

Araştırma Makalesi / Research Article

# Reflections on the Interconnection Between Humanitarianism and National Identity in Asylum-Seeker Policies: A Comparative Analysis of Japan and Türkiye\*

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## Abstract

This study investigates the impact of humanitarianism and its practical application through humanitarian diplomacy on asylum-seeker policies in Japan and Türkiye. It particularly focuses on how these policies are interconnected with the national identities of the countries. Japan's practices are characterized by a restrictive stance, rooted in its historical emphasis on a homogeneous society and post-WWII alignment with the United States. This alignment has fostered a conservative immigration policy that reflects broader Western values of controlled immigration and stringent vetting, prioritizing cultural cohesion over inclusivity. In contrast, Türkiye's policies rely more on humanitarianism incorporating Turkic heritage and Islamic values, leading to a more inclusive stance towards asylum seekers, notably Syrian refugees, which is also a strategic response to regional instability and security concerns. The comparative analysis reveals how the

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interlink between humanitarianism and the national identity of each country influences their asylum policies by unfolding the reasons behind Japan's restrictive approach contrasts with Türkiye's more accommodating stance. Understanding these dynamics offers insights into how nations navigate asylum and immigration issues under the influence of humanitarianism and national identity.

**Keywords**

Japan, Türkiye, humanitarianism, national identity, asylum-seeker, immigration.

# İnsaniyetperverlik ve Millî Kimlik Arasındaki Bağlantının Sığınmacı Politikalarına Yansımaları: Japonya ve Türkiye Üzerine Karşılaştırmalı Bir Analiz\*

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## Öz

Bu çalışma, insaniyetperverliğin ve bunun insani diplomasi yoluyla pratik uygulamasının Japonya ve Türkiye'deki sığınmacı politikaları üzerindeki etkisini incelemektedir. Özellikle bu politikaların her iki ülkenin ulusal kimlikleriyle nasıl bağlantılı olduğuna odaklanmaktadır. Japonya'nın uygulamaları, homojen bir topluma yaptığı tarihsel vurgu ve İkinci Dünya Savaşı sonrası ABD ile olan uyumundan kaynaklanan kısıtlayıcı bir duruşla karakterize edilmektedir. Bu uyum, kontrollü göç ve sıkı inceleme gibi daha geniş Batı değerlerini yansıtan ve kapsayıcılıktan ziyade kültürel uyuma öncelik veren muhafazakar bir göç politikasını teşvik etmiştir. Buna karşılık, Türkiye'nin politikaları daha çok Türk mirasını ve İslami değerleri içeren insancılığa dayanmakta ve başta Suriyeli mülteciler olmak üzere sığınmacılara yönelik daha kapsayıcı bir duruşa yol açmaktadır ki bu aynı zamanda bölgesel istikrarsızlık ve güvenlik endişelerine stratejik bir yanıtıdır. Karşılaştırmalı analiz, Japonya'nın kısıtlayıcı yaklaşımının Türkiye'nin daha uzlaşmacı duruşuyla tezat oluşturmasının ardındaki nedenleri ortaya koyarak, insaniyetperverlik ve her ülkenin ulusal kimliği

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arasındaki bağlantının sığınma politikalarını nasıl etkilediğini gözler önüne seriyor. Bu dinamikleri anlamak, ulusların insaniyetperverlik ve ulusal kimliğin etkisi altında sığınma ve göç konularını nasıl ele aldıklarına dair fikirler sunmaktadır.

### **Anahtar Kelimeler**

Japonya, Türkiye, insaniyetperverlik, millî kimlik, sığınmacı, göç.

## Introduction

The treatment of asylum seekers and refugees varies significantly depending on legal status, national identity, and the political priorities of host countries. Refugees, recognized under the 1951 Geneva Convention, and asylum seekers, individuals seeking international protection, often escape similar threats like wars and political violence (Phillips 2; Whittaker 1-2). Host governments, as Jacobsen (658) outlines, can respond by doing nothing, easing access, or tightening regulations. The broader international system's lack of a unified body to address refugee issues leaves individual countries grappling with the complexities of managing asylum seekers (Avdan 446; Abe 6). Effective asylum policies, therefore, necessitate nuanced, collaborative approaches that account for both humanitarian needs and geopolitical realities.

