

Analysis of Migration in the Czech Republic and Security Challenges in the Context of the Current Geopolitical Situation

Josef ŠENK¹, Jana PUPÍKOVÁ^{1*}, Eliška POLCAROVÁ¹

¹Department of Security Management, AMBIS University, Lindnerova 575/1, 180 00 Prague, Czech Republic

Correspondence: *jana.pupikova@ambis.cz

Abstract

The article focuses on the analysis of migration in the Czech Republic from several perspectives. A portion of the analysis is dedicated to illegal migration in the Czech Republic, including its structure, main migration routes, and illegal transit migration. It also examines the administrative expulsion of foreigners from the territory of the Czech Republic during the period under review. A comparative study of migration status in relation to the war in Ukraine has focused on the number of refugees entering the Czech Republic, illegal entries, and legal residence of Ukrainian citizens in the Czech Republic, the impacts of migration on internal security and public order, and the state's approach to migration in connection with the refugee influx.

KEY WORDS: *migration routes; illegal migration; legal residence; administrative expulsion; internal security and public order; refugees from Ukraine; the Czech Republic*

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1. Introduction

Migration can be defined as the movement of individuals or groups, either within a region or country (internal migration) or to another country (international migration) [1]. Together with fertility and mortality, migration is a key element that influences the economy, culture, and society. It is a phenomenon inherent in the history of society, triggered by a range of factors (wars, deep economic crises, scarcity of resources, etc.). These are phenomena that cause fluctuations in society and induce a range of problems related to forced migration and the integration of refugees in the host country [2]. The Czech Republic was the first country of the Visegrad Group to extensively regulate migration (or immigration) since 2000 [3]. It similarly responded to the refugee crisis in 2015. However, the current war in Ukraine is causing continuous and extensive forced migration from Ukraine to Central and Western Europe, which significantly differs from the refugee crisis in 2015 [4]. This situation requires a response not only from individual states but also from European integration groupings. Therefore, on February 8, 2024, a preliminary agreement was approved to support the reform of the European Union (EU) asylum and migration system. The Common European Asylum System (CEAS) [5] should establish minimum standards for handling asylum seekers across the EU, as under the current rules, they are not uniformly treated across the EU. The aim of this reform is to create a common framework that addresses all aspects of asylum and migration management, enhances the efficiency of this system, and its resilience to migration pressures, eliminates factors prompting migration, and better supports the most affected member states.

The present article aims to analyze the legal aspects of migration in the Czech Republic, examine the evolution of migration in light of the situation before the war in Ukraine and currently during it, and outline the state's approaches to addressing illegal migration and the Ukrainian refugee crisis. The article provides a comprehensive and current perspective on illegal migration in the Czech Republic, presenting information in a form and scope previously unavailable in a single study. This research synthesizes multiple aspects of migration dynamics, including the latest statistical data, the impact of global events on the migration situation in the Czech Republic and the effects of policy measures on migration flows. By integrating these diverse elements, the study provides a nuanced understanding of the complexities of illegal migration in the Czech Republic, thereby advancing the scientific discourse in this field.

Data on migration and migration routes were primarily sourced from official documents of the Ministry of the Interior of the Czech Republic, statistics provided by Frontex, and documents from the European Commission's Directorate-General for Migration and Home Affairs.

The migration analysis focuses on the period between 2013 and 2023, concentrating on absolute figures of migrant numbers for individual years. Migration data are analyzed in terms of both immigration to the Czech Republic and transit migration through Czech territory to neighboring countries. The article also broadly addresses the development, impacts, and resolution of the migration wave triggered by Russian aggression against Ukraine in the context of the Czech Republic and the EU.

2. Legal Aspects of Migration in the Czech Republic

Migration inherently involves both immigration and emigration, as each immigrant is simultaneously an emigrant. Unlike terminology commonly used in foreign professional literature and EU documents, the Czech legal framework does not employ the term "immigrant," instead exclusively employing the term "foreigner" [1].

The domain of illegal migration falls within the purview of the Foreign Police of the Czech Republic [6]. Additionally, the Analytical Centre for the Protection of State Borders and Migration (ANACEN), overseen by the Ministry of the Interior, assumes a significant role in monitoring and analyzing migration within the Czech Republic.

The conditions for foreigner entry into Czech territory are shaped by the Schengen Area. Czech state borders, internal to the Schengen Area, are generally accessible to foreigners at any point without border control. However, border controls are enforced solely at external Schengen borders, typically limited to international airports for flights originating outside the Schengen Area. Entry into the Schengen Area for third-country nationals is regulated by the Schengen Border Code [7]. According to this legislation, foreigners must provide proof of identity through valid travel documentation (as stipulated in § 108 and §177 of the Act on the Residence of Foreigners [6]) and undergo border control, which includes completing a border pass (as outlined in § 14 of the Act on the Residence of Foreigners [6]). Entry may be denied based on specific conditions:

1. Lack of a valid travel document, valid for at least 3 months beyond the intended departure date from the Schengen Area and not older than 10 years (excluding individuals under 15 years of age who are listed in the travel document of another person with whom they are traveling).
2. Lack of a short-term visa (if subject to visa requirements), or valid long-term visa, or valid residence permit.
3. Lack of documentation substantiating the purpose of one's stay.
4. Insufficient financial means for the duration of the intended stay and for the return to the country of origin or transit to a third country where their admission is guaranteed; or inability to obtain these means legally.
5. The foreigner is considered a threat to public order, internal security, public health, or international relations of the member states, or is listed in the Schengen Information System (SIS) as a person to be denied entry.

