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MALAYSIA: CITIZENS' AWARENESS AND PERSPECTIVES ON EXISTING REFUGEES IN THE COUNTRY

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Abstract:

This preliminary study examined 70 Malaysians' awareness and perspectives on the refugee situation in the country. It was found that despite many news and social media reports highlighting the plight of refugees in Malaysia, there are still 32.9% (N=23) who are not aware that there is a community of foreign nationals who are marginalized and are called 'refugees' in our country. Moreover, 68.6% (N=48) of these respondents have not heard of the UNHCR, the UN Refugee Agency, and its roles. This paper also found that 62.9% (N=44) of the Malaysians surveyed agreed that refugees should be helped, be entitled to equal human rights and should not have to face abuses or exploitation, especially in the hands of unscrupulous local employers. However, they are divided on whether the Malaysian government and its people should prioritize refugees over local needs and issues. Interestingly, 54.3% (N=38) of these respondents also expressed a desire for the refugees to be relocated to a third, and more advanced country. This shows that a majority of them are holding onto an old, but existing narrative in contrast to what local scholars (see Kartini & Nur Atiqah, 2023) are now suggesting – a super-diverse Malaysia in terms of ethnicity and cultural practices – by integrating the refugees into our society. The scholars' position accords with the Acculturation and/or Integration Theory. Nonetheless, three respondents had highlighted that these refugees could possibly bring many positive impacts on our economy if they work here legally while awaiting relocation to a third country. So, only these three respondents' views are in line with the latest narrative on refugees, i.e., seeing them as valuable human capital or resources. Finally, this paper concludes by outlining some current frameworks on how to view refugees since their numbers have swelled in Malaysia and globally.

Keywords:

Exploitation, Human Capital, Human Rights, Refugees, Super-Diverse Malaysia, UNHCR

Introduction

The United Nations Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), the global UN Refugee Agency, works closely with the Malaysian government to manage refugee protection such as their access to legal work, prevention of arrest and detention as well as the strengthening of self-reliance (UNHCR Global, 2024a). It also engages with civil society, the private sector and refugees themselves to help these refugees access healthcare and education while in Malaysia (UNHCR Global, 2024a).

The word ‘refugee’ can encompass many meanings, but generally it means that a refugee is a person who suffers from persecution and cannot hope to seek protection from the authorities in their own country.

According to the 1951 Convention relating to the status of refugees or also known as the 1951 Refugee Convention, the word ‘refugee’ is defined as:

“[people who] owing to well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality and is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country; or who, not having a nationality and being outside the country of his former habitual residence as a result of such events, is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to return to it.” (UNHCR, n.d.)

Meanwhile, an ‘asylum-seeker’ is defined as someone whose application for refuge and protection has yet to be processed or approved (UNHCR Malaysia, 2024).

In Malaysia, there are some 181,000 refugees and asylum-seekers and out of these numbers, 85% are from Myanmar, including some 103,000 Rohingyas (UNHCR Global, 2024a). The rest of the refugees are from 50 other countries, including Pakistan, Yemen, Syria, and Somalia (UNHCR Global, 2024a). According to the UNHCR Global (2024a), 67% of these refugees and asylum-seekers are men, while 33% are women. A total of 45,650 are children below the age of 18 (UNHCR Global, 2024a). They all live in cities and towns across Peninsular Malaysia, with a fairly large proportion of inhabitants in the Klang Valley, Johor, and Penang (UNHCR Global, 2024a). Also, Malaysia currently has the biggest number of Rohingya refugees within the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) and the fourth highest number in the world (Sukhani, 2020, para. 1).

According to UNHCR Malaysia (2024), refugees usually work in the informal sector, where they face exploitation, including receiving immensely low wages and long working hours; sometimes, they don’t get paid at all (Sayed & Choi, 2018). Moreover, it is estimated that only about 30% of the refugee children of schooling age actually attended school in the country but volunteers have found them to be smart, motivated and hardworking (Sayed & Choi, 2018).

According to Jalil and Hoffstaedter (2024), the UNHCR works hand-in-hand with the refugee community and civil society to protect and register refugees who require international asylum. However, increasingly, the global management of refugees has seen more incidence of outsourcing and a dispersion of responsibilities where each of the actors like the UNHCR, the state and civil society diffuse their responsibilities by outsourcing to one another (Jalil & Hoffstaedter, 2024). Furthermore, the Malaysian government is said to continue painting refugees as “a burden on the state and society” (Jalil & Hoffstaedter, 2024).