This article examines the impact of the interplay between humanitarianism and national identity on asylum-seeker policies, using Japan and Türkiye as case studies from distinct geographical and cultural contexts. Japan, an archipelago in the easternmost part of Asia, contrasts with the Turkish peninsula (Anatolia), situated in the westernmost part of the Asian continent. Despite both countries establishing their nation-states from the legacies of their respective empires, Japan has remained more isolated within its archipelago. Although geographically distant, the modernization processes of Japan and Türkiye have been subjects of comparative studies, which contributed to their national identity-building processes. Ward and Rustow (1964) compared these two countries in terms of traditional society, foreign contributions, economic and political modernization, education, mass media, bureaucracy, military, and leadership. The Meiji Restoration in Japan and Atatürk's reforms, which began in the late Ottoman period, are often viewed as similar in the context of political modernization or Westernization (Ward and Rustow 117–146). In both countries, these modernization policies were applied similarly to building up a nation-state-based national identity inspired by Western modernization. Throughout the Cold War, Japan intensified its relations with the United States (US) strategically, politically, economically, militarily, ideologically, and culturally. Türkiye, on the other hand, became a member of NATO and maintained close ties with the US, albeit with considerable fluctuations. Indeed, several

rifts in this relationship put Ankara at odds with Washington. However, it did not change the Western orientation of the countries' elites.

Another notable yet underexplored similarity between these two countries is the influence of humanitarianism (Ulusoy; Şeyşane and Tanrıverdi; Haşimi; Liu-Farrer et al.; Honna; Sato and Asano), particularly the practice of humanitarian diplomacy on their foreign policy initiatives. Aiming to fill this gap in the literature, this article highlights how the humanitarianist outlook impacts asylum-seeker policies in Japan and Türkiye. On the other hand, the article argues that the influence of humanitarianism on asylum-seeker policies is not straightforward; rather, it is intricately linked with the national identities.

The cases of Türkiye and Japan illustrate this intricate link effectively. Japan's isolationist tendencies, rooted in its unique national identity, contrasted with Türkiye's evolving stance towards Turkic heritage and Islamic values. This divergence underscores how political and ideological shifts shape each country's approach to asylum-seeking, revealing a complex interplay between humanitarianism and immigration policy.

This study employs a qualitative comparative analysis to explore and analyze the asylum-seeker policies of two distinct countries: Türkiye and Japan. By examining their socio-political contexts, legal frameworks, and implementation processes, this study aims to provide a nuanced understanding of how national asylum policies under the influence of humanitarianism and national Identity differ and converge in response to global migration challenges.

The qualitative comparative analysis is well-suited for analyzing complex, context-dependent phenomena like asylum-seeker policies of two distinct countries. This approach allows for an in-depth exploration of each country's unique legal and socio-political environment while drawing comparisons that reveal broader patterns and insights.

### **The Impact of the Humanitarianism and National Identity Link: "Compassionate and Caring" Immigration**

Humanitarianism, in political analysis and intervention, blends politics with efforts to promote human welfare (Smith 50, 56; Kireççi, "İnsaniyetperverlik" 19). The roots of humanitarian diplomacy trace back

to the nineteenth century, with aid being offered on local, national, and international levels (Regnier 1215). Initially, humanitarian diplomacy focused on protecting vulnerable groups such as children and women from crises like wars and disasters (Kireççi, “Humanitarian Diplomacy” 2). States often employ charity organizations like the Red Cross and Red Crescent and utilize armed forces to address humanitarian crises.

Most countries allocate budgets for humanitarian issues according to their capacity. However, Mahdavi (7) critiques the hegemonic neoliberal approach to the Responsibility to Protect (R2P), arguing that it narrows global ethical norms by overlooking the contributions of non-Western countries. Japan and Türkiye, among other non-Western nations, have historically provided humanitarian assistance to those in need, including asylum seekers.

Defining identity begins with a fundamental question: Who am I? (Erikson 108). Culture is central to this definition, as it sets the boundaries within which individuals operate (Wahrman 116). Elements such as religion, language, beliefs, race, ethnicity, and social roles shape personal identities while contributing to collective identities. National identity, a form of collective identity, extends beyond shared goals to encompass a nation’s core characteristics. Kowert (1–2) links national security priorities and interests directly to national identity, which is constructed through elements like religion, history, and cultural traits. This construction answers the questions: Who are we? And, who are we not?

Today, identities exist at various levels—individual, group, societal, and national (Gillis 4). Billig (83) notes that national identity involves distinguishing a nation’s unique traits in relation to others. National identity, therefore, can influence policies and social acceptance toward asylum seekers (Austin and Fozdar 15; Starkweather 2) and affect economic and political integration (Carey 406–407). In some countries, asylum seekers may be viewed as threats to national identity.