If entry to the territory is denied to a foreigner, they are obliged to return unless prevented by a serious illness or concern for their life. Subsequently, they are escorted back to the border crossing by the police. It is also important to note that the granting of stays in the territory of the Czech Republic falls entirely under the responsibility of the Department of Asylum and Migration Policy of the Ministry of the Interior of the Czech Republic, a responsibility assumed since 2011 when the Immigration Police Service transferred this issue to the ministry due to changes in the Foreigners' Residence Act.

In connection with the armed conflict in Ukraine, triggered by the invasion of Russian Federation forces, the Parliament of the Czech Republic issued a new law [9] regulating the conditions for granting temporary protection to displaced persons from Ukraine and its possible extension (in accordance with implementing decisions of the Council of the European Union [10, 11]), provision of accommodation and related services to persons granted temporary protection, assisted voluntary return, special rules for the provision of health services, and registration of vehicles with Ukrainian license plates. This temporary protection serves as an EU crisis mechanism, activated under exceptional circumstances in the event of a mass influx of persons, aiming to alleviate pressure on the national asylum systems of EU countries and provide collective protection to displaced persons, enabling them to enjoy rights including residence, access to the labor market, housing, medical assistance, social assistance, and access to education for children.

3. Migration Routes

Migrants utilize several routes to travel to Europe, including the Western Balkan route, Eastern Land Borders route, Eastern Mediterranean route, Central Mediterranean route, and Western Mediterranean route, see Fig. 1.

The Western Balkan Route began to gain attention around 2010 as the number of individuals illegally entering Europe began to increase. This route became particularly prominent in 2012 following the relaxation of Schengen visa requirements for countries such as Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Serbia, Montenegro, and North Macedonia. Compared to the Mediterranean routes, this route is considerably safer due to the shorter distance migrants must traverse across the sea. The Western Balkans, due to its geographical location within EU member states, serves as a transit hub and key corridor for migrants heading to the EU, particularly from the Middle East, Asia, and Africa. Many illegal migrants who enter the EU via the Western Balkan route subsequently move to another EU country from the first member state they enter, resulting in a high number of detected illegal migrants and asylum applications in Europe [12]. Since 2015, when the EU recorded a record number of 764,033 illegal border crossings, the trend in illegal migration via the Western Balkan route has been decreasing. However, since 2019, the number of illegal migrants has begun to rise again [13]. In 2022, approximately 330,000 cases of illegal entry were detected at the external Schengen border, representing a 64% increase compared to 2021. The highest

number of illegal entries since 2016 was also recorded. The Western Balkan route was the most burdened migration route to the EU in 2022. A total of 145,600 entries were recorded (a 136% increase). Illegal migrants primarily originated from the Middle East, traveling through Greece and North Macedonia or Bulgaria to Serbia. They then proceeded through Hungary to Austria or through Slovakia and the Czech Republic to Western Europe, especially Germany [14]. In 2023, the migration pressure decreased by approximately 31% compared to 2022 but remained at a high level. There was a high proportion of citizens from Syria, as well as Turkey and Afghanistan. The activity and aggressiveness of smuggling organizations also increased (traffic accidents, clashes with police, loss of lives). After security measures were implemented on Serbian borders at the end of 2023, the migration flow decreased and shifted to other migration corridors [15]. From January to April 2024, 7045 cases of illegal border crossings were recorded, primarily involving migrants from Syria (2698), Turkey (1897), Afghanistan (472), Iraq (250), and Morocco (228) [16].

The Eastern Land Borders route is particularly significant for foreigners arriving from Ukraine into Slovakia, Poland, the Czech Republic, Hungary, and Romania. The notable increase in the number of foreigners along this migration route was attributed to the Russian military aggression in Ukraine after February 24, 2022 [17]. The ramifications of this conflict extend beyond Ukrainian borders and significantly impact European nations, which have accommodated a substantial influx of refugees [18], primarily through this migration route. However, the Eastern Land Borders route is not solely utilized by refugees due to the mentioned war. A certain number of illegal border crossings were also recorded at the borders between Belarus and EU states (Lithuania and later Latvia and Poland), especially in 2021 due to the migration crisis in that region [19]. In 2022, a higher migration pressure was subsequently recorded at certain points along the Lithuanian and Polish borders. A total of 20,480 entry attempts were prevented [14]. Since 2023, migration pressure has slightly decreased; however, cases of entry prevention at the borders between Belarus and EU states continued to be recorded daily. The total number of illegal crossings of the eastern EU border in 2023 was 5,608. Initially, these were primarily citizens of Ukraine, followed by Syria, Iran, Iraq, and Afghanistan. However, since July 2023, there has been a sharp increase in the number of incoming migrants from African and Middle Eastern countries without valid documents at the borders between Finland and Russia. Many migrants unsuccessfully attempted to enter the EU from Belarus before arriving at the Finnish-Russian border [16]. From January to April 2024, 2,102 cases of illegal border crossings were recorded. In addition to migrants from Ukraine (1,918 individuals), Syria, Belarus, and Afghanistan [16].

The Eastern Mediterranean route is observed within the maritime borders of Greece and Cyprus or at the land borders between Greece and Bulgaria. It became the main migration route primarily in 2015 [20]. Migrants utilize this route when traveling to Central Europe, which passes through Turkey to Greece, southern Bulgaria, and Cyprus. In 2018, there was a significant increase in the number of migrants on this route heading towards Greece (a total of 49,158 individuals) [21]. Migration activity on the Eastern Mediterranean route remained high in 2019, especially in the second half of the year. The number of migrants arriving in Greece via this route in 2019 (74,348 individuals) was approximately 47% higher than in 2018 [22]. In 2020, the situation between Turkey and Greece became very tense due to the violation of the agreement established between these states. In the second quarter of that year, activity on this route was very low due to measures related to the COVID-19 pandemic [23]. Arrivals both by sea and land decreased. The most common countries of origin in that year were Afghanistan, Syria, and the Democratic Republic of the Congo [24]. However, migration along this route intensified in the following years. The number of migrants to Greece via the Eastern Mediterranean route since the beginning of 2022 reached 18,788 [17], exceeding the previous year's count of 8,803 individuals by 105% [25]. The total number of unauthorized migrants in 2023 reached 48,404 individuals [26]. In the first quarter of 2024, 17,315 cases of illegal border crossings were recorded. These mainly involved migrants from Syria (5,941), Afghanistan (4,948), Egypt, Turkey, and Eritrea [16].