In view of these scenarios, this article investigates Malaysian citizens’ awareness of refugees in the country and their perspectives on them. It looks at Malaysians’ opinions on issues such as refugee exploitation by employees and their contribution to the Malaysian economy. While a certain segment of the population may feel empathy for the plight of refugees, due to many complicated factors, there may be many sentiments held by Malaysian citizens towards refugees that may influence how the country deals with the issue in the future.

Literature Review

Malaysia is not a signatory to the two important international treaties on refugees, i.e., the 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees and the 1967 Protocol Relating to the Status of Refugees. Therefore, the Malaysian government does not have formal obligations under international law to protect and aid refugees.

While Malaysia houses refugees, these refugees are classified as illegal or undocumented migrants here even with a UNHCR card. The card doesn’t accord legal status to the holder, just a recognition that these holders enjoy protection from deportation. Moreover, despite the UNHCR card, they still do not have the right to work, and the only option for them is to get employed in the informal sector. Nonetheless, without the UNHCR card, the refugees will be worse off and run the risk of getting arrested and deported.

The UNHCR, for example, had sought to persuade the Malaysian government to include refugees and asylum-seekers into the country’s 12th Malaysia Plan 2021-2025 (UNHCR Global Focus, 2020) in line with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) of leaving no one behind but due to various factors such as the Covid-19 pandemic, it did not materialize.

In this section, we explore some issues regarding refugees and the refugee situation in Malaysia:

Challenges Faced by Refugees

Kartini Aboo Talib @ Khalid and Nur Atiqah Tang Abdullah (2023) cited other scholars who have found recurring themes on refugees such as employment insecurity, well-being discourses, human trafficking, slavery, labour exploitation, oppression, and bribery.

Sayed and Choi (2018) reported that refugees face risks such as arrest, detention and deportation.

Zhooriyati et al. (2021) had also mentioned hardships faced by refugees. For example, health concerns like depression and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD); contagious diseases, malnutrition, hypertension and diabetes as well as educational challenges like language

barriers, access to learning, and the lack of facilities in the learning centres designed to teach refugee children.

Meanwhile, Fishbein (2020) reported that even though the number of refugees worldwide who have been identified by the UNHCR as needing resettlement has peaked at 1.44 million refugees, the existing opportunities for relocation are nowhere near the demand (para. 6). Phillips (2013) also reported that merely one percent of asylum seekers, who are acknowledged by the UNHCR as refugees meeting resettlement criteria, actually get resettled in another country.

Difference Between Refugees and Undocumented Migrants

According to UNHCR Malaysia (2024), refugees are people who cannot safely return home while undocumented migrants may have been people who have been trafficked into the country, deceitfully offered employment that don't exist or even a student whose visa has expired. Such undocumented migrants still enjoy protection from their own respective governments and their lives or freedom are not jeopardized when they are deported back to their home country (UNHCR Malaysia, 2024).

Globally and in Malaysia, the UNHCR card confirms the status of refugees and asylum-seekers and protects them from deportation. However, the card “...is not a driving license, a legal document, a travel document, or a residency permit. It [also] does not give the person immunity from the law” (UNHCR Malaysia, 2024). Nonetheless, the UNHCR card enables refugees in Malaysia to get a 50 percent reduction on healthcare fees charged to foreigners. But the cost remains high and exorbitant for many, according to an undocumented migrant awaiting her UNHCR card, who was interviewed by Al-Jazeera (Qarssifi, 2024, para. 8).

A New Policy Direction

Qarssifi (2024) reported that Malaysia had revised its National Security Directive Number 23 – Procedures for the Management of Illegal Immigrants who hold UNHCR Cards – to provide a policy direction for the administration of refugees and asylum seekers. Apparently, these revisions would grant refugees and asylum seekers access to work, health services and education. Despite this, Asylum Access Malaysia, a refugee rights organization, mentioned that in reality, the scenario in the field has not actually improved (Qarssifi, 2024, para. 20).

