

Human Rights and Refugee Protection in Central Europe

INTS-3500 (3 credits)

Czech Republic: Human Rights and Refugee Integration

This syllabus is representative of a typical semester. Because courses develop and change over time to take advantage of unique learning opportunities, actual course content varies from semester to semester.

Course Description

This course examines the role of human rights law for refugee protection, with a focus on Central Europe. Starting from the history of international refugee protection, the 1951 Convention, and the 1967 Protocol, students will gain an understanding of the foundations and structure of international refugee law and human rights. Students will also analyze the historical, political, and social factors that have shaped migration patterns and policies in Central Europe, focusing on the experiences of refugees and asylum seekers in the Czech Republic, Poland, and Germany since 2015. Through case studies, guest lectures, and excursions to Poland and Germany, students will gain a critical understanding of the regime of refugee protection in Central Europe by highlighting its virtues and shortcomings, while developing the skills necessary to advocate for more just and equitable approaches to migration and refugee protection.

Language of Instruction

This course is taught in English.

Learning Outcomes

After succeeding in this course, students will be able to:

- Analyze the historical, political, and social factors shaping migration patterns and policies in the Czech Republic, Poland, and Germany, focusing on refugee experiences since 2015.

- Examine the legal and institutional frameworks governing asylum and migration in the Europe Union, with a focus on the Czech Republic, Poland, and Germany.
- Critically assess the virtues and shortcomings of the refugee protection regime in the Czech Republic, Poland, and Germany.
- Develop skills to advocate for more just and equitable approaches to migration and refugee protection in Central Europe.

Instructional Methods

SIT's teaching and learning philosophy is grounded in the experiential learning theory developed by Kolb (1984; 2015) and informed by various scholars, such as Dewey, Piaget, Lewin, among others. Experiential learning theory recognizes that learning is an active process that is not confined to the formal curriculum; "knowledge is created through the transformation of experience" (Kolb, 2015, p. 49). Learning involves both content and process. Learning is holistic and happens through various life experiences upon which students draw to generate new ways of knowing and being. Learning involves a community and is a lifelong endeavor. Learning is transformational. The suggested four step-cycle of a concrete experience, reflective observation, abstract conceptualization, and active experimentation embedded in the experiential learning model is not linear and might not always happen in that specific order, as any learning is highly context dependent. These stages of taking part in a shared experience; reflecting on that experience by describing and interpreting it; challenging their own assumptions and beliefs to generate new knowledge; and ultimately applying new knowledge, awareness, skills, and attitudes in a variety of situations and contexts are important for students to engage in to become empowered lifelong learners.

Assignments and Evaluation

Assignment Descriptions and Grading Criteria

1. Class Attendance and Participation (10%): Attendance during the seminar is mandatory and your grade will reflect your involvement in class and during other activities and excursions. We encourage you to participate actively, but also remind you that speaking more is not always better. You'll receive participation credit for the days when you do the following:

- **Be present** - the success of this interactive course depends heavily on you attending class. Being present in class helps you establish rapport with your instructor and members of the classroom community.
- **Practice Active Listening** - paying attention in class and during field excursions, asking appropriate questions, showing interest, respect, and

- enthusiasm in responding to ideas (this includes body language), entertaining contradictory perspectives, and taking notes.
- **Be Involved in Class Discussions** - the only way to maximize our collective learning potential is if we are all here contributing. This means challenging yourself to speak up if you usually don't, and also means allowing others to speak if you are a person who tends to dominate class discussions.
 - **Display Respect** – Practice ethical engagement and culturally responsive interaction with hosts, SIT program staff, SIT lecturers and communities.

2. “Mapping of Experience” Journal Project (30%)

Throughout our exploration of refugee protection and human rights in Central Europe, you'll have the opportunity to create a unique and personal Reflection Journal. This journal is a space for you to process, analyze, and express your thoughts, feelings, and insights as we delve into the complex realities of forced migration and the legal frameworks that shape the experiences of refugees and asylum seekers. Your journal entries can take many forms—from thoughtful essays and critical analyses to photographs and expressive artwork. As we examine case studies, participate in guest lectures, and embark on field visits, your journal will serve as a tool for processing the information and experiences you encounter, deepening your understanding of the historical, political, and social factors that shape migration patterns and policies in Central Europe, and critically assessing the virtues and shortcomings of the refugee protection regime.