The Central Mediterranean route has long been the busiest route across the Mediterranean. The route extends from the western part of Libya to mainland Italy or the island of Sicily. The journey continues through the inland regions of Italy to the borders with Austria and then to the migrants' final destinations. Studies indicate that the Mediterranean route is the most dangerous migration route, with a consistently high number of fatalities. Unlike other Mediterranean routes or the Western Balkan route, the Central Mediterranean route differs in the extensive representation of nationalities. Consequently, the main characteristic of this route is a wide spectrum of migrating individuals. The numbers of individuals arriving in Italy have significantly increased in recent years, despite measures taken to combat the spread of COVID-19. In 2021, nearly twice as many migrants arrived in Italy (66,752 individuals) [19] compared to 2020 (34,133 individuals) [24] and almost six times more than in 2019 (11,487) [22]. In 2023, a total of 157,314 individuals arrived illegally in Italy, roughly 50% more than in 2022 (105,131 individuals). Since the beginning of 2024, there have been 16,068 cases of illegal border crossings recorded. These mainly involved migrants from Bangladesh (3,400), Syria (2,501), Tunisia, Guinea, and Egypt [16].

The Western Mediterranean route, originating from North Africa, serves as a key pathway for migrants seeking entry into Spain, both by sea and overland. Its popularity has varied over the years, often influenced by border control policies. In 2018, it became the most utilized route to Europe, with nearly 64,427 refugees arriving in Spain, marking a 131% increase from the previous year [21]. However, in 2019, the number of illegal migrants decreased significantly, attributed to joint efforts by Morocco, Spain, and the EU (32,492 individuals, representing a year-on-year decrease of 50.3%) [22]. In 2020, there was a slight increase in illegal migration, totaling 41,925 arrivals in Spain, notably due to a surge in arrivals on the Canary Islands [24]. Throughout 2021, a total of 66,752 individuals arrived in Italy, with an additional 838 migrants arriving in Malta. In 2021, Libya was the main departure point for migrants heading to Italy, accounting for 47% of all migrants, followed by Tunisia (30%) and Turkey (19%) [25]. A significant increase in illegal migration was recorded in 2022 (a total of 105,131 individuals), almost 60% more than in 2021 [17]. The main departure points were again Libya, followed by

Tunisia, Turkey, Lebanon, and Algeria. In 2023, a 50% increase in illegal migration (157,314 individuals) was recorded compared to 2022 [26].

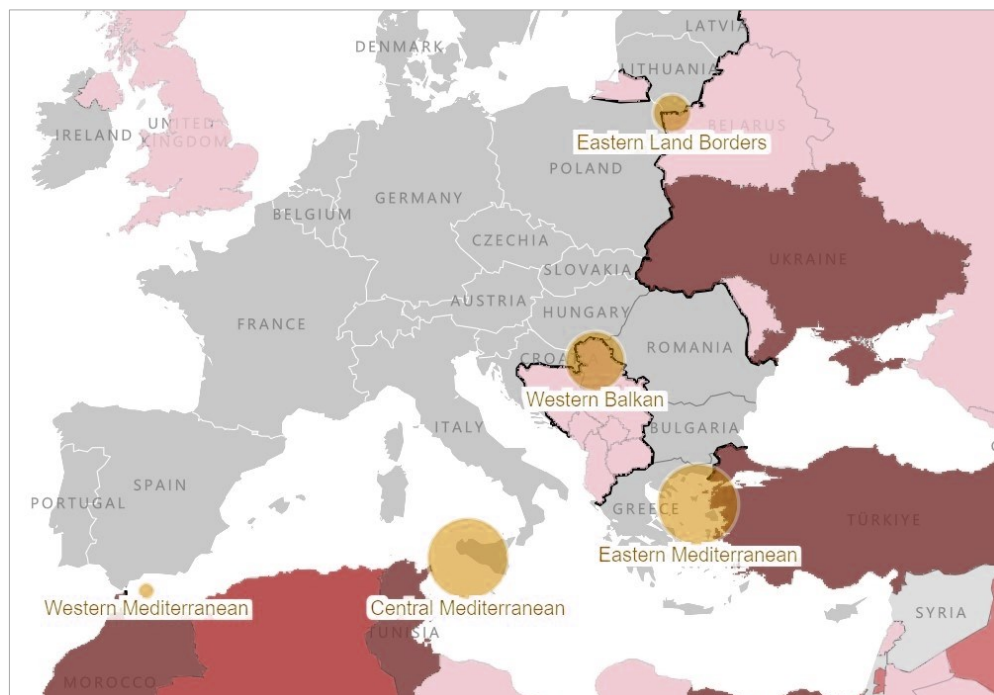


Fig.1. Migration routes to Europe [16]

Migration pressure along this route has significantly intensified since 2021. From January to April 2024, a total of 4,454 cases of illegal border crossings have been recorded, mainly involving migrants from Morocco (2,081), Algeria (1,379), Mali, and Guinea. For many illegal migrants (538 individuals), their origin is unknown [16] (see Fig. 1).