Managing Super-Diversity in Malaysia

Kartini and Nur Atiqah (2023) also suggested that Malaysia should have a paradigm shift by accepting refugees and consequently, the country and the government should learn to manage the enhanced super-diversity nature of our society. They suggested that the Malaysian government should also learn best practices from developed nations, and this can help the country make institutional changes as well as enhancing its human capital growth and development (Kartini & Nur Atiqah, 2023).

Refugees' Human Capital Values in Malaysia

Todd et al. (2019) reported that if refugees were allowed to work in the country, the economic benefits can be huge. For example, among other things, they had summarized some benefits, namely: (1) it is estimated that the refugees' contribution to the nation's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) would rise to above RM3 billion by 2024 through direct and indirect effects such as higher expenditure and lower business costs, (2) refugees possibly generating no less

than 4,000 jobs for Malaysians, and (3) refugees' tax contribution would rise to over RM50 million per annum by 2024.

Ghazali et al. (2020) had surveyed 180 Rohingya refugees in the Klang Valley and found that their total expenditures were similar in pattern to the local B40 income group. They also possibly paid sales and services tax (SST). Moreover, in their study, they had calculated the Rohingya respondents' total expenses in Malaysia which included food, transportation, education and utility bills. The conclusion was that in the past 12 months of their study, these 180 refugee respondents had contributed RM1,946,100 to Malaysia's economy (i.e., their host country/economy).

The Rohingya community in Malaysia, faces significant security and privacy challenges due to their lack of legal recognition and limited access to public resources (Georgiou et al., 2023; Togoo & Ismail, 2021). Although Malaysia has not ratified the 1951 United Nations Refugee Convention, it hosts a substantial Rohingya refugee population who have fled the conflict in Myanmar (Nungsari et al., 2020). As urban refugees, the Rohingya in Malaysia often lack formal legal status, which restricts their access to healthcare, education, and other essential services (Rahman & Dutta, 2023).

This lack of legal recognition and restricted access to resources has led to a precarious situation for the Rohingya refugees in Malaysia, with many facing issues related to healthcare, education, and social integration. The unaffordable cost of healthcare, language barriers, and poor quality of treatment have emerged as significant barriers to Rohingya refugees accessing essential medical services (Chandran et al., 2020). Moreover, the Rohingya refugees in Malaysia often live in isolation and face challenges in securing employment, further exacerbating their vulnerability (Rahman & Dutta, 2023).

UNICEF Malaysia (2024) stated that the refugee and stateless children in Malaysia face significant barriers to accessing education, lacking official credentials, social connections, mentors, and peer support. As of September 2023, over 1,400 refugee and stateless children were held in immigration detention centres, preventing them from living dignified lives and reaching their full potential. Out of 41,000 registered refugee children of school age, none have access to formal education, and only 34 have access to informal alternative learning centres. The lack of legal status restricts their education and puts them at risk of arrest and detention, violating their rights.

Azril Mohd Amin (2024) highlights the inconsistent and inequitable treatment of different refugee groups in Malaysia. While injured Palestinians receive medical care, Rohingya refugees face harsh conditions in detention centres. UNICEF also discusses the financial and logistical challenges of transporting the injured Palestinians, questioning whether these resources could have been better utilized to support medical facilities in nearby countries. Additionally, he raises concerns about the strain on Malaysia's healthcare system and the disparities in healthcare access for refugees, who often face higher costs than Malaysian citizens. The decision to bring injured Palestinians to Malaysia also presents legal complexities, as it may relieve Israel of its obligations under international humanitarian law (para. 20). He further emphasizes the detention of over 1,400 Rohingya children without adequate access to basic services, and calls for a more balanced and equitable approach to Malaysia's humanitarian efforts, ensuring fair treatment and access to essential services for all refugees.

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Refugee Certification Strategy

Jalil and Hoffstaedter (2024) argued that privatization and a neoliberal agenda has created a dispersal of responsibilities in registering refugees from the state to the UNHCR, from the UNHCR to civil society, and from the state and the UNHCR to a private organization called Barisan Mahamega Sdn Bhd. This scenario has maintained the status quo in terms of refugee protection but has increased surveillance of the refugee population. Moreover, by outsourcing certification of refugees to civil society in Malaysia, it has introduced new fees/costs for asylum seekers. These layers of processes had also led to fraud involving employees of UNHCR and some of the refugees’ own community leaders which was reported by Al-Jazeera (2014).

