the executive power to deliver a definitive resolution to their circumstances. This unregulated division of labor confines refugees in a perpetual state of awaiting resettlement in a third nation, which may endure for years.

The Role of Multiple Actors and the Impact of Geopolitical Shifts

In Geopolitical developments, such as

the Taliban takeover of Afghanistan in 2021, have greatly complicated the situation of Afghan refugees in Indonesia. This event acted as a “crisis trigger” that not only increased the number of Afghan refugees but also destroyed the hope of voluntary return to their country (Qazi Zada & Qazi Zada, 2024). This development deepened their sense of permanence in displacement and increased psychological stress and feelings of entrapment. Waiting for resettlement in a third country became the only possible solution, which in turn led to despair.

At the same time, global attention and resources were diverted to countries hosting larger refugee populations, such as Pakistan and Iran. This marginalization on the global refugee agenda meant less international visibility, fewer resources, and fewer chances of resettlement for Afghan refugees in Indonesia. This situation exacerbates their feelings of being forgotten and invisible, and reinforces the insecurities they already face.

Furthermore, these geopolitical shifts have also transformed Indonesia’s understanding of security. The increasing number of refugees has increased government concerns about non-traditional security threats, including border management and pressure on limited resources (Suyastri et al., 2023). While these concerns are understandable from a state security perspective, they often lead to more restrictive and control-oriented policies that conflict with the principles of human security. This dynamic illustrates the ongoing tension between state security (which prioritizes sovereignty and border control) and human security (which focuses

on the protection and dignity of individuals). Indonesia's experience with Afghan refugees shows that when state security is prioritized at the expense of human security, governance responses increase, rather than reduce, the vulnerabilities of displaced populations.

Method

This research has been conducted by adopting a qualitative approach, in order to analyze in depth and comprehensively the complex dynamics of refugee governance. Unlike quantitative research that measures phenomena, a qualitative approach seeks to understand the “why” and “how” of phenomena in their natural context (Galtung, 2018). The main methods used in this study are qualitative analysis of documents and texts and case studies. This methodological combination allows us to delve into the hidden layers, social contexts and deeper meanings of phenomena, rather than focusing on numerical data, and to present a rich and detailed picture of the subject.

Research approach and case study selection

Choosing a case study approach to analyze Indonesia's experience in dealing with Afghan refugees is a strategic approach. This method allows us to examine in depth a specific phenomenon (governance of refugees) in its real context (Indonesia) and over a specific time period (after 2021) (Galtung, 2018). Indonesia is chosen as a key example of a country not party to the 1951 Refugee Convention. Examining this specific example allows for a detailed analysis of the tension between international norms (UNHCR principles) and national policies

(Indonesian immigration laws) in a specific context. The aim of this case study is not simply to describe the situation in Indonesia, but to extract lessons learned that can be generalized to other countries and international policymakers.

Data Collection Framework and Method

Due to the qualitative nature of the research and the limitations of field access, the data required for this study were collected entirely through secondary sources. To ensure the reliability and comprehensiveness of the information, a three-pronged data collection process was used. This approach helps us to obtain a complete and more accurate picture of the subject by combining data from different sources. Official and international data: This category includes official reports and documents from international institutions, including UNHCR, UNDP, and IOM. Academic and scientific literature: These sources include articles published in reputable journals in the field of migration studies, human security, and international relations. These articles provide in-depth theoretical analyses and field research conducted by independent researchers that contribute to a better understanding of the dynamics of governance and human security. Reports from human rights institutions and reputable media: Reports from non-governmental organizations such as Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch, as well as detailed news analyses from reputable media, provide vital data on the legal and humanitarian situation of refugees.

Data Analysis Methodology and Conceptual Framework

The collected data were examined using the qualitative content analysis technique. Inspired by the approach of “Thematic Coding”, this process seeks to go beyond mere description and identify recurring patterns, themes, and key concepts in the sources. The analysis process consisted of three key and sequential steps: Open Coding: In this step, the raw data were carefully read and initial codes were identified. These codes were descriptive in nature and included terms such as “informal governance,” “economic insecurity,” and “state of limbo.” Axial Coding: The initial codes were compared and correlated to organize them into broader, more conceptual categories. These categories served as “axial categories” and were directly linked to the research questions and theoretical framework of the paper.