4. The Development of Illegal Migration in the Czech Republic

Illegal migration should be understood not only as unauthorized entry into the territory of the Czech Republic or its unauthorized departure but also as unauthorized presence in the territory of this state or residence contrary to the purpose for which a residence permit was issued. Until 2021, the highest annual number of persons within illegal migration in the Czech Republic was recorded in 2015 (a total of 8,563 persons, representing a year-on-year increase of 77.6%), largely due to the refugee crisis mentioned at the beginning of the article (see Fig. 2). From June 17, 2015, transit illegal migration also began to be statistically recorded within illegal residence (see Fig. 3) [20]. In the following year, illegal migration significantly decreased, but from 2017 onwards, the number of illegal foreigners in the Czech Republic began to slightly increase again. In 2019, a total of 5,677 persons were detected in illegal migration in the territory of the Czech Republic, of which 266 persons were involved in transit illegal migration (4.7%) [22]. In 2020, 7,093 foreigners were detected in illegal migration, the second-highest number since 2008. This was primarily due to the violation of protective measures related to the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic (a state of emergency was declared in the Czech Republic on March 12, 2020, and among the measures taken by the Czech government in this context was the temporary closure of state borders and the introduction of a ban on entry for foreigners into the territory of the Czech Republic) [24]. However, transit illegal migration increased almost twofold year-on-year (approximately 7% of the total illegal migration). The number of illegal entries into the territory of the Czech Republic continued to increase in 2021, reaching a value of 11,170 (a year-on-year increase of 157.5%). The main share was held by foreigners who again did not meet the conditions of stay set in connection with adopted anti-epidemic measures (primarily citizens of Ukraine). Transit illegal migration increased to 12% (1,330 persons) of the total illegal migration [19].

The situation in 2022 was entirely different. A record increase in total illegal migration was recorded, primarily due to an unprecedented number of illegal migrants transiting through the Czech Republic by land or intra-Schengen flights. A total of 29,235 individuals were detected in illegal migration in the territory of the Czech Republic, representing an increase of 161.7% compared to 2021 (18,065 individuals) [19]. Transit illegal migration reached 29,034 individuals, accounting for 99.3% of the total illegal migration in that year. Foreigners entered the territory of the Czech Republic without the necessary documents and mostly without travel documents, with the intention of reaching Germany (or other countries in Western or Northern Europe). Illegal entries into the Czech Republic were primarily by land from Slovakia. Taking necessary measures such as reintroducing border controls on the Slovak borders (more in the Chapter 6) significantly reduced the numbers of detected illegal migrants in illegal migration in the territory of the Czech Republic. Illegal migration across the external Schengen border (attempted or unauthorized crossing of the air border at international airports) accounted for less than 1%

of the total illegal migration (a 40% decrease compared to 2021). This mainly involved intra-Schengen flights from Greece, where foreigners traveled with irregular documents. The most frequently identified nationality of illegal migrants in 2022 (with a 71.8% share of the total number of individuals detected in total illegal migration) were Syrians, showing a significant year-on-year increase of 20,547 individuals. Ukrainian citizens, who reported to the relevant Regional Assistance Centers for Ukraine (abbreviated as KACPU, more in the Chapter 6) or to immigration police offices to legalize their previous illegal stay in the Czech Republic before the outbreak of armed conflict in Ukraine, constituted markedly lower year-on-year numbers of illegal migrants [14]. In 2023, there was a drastic decrease in illegal migration (13,898 individuals), with transit illegal migration accounting for 34% (4,742 individuals) and illegal migration across the external Schengen border accounting for less than 3% (368 individuals) [15].

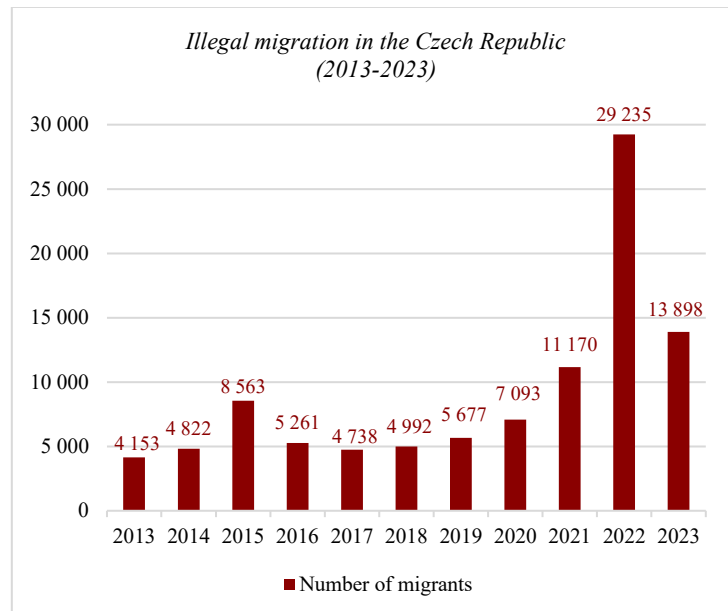


Fig.2. Illegal migration in the Czech Republic [14, 15]