By regularly adding to your journal and sharing your reflections with others, you'll not only enrich your own understanding of refugee protection and human rights but also contribute to a collective dialogue on how to advocate for more just and equitable approaches to migration.

Some examples (this list is far from exhaustive) of things one might include in their journal:

- Relating one's experience at a site visit to assigned readings.
- A poem or sketch about what you have been witnessing outside the bus/train window.
- A lengthy note about a photograph you have just captured.
- A list of questions that help you to identify and articulate what it is you would like to better understand about the places you are seeing or the people you are meeting.

3. Policy Brief/Memo (25%)

Policy briefs/memos are a form of report designed to facilitate policy-making. The core purpose is to succinctly evaluate policy options regarding a specific issue, for a specific policy-maker audience. In this case you might address your brief to a member of the European Parliament or the Council of Europe. Policy-makers need to make practical

decisions under intense time constraints, so the brief should provide evidence and actionable recommendations and be relatively short (not more than 4-5 pages (Times New Roman, 12-point font)).

In your memo include:

- A brief introductory background or contextual information that is necessary for the arguments you will build. Focus on the most important facts that your reader, particularly as they relate to human rights law and the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR).
- A brief analysis of the legal and institutional frameworks governing asylum and migration in Central Europe, including the role of the European Union and the UNHCR in shaping policies.
- An examination of shortcomings or limitations in these frameworks that may be contributing to the case of forced migration you are addressing.
- Present two or more recommendations for how the relevant policymaker or institution should respond to this issue. Justify your recommendations, clarifying why they constitute the best course of action and demonstrating that they are feasible.

4. Oral Presentation (35%)

We want you to develop your presentation and advocacy skills and share what you've learned with a wider community beyond your class. So, for your final presentation, you will create a multimedia presentation (for example, using Canva or Google Slides), in order to express what you have learned from refugee protection and human rights through course materials as well as your lived experience in the Czech Republic, Poland, and Germany. Working in groups of two, you will create a 12-15 minute presentation that does ONE of the following (please review the two options below):

Option 1: Conduct a Comparative Analysis of Refugee Protection Strategies in Germany, Poland, and the Czech Republic

For this presentation, you can draw upon your experiences and learnings from the field visits to Germany, Poland, and Czech Republic as well as course materials. You should compare and contrast the approaches to refugee protection in in these countries, discussing factors such as:

- The role of the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR) in refugee protection -
- National asylum laws and procedures and reception conditions and access to basic rights for asylum seekers -
- The influence of EU policies and directives on national refugee protection systems

Option 2: Role of Human Rights Law in Advancing Refugee Protection

This presentation topic focuses on the content covered throughout the course, particularly the relationship between human rights law and refugee protection.

Students can draw upon the required readings, case studies, and their own analysis to present on:

- The key provisions of the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR) relevant to refugee protection ·
- The complementary role of human rights law in addressing gaps and limitations in the international refugee protection regime ·
- Challenges and opportunities for using human rights law to advance the rights of refugees and asylum seekers in Central Europe

Grading Scale

94-100%	A
90-93%	A-
87-89%	B+
84-86%	B
80-83%	B-
77-79%	C+
74-76%	C
70-73%	C-
67-69%	D+
64-66%	D
below 64	F

Required Texts

See course schedule for a full listing. All course readings are available on the course management site.

Program Expectations

- **Be prepared and engaged:** For an interactive course to succeed, you must be present, on time, and have your readings completed and points in mind for discussion or clarification. Being prepared with these elements raises the level of class discussion for everyone. Moreover, the content of this course is learned collaboratively, meaning that when a student isn't here, they take away from everyone's opportunity to learn. The only way to maximize our collective learning potential is if we are all here contributing. Valid reasons for absence – such as illness – must be discussed with the academic director or other designated staff person. Absences impact academic performance, may impact grades, and could result in dismissal from the program.