Table 1 (below) shows a summary of the Literature Review findings on the refugee issue in Malaysia from 2023 to 2024:

Table 1: A Summary of the 2023-2024 Findings on Refugees in Malaysia

Author(s) and Year of Publication	Findings
Jalil and Hoffstaedter (2024)	In Malaysia, a private company has been engaged in refugee registration since 2017. Such devolvment of responsibilities in registering refugees lead to extra costs for asylum seekers, and allow the Malaysian government to rule through inactivity while maintaining the status quo.
Azril Mohd Amin (2024)	Inconsistent and inequitable treatment of different refugee groups in the country. For example, between the ‘lucky’ Palestinians and the Myanmar Rohingya refugees who face arrest and detention.
UNICEF (2024)	Only 34 out of 41,000 registered refugee children have access to education via informal learning centres. Moreover, more than 1,400 stateless and refugee children are in immigration detention centres.
Qarssifi (2024)	Revisions in National Security Directive Number 23 would grant refugees and

	<p>asylum seekers access to work, health services and education. But, on the ground, it is said that nothing has actually improved.</p>
UNHCR (2024)	<p>Differentiated between refugees and asylum seekers who face threats to their lives if they return home from undocumented migrants who can still safely return to their home countries. Although the UNHCR card enables refugees to get a 50% discount in healthcare fees, the costs are still considered as high and exorbitant for them.</p>
Kartini and Nur Atiqah (2023)	<p>The Malaysian government should absorb the existing refugees and create an enhanced super-diverse country. It should also learn best practices from developed nations and reinforce human capital development in the country.</p> <p>Recurring themes on refugees include employment insecurity, well-being issues, human trafficking, slavery, labour exploitation, oppression, and bribery.</p>
Rahman and Dutta (2023)	<p>As urban refugees, the Rohingya in Malaysia often lack formal legal status, which restricts their access to healthcare, education, and other essential services, thereby exacerbating their vulnerability.</p>

Method

The data used in this preliminary study were collected using a Google form by five students (see acknowledgement) for their class assignment. The students had surveyed Malaysians' views on refugees, among others. Moreover, their data collection via convenience sampling was conducted online using social media during the Covid-19 lockdown in 2020 but these data were never published in any journal.

The survey has both quantitative and qualitative features. For example, of the 17 questions asked during the data collection, 13 were close-ended questions while another 4 were open-ended, free-to-write questions. The advantages of close-ended questions include providing good, measurable data while the open-ended, free-to-write questions provided meaningful insights into subjective opinions, meanings and worldview of the 70 Malaysian respondents surveyed.

In this exploratory study, only eight (8) of the 17 original questions in the survey were selected and highlighted for use because they were in line with the two themes identified by the authors. These two themes are (1) Malaysians' awareness of refugees in the country and (2) their perspectives on the refugee situation in the country. Also, the questions were fully adopted from the source.

According to Malaysia's OpenDOSM (2024), the total Malaysian population as of 1st January 2024 is slightly over 34 million. As our respondents totalled only 70 Malaysian citizens, it is just a very small fraction of the Malaysian population. Therefore, this exploratory study's generalizability is low. Future research should expand on its wider reach of Malaysians in terms of ethnicity, sex/gender, age, rural-urban regions and state.

The following flow chart summarizes the method used:

(1) diagnosis of issue → (2) literature review → (3) seeking permission to re-use the students' survey data → (4) two themes identified → (5) selection of eight survey questions based on the two themes → (6) writing

Findings and Discussion

In this section, the young Malaysian respondents' answers and perspectives will be presented to provide a peek into their awareness and worldview.

Respondents' Profile

Of the 70 Malaysian respondents surveyed, 74.3% (N=52) of them were between 19 and 24 years old, 7.1% (N=5) were between 13 and 18 years old, another 7.1% (N=5) were between 25 and 30 years old while another 4.1% (N=5) were between 31 and 36 years old. Finally, the remaining of the 4.3% (N=3) respondents were above 43 years old. Moreover, 71.4% (N=50) of the respondents were female, making them the overall majority. An overwhelming 90% (N=63) of the respondents were Chinese Malaysians, 4.3% (N=3) were Malay Malaysians, and 2.9% (N=2) each were Indian Malaysians and other ethnicities respectively.