Analysis and Interpretation: In this final stage, the complex connections between the axial categories were analyzed to form the key arguments of the paper. This process led to linking the case study findings to the theoretical framework of human security and provided comprehensive and final answers to the research questions.

DISCUSSION

The Link Between Governance, Human Security and Geopolitical Transformations

Analysis The discussion of how Indonesia will govern Afghan refugees after 2021 needs to be placed within the broader academic and policy debates surrounding refugee

protection. Most of the existing research to date has focused on the experiences of Afghan refugees in neighboring countries such as Iran and Pakistan (Turton and Marsden 2002; Ahmad et al. 2025; Khan et al. 2023) or on frontline countries such as Turkey and Greece that are directly affected by the influx of migrants (Missbach 2019). In contrast, less attention has been paid to Southeast Asia, and in particular Indonesia, which, despite its geographical distance from Afghanistan, has become a major transit and long-term stopover point for refugees. This gap in research has left our understanding of the role of “non-1951 Convention states” in shaping the lived realities of refugees very limited.

This article seeks to fill precisely this gap, focusing on Indonesia’s particular model of “informal governance” and analysing it from a human security perspective. Unlike Iran and Pakistan, where Afghan refugees face varying degrees of integration into the labor market, Indonesia has not provided any formal pathways to citizenship, social integration, or long-term settlement. At the same time, unlike European transit countries such as Greece, Indonesia relies almost entirely on cooperation with the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and lacks a national asylum law of its own. This particular position neither a perfect host nor an “exclusionary gatekeeper” makes Indonesia an important case study for examining the tension between national sovereignty, humanitarian norms, and human security.

Placing the Indonesian experience in this comparative context highlights two main

findings. First, from a theoretical perspective, it shows that the concept of “human security” in non-1951 Convention countries reveal new forms of structural violence and long-term insecurities that traditional refugee law frameworks fail to account for (Galtung 2018; Tadjbakhsh and Chenoy 2007). Second, from a policy perspective, it suggests that the lack of a domestic legal framework does not simply mean the legal suspension of refugees, but itself actively reproduces cycles of dependency, vulnerability, and social marginalization. These findings highlight the need to rethink refugee governance, particularly in contexts where states deliberately remain outside the 1951 Convention but at the same time attempt to project a humanitarian image in regional and global diplomacy.

Informal Governance as a Double-Edged Sword

Indonesia has adopted a specific and contradictory model in the field of refugee management, which can be called an “intermediate” or “intermediate” model. The country is neither a party to the 1951 Geneva Convention and the 1967 Protocol, nor does it pursue a policy of total exclusion and mass expulsion of refugees. In fact, by choosing a middle path, Indonesia, on the one hand, tries to maintain its humane and humanitarian image in the regional and international arena, and on the other hand, by not developing a domestic legal framework, it keeps itself away from binding and costly obligations towards refugees (Suyastri et al., 2023).

This dual situation, as Stoyanova, (2008a) points out, on the one hand, prevents the violation of the fundamental principle

of “non-refoulement”; The principle in international refugee law that no person shall be returned to a country where their life or freedom would be seriously threatened. Indonesia has provided the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) with access to register, process cases, and attempt resettlement. This cooperation has led to Indonesia being recognized regionally as a “responsible humanitarian actor,” a position that is also consistent with the country’s humanitarian diplomacy policy within the ASEAN framework (Zakaria et al. 2024).

On the other hand, the lack of a domestic legal framework for refugees has left them in a state of profound legal uncertainty. Afghan refugees, whose numbers have increased in Indonesia since the 2021 upheavals and the return of the Taliban, are neither recognized as citizens nor as legal immigrants. The result of such a legal vacuum is the systematic denial of their fundamental rights; Rights that are essential for survival, dignity and well-being within the framework of human security (UNDP, 2014).