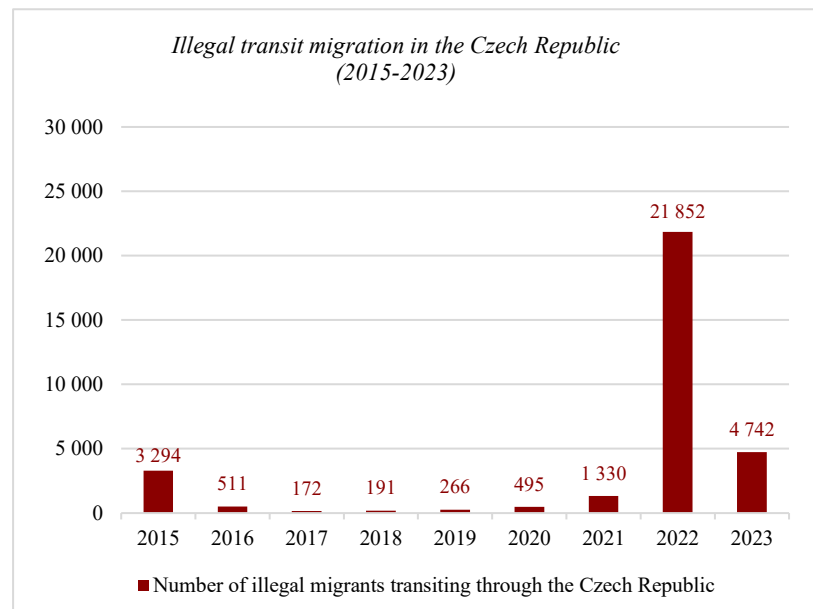


Fig.3. Illegal transit migration in the Czech Republic [14, 15]

A determining factor for many migrants in the Czech Republic is the institution of administrative expulsion. It involves the involuntary termination of a foreigner's stay in the country for sanctioning reasons, governed by the Act on the Residence of Foreigners [6]. The expelled individual is given a specified period to leave the country, during which entry into EU member states is prohibited, as determined by the Czech Police in the expulsion decision. The prevailing reasons for issuing decisions on administrative expulsion during the observed period (2013-2023) include violations of the residence regime, violations of the Employment Act, and non-compliance with decisions on administrative expulsion. The number of

foreigners issued with decisions on administrative expulsion is recorded in the Foreign Information System (a non-public information system managed by the Foreign Police Service of the Czech Republic).

In 2013, decisions on administrative expulsion were issued to a total of 2,020 individuals. The largest group facing administrative expulsion comprised Ukrainian nationals (874 individuals), accounting for 43.3% of the total, followed by individuals from Vietnam, Kuwait, and Russia [27]. In 2014, decisions on administrative expulsion were issued to a total of 2,149 individuals (a year-on-year increase of 6.4%). The most represented group of foreigners were Ukrainian nationals (815 individuals, accounting for 37.9% of the total number of decisions issued), followed by nationals of Libya and Vietnam [28]. In 2015, a significant increase in the number of individuals issued with decisions on administrative expulsion was recorded (3,009 individuals, representing a year-on-year increase of 40%). This increase was primarily due to a higher number of decisions issued to Ukrainian citizens (1,243 individuals, i.e. 41.3% of the total number of such foreigners) and to nationals identified during transit illegal migration, especially Syrians and Vietnamese [20]. In 2016, there were 3,539 decisions on administrative expulsion, marking a 17.6% increase from the previous year. Ukrainian nationals dominated this group, totaling 2,045 individuals, accounting for 57.8% of the total decisions, followed by Moldovan and Vietnamese nationals [29]. In 2017, there was once more a notable rise in decisions on administrative expulsion, affecting 5,119 foreign individuals (a year-on-year increase of 44.6%). The decisions primarily targeted Ukrainian nationals (3,451 individuals), constituting 67.4% of the total, followed by Moldovan and Uzbek nationals [30]. In 2018, decisions on administrative expulsion were issued to a total of 5,713 foreigners (a year-on-year increase of 11.6%), most commonly to citizens of Ukraine (3,856 individuals, representing 67.5% of the total number of decisions issued), Moldova, and Vietnam [21]. In 2019, the highest number of these decisions issued during the entire monitoring period (2013-2023) was recorded, with a total of 7,067 foreigners subject to such decisions (a year-on-year increase of 23.7%). The most represented group of foreigners were Ukrainian nationals (4,631, accounting for 65.6%), followed by Moldova and Vietnam [22].

The decrease in the number of decisions on administrative expulsion occurred only in 2020, during the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic. A total of 6,385 foreigners were subject to this decision (a year-on-year decrease of 9.7%), most commonly citizens of Ukraine (4,233, accounting for 66.3% of the total number of decisions issued), Moldova, and Uzbekistan [24]. In 2021, there was a 21.9% decrease from the previous year, totaling 4,987 individuals facing administrative expulsion, comprising Ukrainian (2,718 individuals), Moldovan, and Syrian citizens. [19].

In 2022, there was a notable rise in both transit illegal migration and administrative expulsion of foreigners from the Czech Republic. A total of 6,449 foreigners faced administrative expulsion, marking a 29.3% increase from the previous year. Among them were 1,960 Ukrainian citizens (30.4%) and 1,382 Syrian citizens (21.4%), representing a more than fivefold year-on-year increase [14]. Alongside the decrease in illegal migration, there was also a decrease in the number of decisions on administrative expulsion in 2023 (5,240, a year-on-year decrease of 18.7%), however, a 154.8% increase was noted among Ukrainian citizens subject to decisions on administrative expulsion (3,034 individuals). Additional decisions were issued mainly to citizens of Moldova, Uzbekistan, and Georgia. The decrease among Syrian citizens was more than tenfold (111 individuals) [15]. Table 1 presents the numbers of foreign nationals most issued administrative expulsion decisions from the Czech Republic between 2013 and 2023, categorized by their country of origin.

Table 1.