National identity is shaped through governmental efforts, including campaigns and legislation (Ortmann 27). The relationship between national identity and political priorities is influenced by global and domestic dynamics (Veen and Zelle 22). Historical events, like post-WWII Japan, can lead to

shifts in national identity aligned with external values. Understanding this relationship is crucial for grasping the broader context of refugee policies.

The formation of national identity operates through a dialectical process. Like in humanitarianism, this process of identity formation relies on constructing and reinforcing boundaries between “us” group and “them” group (Dauvergne 72). Similarly, although humanitarianism in the context of immigration encompasses the most generous aspects of ‘liberal immigration laws’, it simultaneously reinforces the distinction between “us” and “them” (Dauvergne 71). Dauvergne argues that the significance of the individual’s identity, as a recipient of humanitarian aid, is largely reflective of the nation’s own identity. Through the lens of liberal political philosophy, she suggests that humanitarianism serves as a mechanism for nations to present themselves as ‘compassionate and caring’ (Dauvergne 75). In this framework, humanitarian immigration law essentially determines what “we” can offer to “them” (Dauvergne 71). By reinforcing this distinction, humanitarianism contributes to defining national identity, which is shaped by ‘the “othering” process’ (Dauvergne 71). As such, national identity and humanitarianism in immigration policies are interrelated and mutually reinforcing. Catherine Dauvergne, in her analysis of Australia and Canada, asserts that ‘humanitarianism is about identity’ (Dauvergne 164). This connection between humanitarianism and national identity is particularly evident in asylum-seeker and refugee policies since within the domain of refugee selection, policies and practices categorize refugees as ‘the other,’ reflecting back on the national self.

### **Humanitarianism and National Identity in Asylum Policies: Japan vs. Türkiye**

#### **The Japanese Case**

Japan remained isolated for over two centuries during the Edo era’s Sakoku period (1603-1868). In the early 20th century, Japan expanded its empire into the Asia-Pacific, transporting labor and resources from occupied regions while treating these newcomers as outsiders (Uchida 394; Shin and Robinson 13). Despite these interactions, Japan resisted integrating these groups into its society.



Post-WWII, Japan's foreign policy has been shaped by key security concerns: establishing a new international security order in Asia-Pacific; prioritizing economic cooperation with Southeast Asian countries while ensuring that Japan would not become an aggressive military power again under the Fukuda Doctrine; and resolving pre-Cold War territorial disputes with Russia. Humanitarian efforts have been central to Japan's foreign policy, as exemplified by its focus on official development assistance (ODA) and humanitarian aid instead of military intervention (Nishikawa 133). However, Japan has faced criticism for using ODA to benefit its investments, though it has recently shifted to a human security approach (Gomez 324).

Japan is often seen as a homogeneous nation, which has fueled resistance to accepting new identities (Kaneko 35). This stance is challenged by an aging population and a labor shortage. While attempts to boost the population through increased marriage rates have been unsuccessful (Fukuda 72; Boling 307), Japan has explored advanced robotics as a solution to the labor shortage, though this cannot fully address the issue (Robertson, "Robo Sapiens" 369). As a last resort, Japan has cautiously opened its doors to immigration, recognizing its benefits but facing significant societal resistance (Akashi, "New Aspects" 192).

Japan has been criticized for its harsh treatment of refugees, particularly in detention centers where asylum-seekers, like Afghans, have faced severe mental health issues (Ichikawa et al. 345). The country's strict immigration policies, shaped by its geographical isolation and complex bureaucracy, make obtaining refugee status difficult (Tarumoto 14-15). Although Japan has supported refugees through donations to UNHCR (UNHCR Iran), it remains reluctant to accept them domestically, partly due to fears of straining relations with countries like China (Wolman 409).

Despite Japan's stringent refugee regime, it has historically granted asylum to certain groups, such as Russians fleeing the Bolsheviks and Jews escaping the Nazis (Yamagata 2-3; Tokayer and Swartz). These decisions were often driven by strategic considerations, such as countering Bolshevik influence or leveraging Jewish expertise to strengthen ties with the U.S. (Best 313-314).

In response to the Ukrainian crisis, Japan's approach has notably shifted, accepting more refugees and signaling a potential change in its traditionally

unwelcoming stance (CNA). However, Japan still struggles with sustainable refugee policies, reflecting its complex history and cautious approach to immigration.