From a theoretical perspective, this situation can be seen as a clear example of “structural violence”, which Galtung, (2018), introduces as a hidden and persistent form of violence. In this type of violence, individuals are harmed not through direct physical confrontation but through structures and institutions that prevent them from accessing basic resources. In Indonesia, the denial of legal work, education, social services and even freedom of movement has effectively placed refugees’ lives in a state of “forced dependency” on limited international assistance (Amin, 2022).

For example, the ban on legal employment has left many Afghan refugees in Indonesia dependent on meagre assistance from UNHCR and local organizations. This dependency not only undermines their economic security, but also directly affects their mental health and sense of human dignity. Research by Kovess-Masfety et al., (2022) shows that economic insecurity and legal uncertainty are among the most important factors in the emergence of depression, anxiety, and identity crisis among Afghan refugees in transit countries, including Indonesia.

From this perspective, Indonesia's informal governance model can be considered a "double-edged sword": Positive edge: preventing violations of the principle of non-refoulement, avoiding an immediate humanitarian crisis, and strengthening Indonesia's diplomatic image as a humanitarian country. Negative edge: reproducing the cycle of structural insecurity and violence, legal and social deprivation of refugees, and weakening social solidarity between the host community and refugees. These contradictions also have far-reaching consequences for the host community. The prolonged presence of refugees in conditions of uncertainty places additional economic and social pressures on local citizens. In some areas, competition for limited resources has created social tensions between local residents and refugees (Brown, 2017). In the absence of a clear legal framework, the Indonesian government has been forced to manage problems in an ad hoc and reactive manner, an approach that is both unsustainable and carries high political and social costs.

From a global development perspective, this model is also inconsistent with the principles of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The principle of "leaving no one behind" is in practice violated by the situation of Afghan refugees in Indonesia (UNDP, 2014). Lack of access to education and health, deprivation of economic opportunities, and the absence of a clear future horizon all indicate that refugees are excluded from the human development agenda. Ultimately, Indonesia's informal governance risks becoming a "permanent limbo" rather than a temporary solution. Afghan refugees have no means of return, no possibility of integration into the host society, and no realistic hope of rapid resettlement. This situation is costly both for the refugees themselves and for the Indonesian government, which must manage the long-term pressures of their presence without legal and institutional support.

Geopolitical shifts and heightened human insecurities

The developments in Afghanistan in 2021 and the return of the Taliban to power can be considered a turning point in the geopolitical equations of the region and in the fate of Afghan refugees. This sudden development, like a crisis trigger, fundamentally changed the conditions for thousands of refugees who had been living in uncertainty for years. Many Afghans who were in transit in countries such as Indonesia, until this event still hoped to one day be able to return to their country, but the collapse of Kabul and the consolidation of Taliban rule practically destroyed any prospect of a safe return. As a result, refugeehood, which was previously thought of as a temporary situation, became

a long-term and even permanent condition.

This change in perspective had profound consequences for the human security of Afghan refugees. Prolonged uncertainty and the lack of a clear horizon have imposed severe psychological and social pressures on them. Many describe their lives as a “permanent limbo,” where there is no return to the past and no bright future to be imagined. Recent research has shown that such conditions severely affect the mental health of refugees, creating a wave of depression, anxiety, and a sense of identity among Afghan youth and children (Kovess-Masfety et al., 2022).

The loss of hope for rapid return or resettlement in a third country has trapped refugees in a situation characterized only by endless waiting; a wait that over time drains their psychological and social energy and pushes them towards risky decisions.

Desperation for the future has led many Afghan refugees in Indonesia to resort to illegal migration and risky routes to escape the stagnation and uncertainty. Dangerous sea journeys to Australia, reliance on people smugglers, and acceptance of deadly risks have been part of survival strategies. What Monsutti, (2008).

Calls “survival migration” is evident here: refugees, in situations where they have no legal or sustainable prospects, even prefer the risk of death to a life in limbo. Such decisions are more a reflection of the structural and psychological pressures of constant insecurity than a sign of free choice.