Theme 1: Malaysian Respondents' Awareness of Refugees in the Country

As mentioned in the abstract, a total of 32.9% (N=23) of the respondents were not aware that there is a community of foreign nationals who are socially excluded or marginalized called 'refugees' in Malaysia while a majority of 65.7% respondents (N=46) were aware. Only one

(1) respondent answered 'maybe'. See Figure 1. The respondents are young people and some of them may not have been exposed to such news.

Meanwhile, only 7.1% respondents (N=5) cited 'often' when asked how closely they follow news on refugees in Malaysia while 41.4% (N=29) cited 'occasionally' and 51.5% (N=36) cited 'seldom'.

These findings showed that even though the literacy rate is high and over 94% in the country, Malaysians are generally found to be reluctant to read (Asila, 2017, para 4) or maybe have no time to read. According to the interim data collected by the National Library of Malaysia (PNM), as of May 2023, Malaysians read (on average) 20 books annually, up from 15 in 2014, but this is still below the global average of 30 books per annum (Nurul Suhaidi, 2023, para. 1 & 12).

Do you know there is a community of foreign nationals who is socially excluded or marginalized in Malaysia called 'refugees'

70 responses

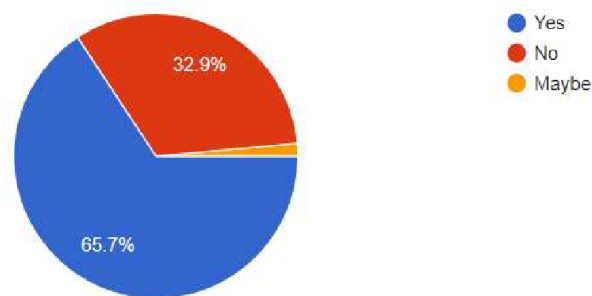


Figure 1: Malaysian Respondents' Answer To "Do You Know There Is A Community Of Foreign Nationals Who Are Socially Excluded Or Marginalized Called 'Refugees' In The Country?"

In Figure 2, the respondents were asked if they have heard of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), the global UN Refugee Agency, and its roles. As can be seen, 68.6% of the respondents (N=48) have answered 'No' while only 14.3% (N=10) have answered 'Yes' and the remaining 17.1% (N=12) have answered 'Maybe'.

Have you heard of UNHCR (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees) and their roles?

70 responses

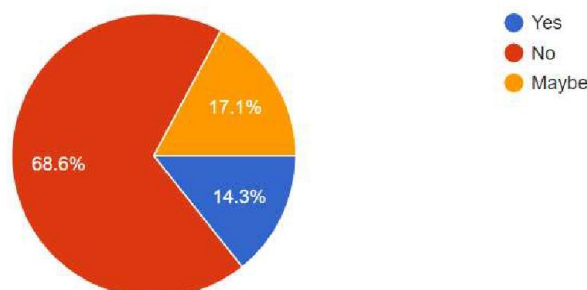


Figure 2: Malaysian Respondents' Answer To "Have You Heard Of The UNHCR And Its Roles?"

Moreover, only 21.4% of the respondents (N=15) surveyed believe that the refugees in Malaysia are legitimate ones who are at risk of persecution in their own respective countries, while 68.6% of the respondents (N=48) believe that the majority of the refugees in the country are economic refugees with the remaining 10% of them (N=7) chose 'Neither'. See Figure 3.

UNHCR contributes by identifying legitimate refugees from the economic refugees. Mostly, legitimate refugees run from political persecution and war. However, economic refugees are looking for a better life. In your opinion, are the majority of refugees in Malaysia legitimate refugees or merely economic refugees?

70 responses

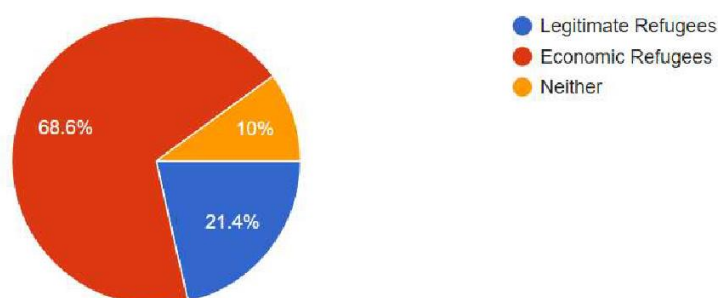


Figure 3: Malaysian Respondents' Answer To "In Your Opinion, Are The Majority Of Refugees In Malaysia Legitimate Refugees Or Merely Economic Refugees?"