Japan's refugee challenges have evolved over time, with notable milestones identified by Akashi ("Challenging" 219). First, the Indochinese refugee crisis of the late 1970s presented an unexpected challenge for Japan. Second, in the 1980s, the subsequent Indochinese flow was classified by Japanese authorities as economic migration rather than genuine refugee status. Third, the May 2002 incident at the Japanese Consulate General in Shenyang, where North Korean refugees were forcibly extracted by Chinese police, highlighted issues of sovereignty and international pressure (Akashi, "Challenging" 235). The first wave of Indochinese refugees, in particular, was not an intentional choice by Japan but a result of international pressure (Koizumi 184).

These milestones reflect Japan's evolving approach to asylum seekers. The country has recognized that asylum seekers can arrive unexpectedly and that economic migrants might disguise themselves as refugees to improve their living conditions (Saxton 114). As Japan continues to refine its policies, both national identity and political priorities will play crucial roles in shaping its approach to asylum seekers and immigrants.

Japan demonstrates a paradox in its approach to refugees: while it generously supports refugee programs financially around the world, it maintains a stringent policy towards accepting refugees within its own borders (Kalicki 369). This paradox highlights Japan's commitment to good international citizenship and humanitarian assistance (Hook et al. 391–392), but also reflects a reluctance to admit refugees whose presence might challenge Japan's homogeneous national identity.

Japan faces two intertwined crises regarding refugee acceptance. Traditionally, Japan has emphasized a blood-linked, culturally homogeneous society that prioritizes preserving Japanese identity (Robertson, "Hemato-Nationalism" 93). Concurrently, modern challenges such as a stable economy, an aging population, and the pressures of globalization have compelled Japan to reconsider its policies, albeit reluctantly (Chan 128–130; Sasaki 69).

An unusual instance of Japan’s evolving approach occurred with the acceptance of 114 refugees from Afghanistan in 2023, a significant number given Japan’s historically stringent policies (Mainichi Shimbun). These Afghan refugees, many of whom had established ties with the US and Japan before the Taliban’s return to power, align with Japan’s modern identity, which has been increasingly influenced by Western values. This development follows a notable increase in refugee admissions: Japan granted 74 refugee statuses in 2021, which nearly tripled to 202 in 2022 (Japan Times, “Japan Granted”). The simultaneous acceptance of 114 Afghan refugees in 2023 represents a substantial shift in Japan’s refugee policy.

**Table 1**  
Japan’s Number of Refugees and Asylum-seekers (2017-2023) (UNHCR, *Refugee Data*)

Year	Country of Asylum	Refugees under UNHCR’s mandate	Asylum-seekers	Stateless
2017	Japan	2.189	31.204	585
2018	Japan	1.893	29.040	709
2019	Japan	1.463	29.123	687
2020	Japan	1.132	23.765	707
2021	Japan	1.508	16.709	531
2022	Japan	17.406	12.473	508
2023	Japan	22.235	23.916	503

According to UNHCR data, the number of refugees under its mandate increased more than tenfold in 2023, reaching 22,235 due to the Ukrainian-Russian War, escalating violence in the Middle East, and the rising number of evacuees from Taliban-controlled Afghanistan (UNHCR).

Japan, known for its stringent refugee recognition policies, has chosen to classify Ukrainian asylum-seekers as “evacuees” rather than integrating them into regular refugee procedures. As the conflict in Ukraine extends into its third year, Japan has announced a new application process that grants Ukrainian refugees the same rights as those recognized under standard refugee status (Visit Ukraine). This move parallels past U.S. pressure on

Japan to accept 10,000 Indochinese refugees in the 1970s. Similarly, during the G7 meeting in Hiroshima in May 2023, Japan faced international pressure to accept more Ukrainian refugees or evacuees (Reuters). U.S. President Joe Biden's criticism of Japan as "xenophobic" due to its reluctance to accept asylum-seekers has further intensified this pressure (DW).

The connection between humanitarianism and national identity significantly influences Japan's asylum-seeker policies, revealing a complex relationship between national identity and the treatment of outsiders. Historically, Japan has emphasized a strict divide between "us" (the Japanese) and "them" (foreigners) to maintain cultural homogeneity. This is seen in its resistance to integrating occupied peoples during imperial expansions and strict post-WWII immigration policies. Humanitarian efforts in Japanese foreign policy are framed within this context, reflecting national identity while preserving the nation's insularity.