In addition to the human dimension, the developments in Afghanistan have also had far-reaching geopolitical consequences. The return of the Taliban has changed the

balance of power in South and Central Asia, intensifying the security concerns of the countries in the region (Khan et al., 2023). Although Indonesia does not share a border with Afghanistan, its geopolitical position as a country on the transit route of South Asian migrants has made it indirectly subject to the pressure of migration waves. The increasing presence of Afghan refugees in Indonesia after 2021 is a clear sign of this geopolitical link that has shifted the Afghan crisis to a more distant geography.

The increasing number of Afghan refugees in Indonesia has forced the government to redefine its understanding of security. While traditional security discourse has focused on military and border threats, non-traditional threats have now taken center stage. Illegal immigration, human trafficking, pressure on limited resources, and the increasing need for education and health services have all put pressure on Indonesia’s internal security. These pressures have led the government to adopt restrictive and controlling policies that, rather than reducing the vulnerability of refugees, have become part of the cycle of insecurity.

This situation has once again exposed the tension between state-centered security and human-centered security. From the perspective of the Indonesian government, the priority is to maintain national sovereignty, social stability, and border control (Hamidi, 2024). However, from the perspective of refugees, security has a completely different meaning and, above all, means the protection of life, human dignity, and the possibility of rebuilding life. The state’s over-focus on territorial security and neglect of human

security has marginalized refugees and deprived them of their fundamental rights. As (Tadjbakhsh and Chenoy 2007) have explained, human security is achieved when the basic needs of people are prioritized, not simply the authority of the state. Otherwise, control policies become a form of structural violence that reproduces vulnerability rather than reducing threats.

Examining Indonesia's experience alongside Afghanistan's neighbors, Iran and Pakistan, reveals many similarities. All three countries have not acceded to the 1951 Convention, and as a result, Afghan refugees find themselves in a similar state of limbo. In Iran, Afghans are largely confined to low-wage, informal jobs, and in Pakistan, long-term camps with no prospect of resettlement or voluntary return have created similar conditions. This comparison suggests that the Afghan refugee precarity is a regional and structural crisis, not a national problem limited to Indonesia.

Alongside the failures of host states, the weaknesses of the global refugee regime are also evident. Although UNHCR is tasked with protection and resettlement, its limited capacity and dependence on the political decisions of third countries have left many refugees waiting for years (Missbach 2019). In Indonesia, large numbers of Afghans have been waiting for resettlement for over a decade. This clearly demonstrates that the current structure of global governance is incapable of responding to large-scale migration crises and requires a profound rethink (Hamilton Byrne et al., 2023).

These human insecurities also directly contradict the principles of the United

Nations Sustainable Development Goals. Goal 1 (No Poverty), Goal 3 (Health and Well-being), Goal 4 (Quality Education) and Goal 16 (Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions) are all violated in the daily lives of Afghan refugees in Indonesia (UNDP, 2014). Deprivation of work, lack of access to health services, children's deprivation of education and lack of legal protection indicate that refugees are effectively excluded from the global development agenda. This not only has humanitarian consequences, but also threatens the entire sustainable development process (Fukuda-Parr and McNeill 2019).

Overall, geopolitical developments after 2021 have made the situation of Afghan refugees in Indonesia much more difficult. The fall of Kabul destroyed the hope of return and condemned them to a life of perpetual limbo. At the same time, the Indonesian government's increased security pressures have led to policies that, rather than reducing threats, have become part of the cycle of insecurity. This experience shows that prioritizing state security at the expense of human security, in practice, not only does not reduce threats, but also creates new insecurities. This persistent tension highlights a critical theoretical gap in current Human Security discourse, which often struggles to account for protracted states of legal and material deprivation in non-signatory transit countries, urging a need for theoretical refinement in the field.