This finding showed that there is a misconception among these young Malaysian respondents regarding the plight experienced by the refugees in the country. Their perception seems widespread (68.6%, N=48) among this set of respondents. However, while a majority of the refugees in Malaysia are legitimate ones escaping war, conflict, persecution and violence in their home countries, there could also be those who are economic refugees who are yet to be identified and distinguishing them is difficult since they often blend in with other asylum-seekers and refugees in the country. Significantly, there are no less than 500,000 unregistered refugees in Malaysia with little legal protection (Sukhani, 2020, para. 15) and there is no

knowing if these unregistered refugees are legitimate ones or economic refugees until their status were verified.

Theme 2: Malaysian Respondents' Perspectives on Refugees in the Country

In this section, the respondents' perspectives on the refugee situation is highlighted. Here, it was found that 62.9% of them (N=44), i.e., a majority of them, are in agreement with the statement that 'refugees are entitled to equal human rights'. Meanwhile, 22.9% of these respondents (N=16) had chosen 'neutral' to this statement and a minority of 14.2% (N=10) of them had disagreed with the statement that 'refugees are entitled to equal human rights'.

When asked about their perspectives, a total of 14 written responses were collected. Some of these responses were written in the Chinese language and had to be translated. Others were in English or the Malay Language. The following are a sample of the expressed perspectives:

The first respondent (henceforth abbreviated as R1) stated that human rights apply to every human being on earth. R1 also mentioned that regardless of the degree of one's wealth and status, everyone deserves to be treated and protected equally. This is human rights.

R3 also stated that these refugees have human rights, and the government of each country should take responsibility and pay serious attention to this refugee issue.

R10 said that we are all the same living beings with the same structure. It is a mistake to differentiate and treat anyone differently, no matter what status we are in.

R11 mentioned that even though they are refugees, they still own the right to life, liberty and freedom from cruel and inhumane treatment.

At the same time, 54.3% of the respondents (N=38) chose to relocate the refugees to a third country while 24.3% (N=17) chose that Malaysia should absorb these refugees. Another 21.4% of the respondents (N=15) chose neither. It is to be noted that those who had agreed that Malaysia should absorb the existing refugees did not write their comments in the column provided to them. Only those who had wanted to relocate the refugees to a third country had commented in the column provided. The following are some of these respondents' perspectives:

R1 said that the refugees should be relocated to a capable and strong country that does not lack resources to help.

R2 mentioned that the country should pay attention to local citizens first.

R4 also believed that Malaysia has its own issues to resolve so it is far from able to provide free accommodation while we have homeless people among us.

R5 shared similar views with R4 and felt that Malaysia has enough issues on its own and should stop letting illegal immigrants come in. But the refugees must be sent back to their country with proper procedures.

R6 said that Malaysia shouldn't assist the refugees since our country has such high debts.

R7 said that the Malaysian government should have the capability if it wants to take in the refugees.

R8 also mentioned that despite human rights, Malaysia needs to be capable of taking care of its own citizens first.

Finally, the respondents were asked if they would allow refugees temporary work permits until their relocation to a third country as the prime minister of Malaysia. A total of 55.9% (N=38) said "yes" while another 47.1% (N=32) said "no". See Figure 4 below.

If you were Prime Minister of Malaysia, would you change policy, allowing refugees temporary work permit to work until their relocation to a third country? This can combat abuses by unscrupulous Malaysian employers who take advantage of the refugees' illegal status. If yes, why? If not, why not?