Japan's approach to asylum-seekers highlights this paradox. Despite substantial global humanitarian contributions, Japan's domestic policies remain stringent, reflecting a reluctance to admit those who might disrupt cultural unity. Geographic isolation and rigorous immigration procedures further limit entry. Asylum-seekers are often viewed as economic migrants rather than genuine refugees, resulting in low acceptance rates.

However, with an aging population and labor shortages, Japan has shown some policy shifts. The recent acceptance of a few Ukrainian and Afghan refugees, driven by international pressure and changing geopolitical realities, suggests a cautious opening. Yet, these exceptions remain controlled within a framework that maintains the distinction between "us" and "them." Japan's immigration policies reflect a balance between compassion and maintaining cultural homogeneity, illustrating the intertwined nature of national identity and immigration policy amidst globalization and demographic changes.

### The Turkish Case

Humanitarianism has long been a cornerstone of Turkish domestic and international policy. This ethos has significantly shaped Türkiye's approach to humanitarian diplomacy, reflecting a blend of realist and idealist perspectives (Ulusoy 738). The Turkish Red Crescent (Hilal-i Ahmer Cemiyeti), founded in 1868, initially assisted people from the Caucasus fleeing Russian violence

and later played a key role in supporting those displaced from the Balkans and other regions (Gilley 39). While Gilley views Türkiye as a Middle Power, Şeyşane and Tanrıverdi (173) argue that Türkiye has been a major player in humanitarian diplomacy, both historically and in the present day. The Turkish Red Crescent has provided aid across the globe—from South America to East Asia and from North America to Africa—even amid the adversities of WWI and the Turkish War of Independence (Acchan 59).

Historically, under the Ottomans, numerous asylum-seekers were accepted into the country throughout different centuries. Ottoman archival documents show major instances of people taking shelter in large numbers from different regions who were fleeing from religious or ethnic oppression, or for political reasons (*Cihan-Penah*). Cases include but not limited to Ottomans' giving refuge to Jews in 1492 and Muslims in 1570 and in 1613 who fled from the Spanish Inquisition; Polish people in 1772 and in 1856; the Crimeans in 1856, and the Caucasians in 1878, who were forced to flee from their homes by Russia, Tunisian Bedouins in 1881 who escaped from the French oppression. Turkish population of Bulgaria for instance forced to flee the country and took refuge in Türkiye in 1923, 1950 and 1989 in large numbers (Duman 474; Çolak 118; Kemaloğlu), as well as Hungarians who fled from the revolution in 1956.

Kurds, Soranis, Goranis, and Zazas sought refuge during the First Gulf War in 1991, with almost 400 thousand displaced people (Özdemir 133), which was another example highlighting Türkiye's unique stance on humanitarian issues. The largest number of asylum seekers during the Republican era was displaced Syrians because of the civil war in the country which started in 2011 and did not end for several years. During the Syrian Civil War, Assyrians, Yazidis, Christians, and Muslims (Ihlamur-Öner; Ali 85; Erdener) have been sheltered by Türkiye, regardless of their ethnicity. This historical record illustrates an enduring legacy of humanitarian assistance, spanning from the Ottoman Empire to modern times.

However, this legacy experienced a notable shift under the Turkish Republic (Bozdoğan and Kasaba 3). These changes were influenced by the new Republic's effort to redefine its national identity, distancing itself from its Ottoman heritage (Bozdoğan and Kasaba 17). Between 1923 and 1927, the Turkish Republic accepted and resettled over 450,000 Turks who had been