Foreign nationals issued administrative expulsion decisions from the Czech Republic, 2013-2023 [14,19-22,24,27-30]

Country of foreign nationals	Year										
	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
Ukraine	874	815	1 243	2 045	3 451	3 856	4 631	4 233	2 718	1 960	3 034
Moldova	67	33	85	295	688	888	1 171	1 050	984	991	742
Russia	106	122	114	116	102	91	69	36	65	43	122
Syria	3	25	237	13	2	7	25	32	245	1 382	111
Georgia	22	15	11	7	18	50	120	121	123	214	135
Uzbekistan	49	43	48	75	179	107	122	125	99	213	137
Afghanistan	9	7	83	9	7	5	14	41	47	104	*
Turkey	13	15	20	16	15	22	19	25	41	434	*
Vietnam	180	152	135	117	114	96	157	116	93	191	94
Morocco	2	2	4	4	4	4	2	34	104	113	*

* Note: no official data has been published yet

5. Foreigners with Legal Residence in the Czech Republic

Regular growth in the number of foreigners residing in the Czech Republic occurred after the economic crisis subsided from 2011 onwards. In 2012, there were 438,213 foreigners recorded, with the following year seeing 441,536 foreigners (including 105,239 individuals of Ukrainian nationality, constituting 23.8%) [27]. As of December 31, 2014, there were 451,923 foreigners with legal residence in the country, comprising 251,342 individuals with permanent residency and 200,581 with temporary residency. Foreigners accounted for approximately 4.4% of the population of the Czech Republic. The largest representation was among Ukrainian nationals (104,388 individuals, constituting 22.3% of all registered foreigners) [28]. In 2015, there were a total of 467,562 foreigners legally residing (for longer than 90 days) in the Czech

Republic, representing a 3.5% increase compared to the end of 2014. Ukrainians accounted for 22.8% (106,019 individuals) [20]. In 2017, there were 526,811 foreigners legally residing (for longer than 90 days) in the Czech Republic, which is a 6.1% increase compared to the end of 2016 (496,413 foreigners). Once again, the largest representation was among Ukrainian nationals (117,480 individuals, constituting 22.3%) [29, 30]. Compared to 2016, the share of Ukrainian nationals from the total number of foreigners remained virtually unchanged (110,245 individuals, constituting 22.2%). As of December 31, 2018, there were a total of 566,931 foreign nationals registered in the Czech Republic, of whom 276,252 had temporary residency and 290,679 had permanent residency. A total of 131,709 individuals from Ukraine were recorded (23.2% of all registered). Among foreigners legally residing in the Czech Republic, citizens of third countries predominated (334,438 individuals, constituting 59%) over citizens of EU, European Economic Area (EEA), and Switzerland (232,493 individuals, constituting 41%) [31].

In 2019, a total of 595,881 individuals of foreign nationality were registered in the Czech Republic, with 295,197 having temporary residency and 300,684 holding permanent residency. Ukrainian citizens accounted for 24.4% (145,518 individuals) [32]. Despite the COVID-19 pandemic, the number of foreigners in the Czech Republic continued to rise. By the end of 2020, a total of 634,790 individuals of foreign nationality were registered in the country, including 165,654 individuals from Ukraine (26.1%) [33]. The number of foreigners in the Czech Republic further increased in 2021. As of December 31, 2021, a total of 660,849 individuals of foreign nationality were registered in the country, comprising 338,957 with temporary residency and 321,892 with permanent residency. Foreign nationals legally residing in the Czech Republic were mainly from third countries (429,881 individuals, constituting 65%), while citizens of EU, EEA, and Switzerland comprised the remaining portion (230,968 individuals, constituting 35%). Within legal migration for this year, 29.8% were Ukrainian nationals (196,875 individuals) [25]. In 2022, a significant year-on-year increase was also recorded among foreigners with permitted residency in the Czech Republic, by 159.4%, see Fig. 4. As of December 31, 2022, a total of 1,116,154 individuals of foreign nationality were registered, with 782,000 having temporary residency and 334,154 having permanent residency [14]. This substantial increase was primarily caused by the high number of Ukrainian citizens (particularly refugees due to the armed conflict in their home country).

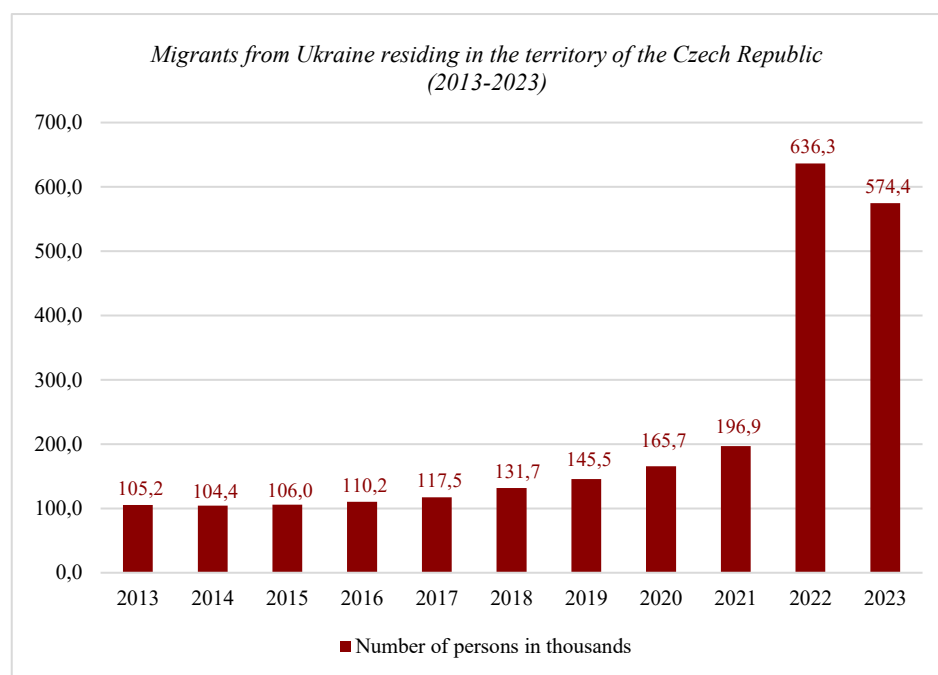


Fig.4. Ukrainian migrants residing in the Czech Republic [14,19-22,24,27-30]