- **Submit assignments on time:** SIT Study Abroad programs integrate traditional classroom lectures and discussion with field- based experiences, site visits and debriefs. The curriculum is designed to build on itself and progress to the culmination (projects, ISP, case studies, internship, etc.). It is critical that students complete assignments in a timely manner to continue to benefit from the sequences in assignments, reflections and experiences throughout the program. Please back up your work.
 - Students may request a justified extension for one paper/assignment during the semester. Requests must be made in writing and at least 12 hours before the posted due date and time. If the reason for the request is accepted, an extension of up to one week may be granted at that time. Any further requests for extensions will not be granted. Students who fail to submit the assignment within the extension period will receive an 'F' for the assignment.
 - Please note late penalties will be forgiven for most assignments if they are related to circumstances beyond your reasonable control (ex: you are sick, etc.). Otherwise, please submit upload assignments by their due dates.
- **Bring your curiosity:** Ask questions in class. Engage the guest lecturers, as these are often very busy professionals who are doing us an honor by coming to speak. Remember, there are no foolish questions and your inquiries might help others in class who have similar ideas/thoughts. By actively participating and showing curiosity, you demonstrate respect for our guests and contribute to creating a dynamic learning environment for everyone.
- **Maintain academic Integrity:** Even unintentional plagiarism is serious. Before you submit each assignment, ask yourself all of these questions:
 - Did I copy a sentence or phrase (5 words or longer) word for word from a textbook, article, or website, without surrounding it with quotation marks and citing the author, year, and page number where I read the sentence or phrase?
 - Did I mention ideas or facts I read about in a book, article, or website, without citing the author and year of the source where I read about them?
 - Did I paraphrase by changing only a word or two or moving the words around?
 - Suppose you answered "yes" to any of the above questions. In that case, you are committing plagiarism and need to give credit to appropriate sources before you submit your assignment.
- **Principled Disagreement:** Learning often involves discomfort. Some discomfort can facilitate personal and collective growth. You, your peers, guest lecturers, instructors, and local constituents, have diverse experiences, values, beliefs,

affiliations, and identities. Reflecting on these differences can be emotionally challenging, even when it deepens self-awareness and mutual understanding. In this course, we aim to encourage principled disagreement rather than avoiding difficult conversations. This is challenging and we will inevitably make mistakes. Our goal is to thoughtfully critique ideas rather than attacking individuals. We aim to embrace productive discomfort and minimize unproductive discomfort, striving for respectful disagreement.

- **Content Considerations:** Some texts and activities you will encounter in this course delve into sensitive topics that may be emotionally and intellectually challenging. Our classroom is a space where we can engage with challenging ideas, question assumptions, and navigate difficult topics with respect and maturity. As possible, I will flag content and activities that are especially graphic or intense, so we are prepared to address them soberly and sensitively. If you are struggling to keep up with the work or participate in the course because of the nature of the content and activities, you should speak with me and/or seek help from counseling services.
- **Our social identities** – Our social identities - race/ethnicity, class, gender, sexual identity, religion, mental and physical ability, size, national origin, citizenship status, and more – shape how we are perceived, represented, and treated. They also influence what knowledge and learning is deemed valuable and legitimate. To challenge hegemonic paradigms and perspectives, this course intentionally includes readings, topics, videos, and assignments from authors and perspectives of diverse backgrounds. However, there may be gaps we have overlooked. Your constructive feedback is always welcome on how to make this course more inclusive and transformative.
- **Store Your Work:** Keep several copies of your work as back up and keep one copy accessible to you through an online forum, such as an attachment in your email, the course learning management system, or cloud-based storage. This way your work will always be available to despite technical issues. Lost files, deleted drives, or computer crashes are not excuses for late, missing work.
- **Mindful Digital Engagement:** While the topics of refugee integration and cultural transformation are captivating, it's difficult to compete against the internet's endless distractions. Engaging with the digital world during class or study abroad activities can be disruptive to both instructors, guests, community partners, and peers. To foster an environment of active presence and engagement, we ask

students to adhere to these mindful digital engagement guidelines:

- Cellphones and other personal electronics can be used for taking notes and other class activities. Off-task usage is not acceptable. You may be marked as absent for habitually using them for something other than classroom activities.
- Refrain from recording class or study abroad activities (audio, visual, or both) To ensure the free and open discussion of ideas, students may not record classroom lectures, discussion and/or activities without the advance written permission of the instructor, and any such recording properly approved in advance can be used solely for the student's own private use.

SIT Policies and Resources

Please refer to the [SIT Study Abroad Handbook](#) and the [Policies](#) section of the SIT website for all academic and student affairs policies. Students are accountable for adhering to all published policies. Of particular relevance to this course are the policies regarding: academic integrity, Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA), research and ethics in field study and internships, late assignments, academic status, academic appeals, diversity and disability, sexual harassment and misconduct, and the student code of conduct.