68 responses

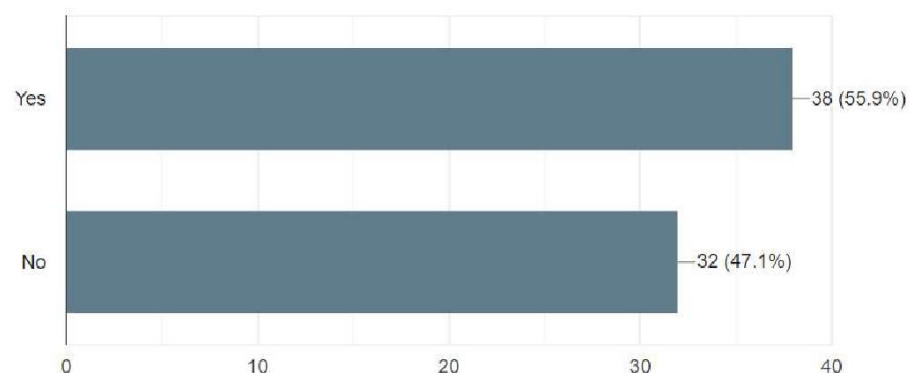


Figure 4: Malaysian Respondents' Answer To "If You Were Prime Minister Of Malaysia, Would You Change Policy, Allowing Refugees Temporary Work Permits Until Their Relocation To A Third Country? This Can Combat Abuses By Unscrupulous Malaysian Employers Who Take Advantage Of The Refugees' Illegal Status. If Yes, Why? If Not, Why Not?"

Only three of the 38 respondents who had answered "yes" had given their viewpoints which are in accord with the current narrative on refugees, i.e., seeing them as valuable human capital or resources. However, many other respondents also wrote that refugees are human beings who need to support themselves too. For example:

R20 said "improve [the] economy."

R25 said that at least they can contribute to Malaysia.

R29 believed that we can overcome the problem of manpower shortage by allowing refugees to work, thereby improving Malaysia's economy.

R31 mentioned that temporary work permits can prevent abuses by Malaysian employers.

Current Frameworks on Refugees

There are many current frameworks used to view the refugees and their circumstances. For example, we can use the Acculturation Theory or the Integration Theory to consider absorbing these refugees into their respective host countries. This idea is compassionate and humane but perhaps politically controversial.

UNHCR USA (2024) has outlined the New York Declaration for Refugees and Migrants which proposes the Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework (CRRF). It emphasizes social inclusion in host countries, access to education and employment as well as minimizing reliance on humanitarian aid. This framework accords refugees with more dignity and rights.

Moreover, UNHCR Global (2024b) reported on the Global Compact on Refugees (GCR) which was launched in 2018 to focus on equitable responsibility-sharing among countries hosting refugees, enhancing refugee self-sufficiency, boosting access to third-country and supporting circumstances for a risk-free and honourable return to their home countries.

These new paradigms or frameworks can change our perspectives on refugees and the refugee situation in Malaysia and the world.

Conclusion

This preliminary study had examined 70 Malaysian respondents' awareness and perspectives on refugees and the refugee situation in the country. It is found that a majority of these young Malaysians are generally sympathetic towards the refugees but would still rather have them relocated to a third country. This is in contrast with a current, new narrative on absorbing the refugees, making Malaysia a super-diverse country in terms of ethnicity and cultural practices.

Moreover, the study's objectives have successfully been achieved by highlighting the issues related to refugees in Malaysia and our citizens' awareness as well as their perspectives on these refugees. It has contributed to the literature by adding on to the ongoing discourse on refugees.

On a positive note, a majority of the respondents agree that the Malaysian government should provide a temporary work permit for the refugees to work and support themselves while awaiting relocation to a third country. This shows their compassion, humaneness and empathy. In line with the human capital paradigm or framework, it is estimated that the refugees in Malaysia can positively contribute to our economy (see Ghazali et al., 2020; and Todd et al., 2019).

Moreover, it was found that a majority of our youthful respondents have not even heard of the UNHCR, the global UN refugee agency, and its roles. Furthermore, 51.5% (N=36) of them have also mentioned that they seldom follow news regarding refugees in the country. This seems to reflect poorly on the respondents' general knowledge, their reading habits and/or perhaps their interests about social issues.

While this preliminary study has provided a peek into our young Malaysians' worldview, there is limited generalizability in this study because the sample size was quite small, and an overwhelming number of the respondents were Chinese Malaysians. In other words, the data were not a representative sample of the Malaysian population. Therefore, future research should endeavour to have a representative sample across the entire Malaysian population to investigate their awareness and perspectives on the refugees.

Finally, a future study should also investigate whether Malaysians, regardless of religion and race/ethnicity, are willing to allow the government to absorb these refugees, making them citizens of Malaysia and thereby making our country a super-diverse and super-multicultural society as suggested by scholars Kartini and Nur Atiqah (2023).

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