Since the onset of Russian aggression in Ukraine, a total of 473,216 temporary protections were granted in the Czech Republic in 2022. Interestingly, the Czech Republic had the highest number of issued temporary protections in the EU in 2022 per capita. Among Ukrainian citizens, there was a year-on-year increase of 223.2% (636,282 individuals), constituting 57.0% of the total number of legally residing foreigners in the Czech Republic [17]. Among foreigners legally residing in the Czech Republic, citizens of third countries predominated (888,806 individuals, 80%) over citizens of EU, EEA, and Switzerland (227,348 individuals, 20%). By the end of 2023, a total of 1,065,740 individuals of foreign nationality were registered in the Czech Republic, with 341,111 having temporary residency, 349,995 having permanent residency, and 375,021 registered under temporary protection. The significant increase in the number of foreigners in the Czech Republic is primarily attributed to the granting of temporary protection to Ukrainian nationals (574,447 individuals, 53.9% of all registered foreigners in that year) fleeing the war in their country. Among foreigners legally residing in the Czech Republic, citizens of third countries predominated (836,044 individuals, 78%) over citizens of EU, EEA, and Switzerland (229,696 individuals, 22%) [26].

6. The Czech Republic's Approaches to Illegal Migration and Responses to the Ukrainian Refugee Crisis

The approaches of the Czech Republic to addressing illegal migration and responses to the Ukrainian refugee crisis are founded on the Migration Policy Strategy [34]. The main tools employed by the Czech Republic in the realm of preventing illegal migration include effective pre-entry controls, as well as return policies, cooperation with third countries, combating human trafficking, and the detection and rigorous punishment of organizers of illegal migration. Regarding unauthorized residence in the territory of the Czech Republic, the primary tool is primarily the monitoring of foreigners' stays.

In the fight against illegal migration and other transnational criminal activities, emphasis is placed on enhancing activities in controlling illegal crossing of both internal and external borders of the Schengen Area, including thorough cooperation with relevant foreign security forces. Members of the Czech Republic police are deployed in joint operations as part of cross-border and international cooperation efforts.

Continuous police cooperation with neighboring countries prioritizes border law enforcement, particularly through sharing analytical and operational information on foreigner movement and residence across state borders. Border officers implement joint measures aimed at enhancing monitoring of the development of migration routes for illegal migration through controls on designated road and railway corridors. Joint police and customs cooperation centers with neighboring states play a crucial role in this collaboration, especially in gathering information on specific individuals. Direct operational cooperation with the authorities of neighboring states (Slovakia, Germany, Austria, Poland) and Hungary is essential in combating illegal migration (human smuggling, fictitious marriages, abuse of work visas, etc.), cross-border criminal activities (theft of luxury motor vehicles, detection of distributors of narcotics and psychotropic substances, human trafficking, etc.). Further collaborations are established ad-hoc according to current needs. In 2019, a total of 765 joint patrols were conducted by officers of the immigration police departments of regional police directorates with units from neighboring states [22]. In 2020, only 226 joint police patrols were conducted, representing a significant 70.5% decrease compared to the previous year, attributed to measures taken in response to the COVID-19 pandemic [24]. In 2021, only 75 joint patrols were conducted, marking a further 66.8% decrease compared to 2020, mainly due to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, which significantly influenced the global migration situation in all its aspects. The execution of joint patrols was suspended or entirely canceled in most months of 2021[19].

In 2022, EU member states in the Western Balkans recorded the highest volume of secondary movements of illegal migrants since 2017. The heightened migration pressure was primarily attributable to a substantial number of migrants already present in the Western Balkans, with the open visa policies of Western Balkan countries also playing a significant role. In response to the aforementioned surge in illegal migration, increased activity of organized smuggling groups, and the worsening security situation reaching such intensity that alternative measures for ensuring public order and safety proved inadequate, the government of the Czech Republic decided to temporarily reintroduce border controls along the land border with the Slovak Republic (from September 29, 2022, to October 8, 2022) [14]. This decision is grounded in Article 28 of the Schengen Border Code [7]. The reimplementation of border controls was further repeatedly extended by the government (until February 4, 2023) in accordance with the provisions of Article 25 of this code. Since the outset of the reintroduction of controls, the implementation of measures involved collaboration between the Czech Republic Police and the Customs Administration, subsequently supplemented by active-duty military personnel [14]. In November 2022, the issue of increasing illegal migration from the Western Balkans was also addressed at a meeting of the interior ministers of the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Hungary, and Austria, emphasizing the need to harmonize the visa policies of Western Balkan countries with the EU. In its capacity as the Presidency of the EU Council, the Czech Republic led ministerial discussions within the EU-Western Balkans forum for justice and home affairs, focusing on enhancing cooperation in the Western Balkans regarding border management, operational partnerships against human trafficking, alignment of visa policies with the EU, and the necessity to continue developing relationships with Western Balkan partners [14]. On December 5, 2022, the European Commission presented the EU Action Plan for the Western Balkans [35], outlining operational measures to strengthen partnerships with Western Balkan countries. This partnership facilitates the alignment of local systems with EU standards and is crucial due to the perspective of Western Balkan countries' accession to the EU. In 2022, 466 officers of the Czech Republic Police were deployed in joint operations under the Bilateral Police Cooperation in Western Balkan countries. Officers operated in North Macedonia and Hungary, intercepting over 39,000 illegal migrants. In 2023, 299 officers were deployed, intercepting nearly 21,000 illegal migrants [15, 36].