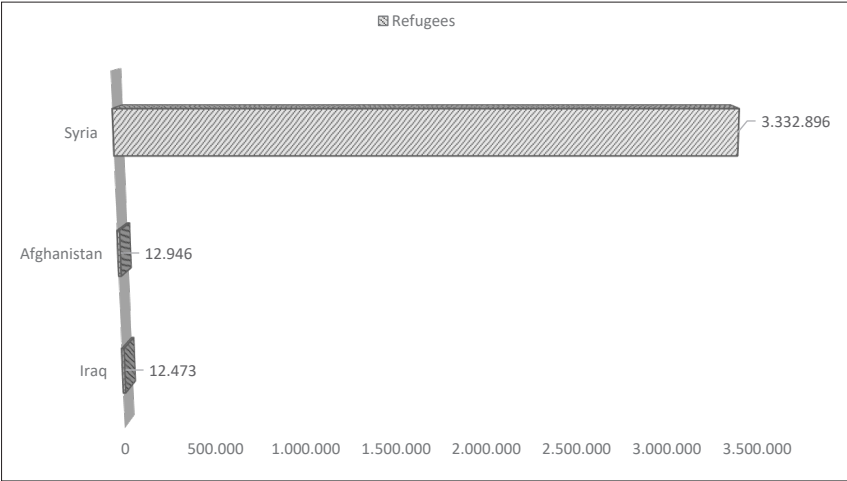
left behind in Greek territory after WWI, implementing national identity policies. Reflecting this shift from the Ottoman past and emphasizing the country's Western orientation, Türkiye signed the 1951 Geneva Refugee Convention with geographical limitations (Soykan 3), recognizing only European refugees while offering conditional refugee status to individuals from other regions who could remain staying in Türkiye, only until resettlement to a third country. Therefore, Syrian asylum-seekers, who poured into Türkiye since the civil war erupted, could not be recognized as refugees, but rather they were given the official status of people under "temporary protection" with a specific legislation in 2014.

After the hopes of displaced Syrians to return to their country disappeared, Türkiye, under the Justice and Development Party, partially reversed this shift by returning to the Ottoman legacy in various aspects of sociopolitical life and foreign policy. This heritage has influenced Türkiye's national identity and strengthened its relations with the Middle East and the Islamic world. During the Arab Spring and the Syrian Civil War, Türkiye, driven by humanitarian concerns, had to shelter about 3.5 million displaced Syrians, addressing their immediate humanitarian needs. This approach enhanced Türkiye's reputation in the Muslim world (Salem 1-2) and the Western world.

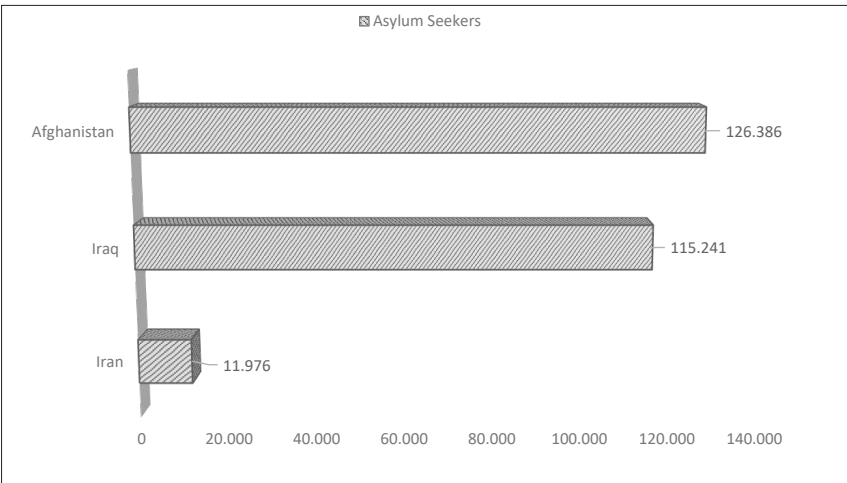
Türkiye has faced significant challenges due to the massive influx of asylum-seekers from Syria since 2011. The Arab Spring and subsequent civil war have undermined central authority and caused the regime to implement repressive policies and atrocities against its citizens. Meanwhile, DAESH and PKK/YPG rebels, who have been given room to maneuver, have destabilized the Turkish-Syrian border. Almost half of the asylum-seekers who were fleeing from the brutal civil war were women, and the majority of the remaining half were children. Therefore, Türkiye responded promptly to the humanitarian crisis by opening its borders to those fleeing the brutal conflict for their lives.

The sudden and large-scale arrival of Syrian and other asylum-seekers initially challenged Turkish migration and refugee management policies. Figure 1 illustrates the top three countries of origin for refugees (including people under temporary protection): Syrians, about 3.5 million; Afghans, about 13 thousand; Iraqis, about 12.5 thousand people. On the other hand,

Figure 2 illustrates the top three countries of origin for asylum-seekers: Afghans, about 126 thousand; Iraqis, about 115 thousand; and Iranians, about 12 thousand people.