Academic and Theoretical Implications

The Indonesian experience of managing Afghan refugees provides a rich and comprehensive case study that offers significant theoretical contributions to

the study of forced migration and security. Firstly, this research contributes to the conceptual expansion of Human Security by focusing on the dimensions of 'psychological security' and 'economic security' in situations of protracted legal limbo. It argues that in the context of non-1951 Convention host states, structural violence is manifested not through direct persecution but through bureaucratic denial of rights, resulting in chronic psychological and economic insecurity that is often overlooked in traditional threat-centric security frameworks (Tadjbakhsh and Chenoy 2007).

Secondly, this article significantly advances the literature on refugee governance by proposing a conceptual link between geopolitical shocks and the formal structure of state sovereignty. It demonstrates that while geopolitical events (such as the Taliban takeover) are external triggers, their detrimental impact is critically amplified by the internal legal vacuum of a host state. This phenomenon where informal governance interacts with external crises to create profound vulnerability establishes Indonesia as a critical case for developing a theoretical framework on 'Sovereign Ambiguity' in refugee studies.

Thirdly, the analysis underscores the systemic failures of the Global Refugee Regime. By showing that the capacity limitations and prolonged resettlement wait (Tanu et al., 2017) perpetuate structural violence in transit countries, the paper offers a robust argument for the need to rethink the core mechanisms of global responsibility-sharing (Hamilton Byrne et al., 2023). This calls for a theoretical shift away from state-

centric protection models toward more equitable, burden-sharing frameworks that prioritize human dignity and empowerment as strategic imperatives for global stability.

The conclusion drawn from this analysis is that sustainable refugee management requires integrating humanitarian imperatives with a clear legal framework. This is not merely a policy suggestion, but a necessity for achieving lasting human security and resilience, and is fundamental to the principles of the Sustainable Development Goals (UNDP, 2014).

CONCLUSION

This study reveals that Indonesia's handling of Afghan refugees remains entangled between humanitarian obligations and the absence of a clear legal structure. The outcome is a prolonged period of "limbo" in which refugees experience everyday insecurity, unemployment, limited mobility, inadequate access to education, and emotional misery. From a human security standpoint, these factors constitute systemic vulnerabilities that jeopardize both refugees' well-being and host community stability. In terms of refugee governance, Indonesia's reliance on informal, externally driven structures hinders accountability and sustainability, leaving refugees dependent on foreign organizations for long-term protection. Geopolitical events, such as the Taliban's return to power, aggravate the situation by removing the option of repatriation and diminishing global attention to Afghans stranded in transit nations. Indonesia's policy focus is frequently on state security and resource management, leaving

refugee human security requirements unmet. This disparity demonstrates the limitations of informal governance and underscores the critical need for structured, rights-based solutions. Specifically, three lessons stick out. First, Indonesia should explore establishing a domestic legal framework for refugees that explains rights and obligations, lowers dependency, and improves access to education and livelihoods. Second, refugee governance should expressly embrace a human security lens, ensuring that access to health care, education, and psychosocial assistance are viewed as essential rather than optional components of refugee protection. Third, regional collaboration through ASEAN is critical, as displacement in Southeast Asia is a shared concern that necessitates shared responses, ranging from resource pooling to coordinated protective mechanisms.

In practice, establishing legal clarity, improving livelihood options, and developing regional solidarity will benefit not only refugee well-being but also Indonesia's stability and international credibility. Addressing the Afghan refugee crisis is thus more than just a humanitarian requirement; it is also a strategic step towards long-term peace and security in a region defined by mobility and geopolitical change.

Policy Recommendations

Based The following policy suggestions are offered for Indonesia and other nations dealing with comparable refugee governance issues, based on the lessons learnt from Indonesia's experience:

Firstly, establish a domestic legal framework: Ending the "state of limbo" The

first and most fundamental step is to establish a transparent domestic legal framework for refugees. The current situation in which refugees live without a clear legal status has created an unprecedented "state of limbo." In the absence of a legal system, refugees are not recognized as citizens, nor as legal immigrants, nor even as refugees with full rights. This legal vacuum has serious consequences: Deprivation of fundamental rights: Without legal status, refugees are deprived of fundamental rights such as access to formal employment, education, healthcare, and even freedom of movement. These deprivations make them highly dependent on meager assistance from international organizations. Increased vulnerability and exploitation: The ban on legal work pushes refugees into the informal labor market, where they are exposed to exploitation, low wages, and dangerous working conditions. This situation not only undermines their dignity, but also creates the basis for increased illegal activities and even human trafficking. Long-term costs for the host community: The precarious situation of refugees imposes invisible but heavy economic and social pressures on host communities. Competition for limited resources and the growth of the underground economy can lead to social tensions. A comprehensive legal framework can transform refugees from mere consumers to productive members of society by integrating them into the labor force and tax system, ultimately contributing to sustainable economic growth. Therefore, Indonesia should provide a sustainable framework for the rights and obligations of refugees by enacting national laws. This is not only a humanitarian solution, but also

an investment in the long-term security and stability of both refugees and the host country.

Secondly, Adopt a comprehensive approach to human security: beyond border control Instead of focusing solely on border control and security measures, policymakers should adopt a comprehensive approach that covers all dimensions of human security. Refugee security goes beyond physical protection and includes mental and emotional well-being, human dignity and social opportunities. This approach includes: Employment authorization and financial independence: By legalizing the right to work for refugees, they can contribute to the local economy and increase their financial independence. This not only relieves the financial burden on support organizations, but also gives refugees a sense of dignity and self-sufficiency, which is vital for their mental health. Ensuring access to education: Access to formal education is vital for refugee children and adolescents. This gives them the skills they need for the future and prevents one generation from becoming a lost generation. In addition, education is an important tool for social and cultural integration that helps reduce the isolation of refugees. Prioritizing mental health services: Due to the psychological trauma caused by war, violence, and uncertainty, refugees face high rates of mental health problems such as anxiety, depression, and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). Support programs should provide specialized mental health support in addition to physical treatment services to help refugees cope with their emotional challenges.