Please refer to the SIT Study Abroad Handbook and SIT website for information on important resources and services provided through our central administration in Vermont, such as [Library resources and research support](#), [Disability Services](#), [Counseling Services](#), [Title IX information](#), and [Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion](#) resources.

Course Schedule

Please be aware that topics and excursions may vary to take advantage of any emerging events, to accommodate changes in our lectures' availability, and to respect any changes that would affect student safety. Students will be notified if this occurs.

Module 1: Foundations of Refugee Protection and Human Rights

This module introduces students to the key concepts, definitions, and historical context of refugee protection and human rights. Students will examine the development of international law, focusing on the 1951 Refugee Convention and its 1967 Protocol, and explore the role of institutions such as the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) in promoting and safeguarding the rights of refugees and asylum seekers.

Sessions may include:

- The 1951 Refugee Convention and its 1967 Protocol
- Historical Overview of Legal frameworks for refugee protection in Central Europe
- The role of international organizations such as the United Nations Commission on Human Rights in refugee protection and integration

Required Readings

Abuya, E. O., Krause, U., & Mayblin, L. (2021). The neglected colonial legacy of the 1951 Refugee Convention. *International Migration*, 59(4), 265–267

Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees, July 28, 1951, 189 U.N.T.S. 137.
<https://www.unhcr.org/3b66c2aa10>

Dubner, S. J. (Host). (2015, December 17). [Is migration a basic human right?](#) [Audio podcast episode]. In Freakonomics Radio. *Freakonomics*.

Orchard, Phil. "The Dawn of International Refugee Protection: States, Tacit

Cooperation and Non-Extradition." *Journal of Refugee Studies* 30, no. 2 (June 2017): 282-300. <https://doi-org.ncat.idm.oclc.org/10.1093/jrs/few014>.

Recommended Readings:

United Nations General Assembly. (1948). Universal Declaration of Human Rights.
<https://www.un.org/en/about-us/universal-declaration-of-human-rights>

United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. "Global Trends: Forced Displacement in 2022." UNHCR, 2022. <https://www.unhcr.org/us/global-trends>

Module 2: Drivers of Migration and Refugee Flows in Central Europe

This module examines the historical, political, and geopolitical factors that have shaped the migration patterns and refugee flows in Central Europe, with a focus on the Czech Republic. Students will explore both contemporary and longer-term drivers of forced migration to the region.

Sessions may include:

- Historical overview of refugee and forced migration movements in Central Europe and more recent influxes.
- Examining the drivers of the 2022 Ukraine refugee crisis and the Czech Republic's response.
- Economic, social, and political conditions in countries of origin that contribute to outward migration to Central Europe.

Required Reading:

- Guild, E., & Groenendijk, K. (2023). The impact of war in Ukraine on EU migration. *Frontiers in Human Dynamics*. Vol. 5.
- Malynovska, O. (2024). Forced displacement from Ukraine due to Russia's 2022 invasion and the likelihood of a new wave of emigration. *Canadian Foreign Policy Journal*, 30(1), 65–79. <https://doi.org/10.1080/11926422.2023.2228543>
- Sasse, G. (2020). War and displacement: The case of Ukraine. *Europe-Asia Studies*, 72(3), 347-353. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09668136.2020.1728087>
- Schon, J. (2019). Motivation and opportunity for conflict-induced migration: An analysis of Syrian migration timing. *Journal of Peace Research*, 56(1), 12-27.

Module 3: Case Studies: Refugee Protection in Czech Republic, Germany and Poland

This module includes an excursion to Germany and Poland. Through field visits and comparative case studies of Central European countries, students will investigate reception conditions, access to basic rights, and the challenges and gaps in ensuring effective refugee protection in the region.

Sessions may include:

- Germany's "open-door" policy and initial reception of refugees
- Comparative analysis of refugee protection systems.
- Lessons learned for refugee protection in Central Europe
- Challenges and Opportunities for Refugee Protection in Central Europe

Required Readings:

- Brücker, H., Ette, A., Grabka, M. M., Kosyakova, Y., Niehues, W., Rother, N., Spieß, C. K., Zinn, S., Bujard, M., Cardozo, A., Décieux, J. P., Maddox, A., Milewski, N., Naderi, R., Sauer, L., Schmitz, S., Schwanhäuser, S., Siegert, M. & Tanis, K. (2023). Ukrainian refugees in Germany: Escape, arrival and everyday life (Brief Analysis 04|2022). Nuremberg. Federal Office for Migration and Refugees. <https://doi.org/10.48570/bamf.fz.ka.04/2022.en.2023.ukrkurzbericht.1.0>
- Costello, C., & Foster, M. (2021). (Some) refugees welcome: When is differentiating between refugees unlawful discrimination? *International Journal of Discrimination and the Law*, 21(3), 161-187. <https://doi.org/10.1177/13582291211025776>
- Hassino, M. (September 20, 2022). [Nothing without us](#) (No. 7) [Audio podcast episode]. In I Am Not Your Refugee. *Open Democracy*.
- Minkiewicz, A., Mirabelli, P., Nosowska, A., & Pelham, L. (n.d.). Equality versus equity: a case study from Poland. *Forced Migration Review*, 72, 20–23.

Narkowicz, K. (2018). 'Refugees Not Welcome Here': State, Church and Civil Society Responses to the Refugee Crisis in Poland. *International Journal of Politics, Culture, and Society*, 31(4), 357–373. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10767-018-9287-9>

Rogers, T. (2021, April 29). Welcome to Germany. *The New York Review of Books*.

Recommended Reading:

Kingsley, P., & Diab, S. (2015, September 4). Passport, lifejacket, lemons: What Syrian refugees pack for the crossing to Europe. *The Guardian*.

Klaus, W., & Szulecka, M. (2023). Departing or Being Deported? Poland's Approach towards Humanitarian Migrants. *Journal of Refugee Studies*, 36(3), 467–488. <https://doi.org/10.1093/jrs/feac063>

Kuzmenko, O., Ryndiuk, D. V., Kozhura, L., Chorna, V., & Tytykalo, R. (n.d.). Legal aspects of temporary protection for Ukrainians in the member states of the European Union. *Juridical Tribune Journal = Tribuna Juridica*, 13(2), 224–240. <https://doi.org/10.24818/TBJ/2023/13/2.04>

Lee, A. C. K., Khaw, F.-M., Lindman, A. E. S., & Juszczak, G. (2023). Ukraine refugee crisis: evolving needs and challenges. *Public Health*, 217, 41–45. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.puhe.2023.01.016>

Module 4: Civil Society and Refugee Protection

Sessions may include:

- The role of NGOs and grassroots organizations in advocating for refugee rights and protection
- Refugee-led initiatives and their contribution to refugee protection
- Challenges faced by civil society actors and strategies for overcoming them
- The potential for grassroots efforts to drive policy changes and social transformation

Required Readings

Barreto, C., Berbée, P., Gallegos Torres, K., Lange, M., & Sommerfeld, K. (2022). The civic engagement and social integration of refugees in Germany. *Nonprofit Policy Forum*, 13(2), 161-174.

Heller, C., & Pécoud, A. (2020). Counting migrants' deaths at the border: From civil society counterstatistics to (inter)governmental recuperation. *American Behavioral Scientist*, 64(4), 480-500. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0002764219882996>

Parekh, S. (2019). Reframing the refugee crisis: From rescue to interconnection. *Ethics & Global Politics*, 12(1), 21-32. <https://doi.org/10.1080/16544951.2019.1577017>

Van Selm, J. (2020). Complementary pathways to protection. *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, 690, 136-152. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0002716220935868>

Module 5: Contemporary Challenges and Future Directions

The final module addresses contemporary challenges and future directions in refugee protection and human rights, including the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and the emerging challenges of climate change and environmental displacement. Students will also reflect on the course's key takeaways and consider prospects for strengthening refugee protection in Central Europe and beyond.

Sessions may include:

- Impact of COVID-19 on Refugee Protection and Human Rights
- Role of technology in supporting refugee protection
- Emerging challenges around climate change and environmental displacement
- Challenges and opportunities for strengthening refugee protection in Central Europe

Required Readings

Butros, D., Brodén Gyberg, V., & Kaijser, A. (2021). Solidarity versus security: Exploring perspectives on climate induced migration in UN and EU policy. *Environmental Communication*, 15(6), 842-856. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17524032.2021.1920446>

Ghezelbash, D., & Tan, N.F. (2020). The end of the right to seek asylum? COVID-19 and the future of refugee protection. *International Journal of Refugee Law*, 32(4), 668-679.

Milazzo, E. (2023). Conclusions: The quest for a democratic compass. In *Refugee Protection and Solidarity*. Oxford University Press.

Norwegian Refugee Council. (2023). The world's most neglected displacement