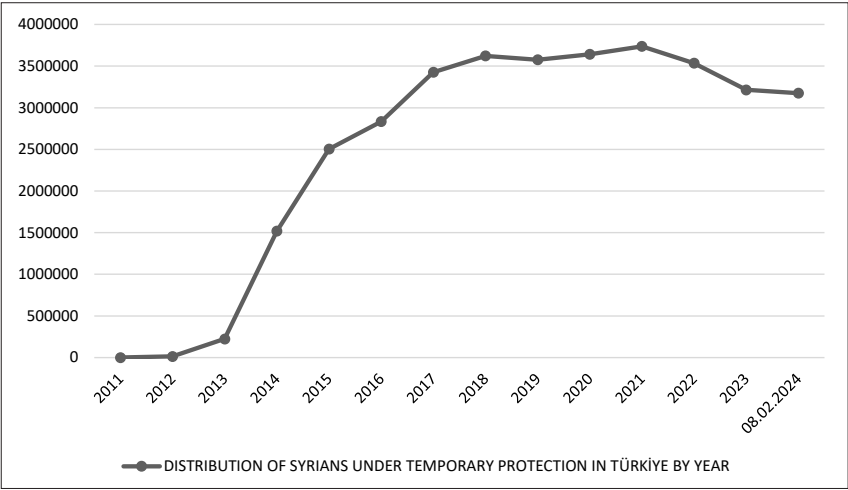


**Figure 1.** Top 3 country of origin for refugees (including temporary protection) in Türkiye (UNHCR, *Factsheet*)



**Figure 2.** Top 3 country of origins for asylum seekers in Türkiye (UNHCR, *Factsheet*)

Inspired by its historical legacy, Türkiye views aiding others as still important in 21st-century regional politics. In parallel, Turkish migration policies have increasingly prioritized human security and regional stability (Karakoc and Dogruel 364). Despite opposition from various groups, such as the Victory Party, against Türkiye’s refugee policies (Ashawi and Kucukgocmen), the government has maintained a sensitive approach to the humanitarian crisis occurring across its borders (Demir and Yılmaz 7, 17). Since the Syrian Civil War started in 2011, Türkiye had to shelter about 3.5 million Syrians, as Figure 3 illustrates by year. Between 2011–2013 in the Syrian Civil War, less than 300 thousand displaced Syrians took refuge in Türkiye, whereas the numbers increased almost ten times in the following five years. Hence, no country in the world can easily handle that massive flow of people. This balance underscores how humanitarianism and national identity are interrelated and mutually reinforcing, as per Dauvergne’s framework.



**Figure 3.** Distribution of Syrians under temporary protection in Türkiye by year (Goc Idaresi)

**Comparative Analysis of Historical Trajectories and Contemporary Implications**

Japan’s approach to humanitarianism has historically been cautious. During the Edo era, Japan was isolated, and in the early 20th century, it expanded its empire while maintaining a clear distinction between occupiers and local



populations (Uchida 394; Shin and Robinson 13). This historical context highlights Japan's consistent tendency to view newcomers as outsiders, reinforcing boundaries between "us" and "them." Türkiye's approach to humanitarianism has deep historical roots, influenced by Ottoman traditions of providing refuge (Gilley 39). The country has historically hosted diverse groups fleeing persecution, demonstrating a long-standing commitment to humanitarian aid (Bozdoğan and Kasaba 3). This tradition reflects an integrated approach to humanitarianism and national identity, where aiding others aligns with both historical legacy and contemporary values.

Japan's domestic refugee policies remain stringent, with a complex bureaucracy making it difficult for asylum-seekers to gain status (Tarumoto 14-15). This reluctance reflects Japan's struggle to reconcile its humanitarian contributions with maintaining cultural homogeneity. The Turkish Republic initially distanced itself from Ottoman practices but later partially reversed this stance under the AK Party. The emphasis on the Ottoman legacy has influenced Türkiye's approach to humanitarianism, especially in response to the Syrian Civil War (Salem 1-2). Türkiye's acceptance of millions of Syrian refugees demonstrates a significant alignment between humanitarianism and national identity (Demir and Yılmaz 7, 17), enhancing its role in the Muslim world and beyond, as well as balancing regional stability.

Recent policy shifts in Japan, such as the acceptance of Afghan refugees and changes in treatment for Ukrainian refugees, indicate a cautious opening (Mainichi Shimbun; Japan Times, "Number of Ukrainian"). These changes, however, are still framed within a context that seeks to preserve Japan's homogeneous national identity while responding to international pressures (Wolman 409). Whereas Türkiye has been facing challenges due to the large influx of refugees and associated internal and external pressures, despite its humanitarian stance (Ashawi and Kucukgocmen). The country strives to continue to balance humanitarian commitments with national identity, particularly in the context of regional politics (Karakoc and Dogruel 364).