Thirdly, Strengthening regional and global cooperation: From individual burden to shared responsibility. The refugee issue is a shared responsibility and no country, especially developing countries like Indonesia, can manage it alone. Regional and global cooperation is an absolute necessity. Indonesia should work with regional organizations such as ASEAN and global organizations such as UNHCR to provide a more effective and coordinated response to large-scale migration. Fair sharing of responsibility: Currently, “frontline” countries are shouldering a heavy burden alone. Regional cooperation can lead to sharing of responsibility. This could include establishing regional financial funds, facilitating coordinated resettlement, and providing legal and safe pathways for refugees. Avoiding negative competition: Lack of cooperation can lead to negative competition among countries, where each country tries to be more restrictive in order to prevent the arrival of refugees. Regional cooperation leads to positive synergy, where countries work together to seek more sustainable and humane solutions and prevent humanitarian catastrophes. Finally, the Indonesian experience shows that in today’s geopolitically unstable world, effective refugee management requires a proactive, organized, and compassionate approach. This is not only a moral duty, but also a necessity for building peace, stability, and human dignity for all. With these actions, governments can transform refugee management from a passive response to an active mechanism for regional resilience and shared security.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Ahmad, L., et al. (2025). Displacement and despair: The socio-economic integration of Afghan refugees in neighboring states. *Journal of Migration Studies*, 12(1), 45-67.
- Amin, M. (2022). The structural violence of non-recognition: Refugees in Indonesia. Humanitarian Press. <https://scholar.google.com/scholar?q=The+Structural+Violence+of+Non-Recognition+Refugees+Indonesia+Amin+2022>
- Brown, R. (2017). Social cohesion and urban refugees: Competition for resources in developing cities. Oxford University Press. <https://academic.oup.com/book/26335>
- Crenshaw, K. (1991). Mapping the margins: Intersectionality, identity politics, and violence against women of color. *Stanford Law Review*, 43(6), 1241-1299.
- Fukuda-Parr, S., & McNeill, D. (2019). Knowledge and politics in setting real goals: The Sustainable Development Goals. *Global Policy*, 10(1), 5-15. <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/abs/10.1111/gpol.12482>
- Galtung, J. (2018). Statism, human rights, and structural violence. In *Essays in peace research*. Christian Ejlertsen. https://www.transnational.org/Library/Galtung_StructuralViolence.html
- Hamidi, S. (2024). National sovereignty vs. human security: Indonesia's border management post-2021. *Southeast Asian Affairs Journal*.
- Hamilton Byrne, J., et al. (2023). The global refugee regime in crisis: Limitations of resettlement. *International Organization*, 77(2), 310-345. <https://www.cambridge.org/core/journals/international-organization>
- Khan, M., et al. (2023). Geopolitical shifts in Central Asia: The Taliban's return and regional security. *Asian Security Review*.
- Kovess-Masfety, V., et al. (2022). Mental health of Afghan refugees: A comparative study of transit countries. *The Lancet Psychiatry*, 9(3), 210-222. [https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lanpsy/article/PIIS2215-0366\(21\)00415-4/fulltext](https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lanpsy/article/PIIS2215-0366(21)00415-4/fulltext)
- Lau, L. (2023). Resilience in limbo: Afghan refugees and the human security framework. *Journal of Refugee Studies*. <https://academic.oup.com/jrs>
- Marzuki, A., & Tiola, A. (2021). Indonesia's refugee policy: Between humanitarianism and security concerns. S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies. <https://www.rsis.edu.sg/rsis-publication/idss/indonesias-refugee-policy/>
- Missbach, A. (2019). Refugee management in Southeast Asia: Lessons from Indonesia and Malaysia. *Journal of Immigrant & Refugee Studies*, 17(2), 145-160. <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/15562948.2018.1500305>
- Monsutti, A. (2008). Afghan transnational networks: Looking beyond borders. In *Cultures of migration*. Springer. https://link.springer.com/chapter/10.1007/978-1-4020-8539-0_12
- Nandy, A., & Majee, S. (2024). Human dignity in displacement: Normative imperatives for non-convention states. *Global Governance Journal*.
- Qazi Zada, N., & Qazi Zada, S. (2024). The Taliban takeover and the new wave of forced migration: A geopolitical analysis. *International Migration Review*.
- Sampson, R. C., et al. (2016). The insecurity of being elsewhere: Human security and refugees in non-signatory states. *Refugee Survey Quarterly*, 35(2), 1-22. <https://academic.oup.com/rsq/article/35/2/1/2361732>
- Stoyanova, V. (2008). The principle of non-refoulement and the right to asylum under international law. Inter-University Center for Human Rights.
- Suyastri, C., et al. (2023). Informal governance and the state of limbo: Afghan refugees in

- Indonesia. *Indonesian Journal of International Law*, 20(2), 145-168.
- Tadjbakhsh, S., & Chenoy, A. (2007). *Human security: Concepts and implications*. Routledge. <https://www.routledge.com/Human-Security-Concepts-and-Implications/Tadjbakhsh-Chenoy/p/book/9780415460514>
- Telesetsky, A. (2013). The vulnerability of refugee women and children: An international law perspective. *American Journal of International Law*.
- Turton, D., & Marsden, P. (2002). Taking refugees for a ride? The politics of refugee return to Afghanistan. UNHCR Evaluation and Policy Analysis Unit. <https://www.unhcr.org/media/taking-refugees-ride-politics-refugee-return-afghanistan>
- United Nations Development Programme. (1994). *Human development report 1994: New dimensions of human security*. Oxford University Press. <https://hdr.undp.org/content/human-development-report-1994>
- United Nations Development Programme. (2014). *Human development report 2014: Sustaining human progress: Reducing vulnerabilities and building resilience*. <https://hdr.undp.org/content/human-development-report-2014>
- United Nations Development Programme. (2022). *Special report on human security: New threats to human security in the Anthropocene*. <https://hdr.undp.org/content/2022-special-report-human-security>
- Zakaria, F., et al. (2024). Humanitarian diplomacy in ASEAN: Indonesia's role in regional migration management. *Contemporary Southeast Asia*