Both Japan and Türkiye use humanitarianism to reflect and reinforce national identity, but they do so in different ways. Japan's historical isolation and modern reluctance to integrate refugees reinforce a strict boundary between "us" and "them," while Türkiye's historical and contemporary practices show a more integrated approach, reflecting a blend of humanitarianism

and national identity. Japan's policies demonstrate a cautious opening to refugees under international pressure while maintaining strict domestic controls. Türkiye's policies, by contrast, show a more proactive stance in accepting refugees and integrating them into national frameworks, reflecting a commitment to humanitarian values that align with its national identity. Japan, on the other hand, has historically been shaped by isolation and homogeneity, influencing its approach to refugees. Türkiye's national identity, increasingly influenced by its Ottoman heritage, accommodates a more inclusive approach to humanitarianism, though challenges persist in managing large-scale refugee inflows.

### **Conclusion**

For Japan, the impact of the link between humanitarianism and national identity on asylum-seeker policies reveals a complex interplay between national identity and the treatment of outsiders. Historically, Japan maintained a rigid distinction between "us" (*uchi*) and "them" (*soto*), rooted in its desire to preserve cultural homogeneity. This is evident in Japan's resistance to integrating occupied peoples into its society during its imperial expansions and its strict post-WWII immigration policies. Humanitarianism in Japanese foreign policy has been framed within this context, where aid and assistance are offered as a reflection of national identity, but without compromising the nation's insular character.

Japan's approach to asylum-seekers and refugees illustrates this paradox. Despite its significant financial contributions to global humanitarian efforts, Japan's domestic policies remain stringent, reflecting a deep-seated reluctance to admit those who might disrupt the perceived cultural unity. This reluctance is reinforced by the nation's geographic isolation and rigorous immigration procedures, which serve as barriers to entry. The distinction between "us" and "them" is further reinforced by Japan's treatment of asylum-seekers as potential economic migrants rather than genuine refugees, leading to low acceptance rates.

However, as Japan faces an aging population and labor shortages, the tension between maintaining national identity and addressing economic imperatives has prompted some policy shifts. The acceptance of a limited number of Ukrainian and Afghan refugees in recent years indicates a cautious opening,

driven partly by international pressure and changing geopolitical realities. Yet, these exceptions still operate within a framework that emphasizes Japan's control over who is allowed to enter and under what conditions, maintaining a clear distinction between "us" and "them."

Therefore, Japan's immigration and refugee policies can be interpreted as a manifestation of its national identity, where humanitarianism is carefully calibrated to reflect compassion without diluting the nation's cultural homogeneity. This approach underscores the mutually reinforcing relationship between national identity and immigration policy, as Japan continues to navigate the challenges of globalization and demographic change.

On the other hand, humanitarianism has been a fundamental aspect of Turkish policies towards displaced Syrians and those who are in need, deeply rooted in tradition. Adherence to the principle of humanitarianism has guided Türkiye's humanitarian diplomacy, notably through the Turkish Red Crescent, which has historically assisted displaced populations from the Caucasus, Balkans, and beyond. The transition from the Ottoman Empire to the Turkish Republic saw shifts influenced by evolving national identity. The 1951 Geneva Refugee Convention, with its European-centric focus, and Türkiye's evolving refugee policies reflect these changes.

Türkiye's challenges due to the influx of Syrian asylum-seekers since 2011 also underscore the dynamic between humanitarianism and national identity. The arrival of asylum-seekers in huge numbers overwhelmed Türkiye's capacity, as no country would be prepared to receive hundreds of thousands of asylum-seekers within days. Yet, Türkiye's prompt response by opening its borders deserves to be recognized as a country that prioritizes humanitarian policies, particularly because the significant portion of the asylum-seekers were women and children requiring immediate protection.

In a nutshell, this study reveals how Japan and Türkiye's approaches to humanitarianism are shaped by their respective national identities and historical contexts. Japan's stringent policies reflect a struggle between maintaining cultural homogeneity and responding to international pressures, while Türkiye's more integrated approach aligns humanitarianism with national identity despite ongoing challenges. Both cases illustrate

the complex interplay between humanitarianism and national identity in shaping immigration policies.

### **Contribution Rate Statement**

The authors' contribution rates in this study are equal.

### **Conflict of Interest Statement**

There is no conflict of interest with any institution or person within the scope of this study. There is no conflict of interest between the authors.

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