As part of international cooperation, the Czech Republic Police also participates in operations conducted by the European Border and Coast Guard Agency (FRONTEX), which supports EU member states and Schengen associated countries in managing the external borders of the EU and combating cross-border crime. In 2021, the European Border and Coast Guard Standing Corps (EBCG SC) was deployed for the first time as a permanent unit, serving as the uniformed service and operational component of the EU, to which member states are obligated to contribute a specified number of personnel. The Czech Republic fulfilled its commitment, and its national team within the EBCG SC currently comprises 252 police officers. In 2022, a total of 161 police officers were deployed in joint operations under this unit, and in 2023, 146 police officers were deployed [15, 36].

Regarding the response to the Ukrainian refugee crisis, in 2022, the Czech Republic, along with the unity of EU member states, faced challenges in addressing the impacts of the Russian invasion of Ukraine and had to contend with significant migration pressure, which experienced rapid growth again after relatively calm years during the COVID-19

pandemic. A pivotal point of assistance became the discussion on the historic first activation of the Temporary Protection Directive [10], enabling EU member states to cope with the influx of newcomers. Following the offer of temporary protection to those fleeing the war in Ukraine, the EU and EEA countries recorded over 5 million registrations of this type of protection in the first quarter of 2023. The highest number of overall registered temporary protections as of December 31, 2023, was noted in Germany (1,251,245), Poland (954,795), and the Czech Republic (375,021). In the Czech Republic, a total of 581,077 temporary protections were granted from the beginning of the conflict (February 24, 2022) until December 31, 2023 [26]. From this perspective, the coordination of aid and discussions on financial support to the most affected member states at the EU level were also absolutely crucial. The Ministry of the Interior of the Czech Republic succeeded in negotiating financial assistance amounting to 670 million CZK from the Asylum, Migration, and Integration Fund [37]. Similar assistance was obtained by Poland, Slovakia, Hungary, and Romania [14].

The exceptional nature of the situation can also be seen in the deployment of Czech Republic Police officers to Slovakia during the peak of the refugee wave from Ukraine (March to June 2022). Four Czech police contingents totaling 210 officers were dispatched to Slovakia. Their primary tasks at the border crossings between Slovakia and Ukraine mainly included assisting with traffic coordination, migration flow management, providing support during identity document checks, and inspecting cargo spaces of transportation vehicles [36].

In the Czech Republic, Regional Assistance Centers for Ukraine (abbreviated as KACPU) were also established to aid war refugees. These centers provide administrative assistance through representatives from the Department for Asylum and Migration Policy, insurance companies, the Foreign Police, and interpreters [38]. Additionally, they offer humanitarian aid and all necessary provisions for accommodation. Simultaneously, the National Assistance Center for Assistance to Ukraine was established to coordinate integration and humanitarian activities in the regions. An official web portal (<https://frs.gov.cz/>) was also created for foreigners who wish to live or are living in the Czech Republic, providing information and forms for their legal entry and stay in the country.

Equally crucial were non-governmental non-profit organizations (diocesan and archdiocesan charities, integration centers, charitable foundations, regional branches of the Czech Red Cross, etc.), which implemented numerous projects to support the integration and adaptation of Ukrainian refugees in the Czech Republic.

7. The Impact of Migration on Internal Security and Public Order

Illegal migration is a phenomenon that can significantly threaten internal stability and security in destination countries. Therefore, addressing illegal migration is a crucial aspect of the Czech Republic's migration policy. The impact of migration on internal security and public order in the Czech Republic is evident from the necessity of temporarily reintroducing border controls along the internal Schengen border with Slovakia. This is not only due to increased activity of organized smuggling groups but also to growing aggression from smugglers, leading to traffic accidents, clashes with the police, and sadly, loss of life. The deterioration of the migration and security situation at the external borders of the Schengen area is also visible.

The influx of migrants into the Czech Republic, exemplified by the Ukrainian war crisis, has implications for its citizens. While a wave of solidarity emerged, accompanied by a long-term governmental initiative to support Ukraine, varying opinions on the extent and manner of assistance have surfaced. Research [39, 40] by the STEM Analytical Institute indicates that the Czech public tends to be conservative and resistant to change, reflected in their attitude toward migration. Only 53% of citizens view allowing Ukrainian refugees to stay in the Czech Republic as appropriate.

In recent years, resistance to immigrants has emerged as a significant threat to democracy not only in the Czech Republic but also in many countries, where it has undermined or could potentially undermine the proper functioning of democratic institutions [41].

A more restrictive immigration policy could potentially subject immigrants to unfair exclusion. However, it is also necessary to consider that immigration encompasses not only the process of settling migrants but also their interaction with the host society [41]. It is thus a two-way process, with subsequent integration of migrants entering various societal domains, including employment, education, health, civil rights, social welfare, and family [42]. On the other hand, if immigration were left unregulated, it could undermine democratic foundations or even lead to democratic failure. This presents a challenging ethical dilemma that cannot be easily resolved [43].

8. Conclusions

Migration represents a complex phenomenon with significant legal, economic, and societal implications. Migration routes to Europe are dynamic. The Western Balkan route remains the busiest, although there was a slight decrease in 2023. The Eastern Land Borders route is primarily affected by refugees from Ukraine. The Eastern Mediterranean route is experiencing an increase in activity following the COVID-19 pandemic-induced slowdown. The Central Mediterranean route, extending from Libya to Italy, is characterized by its diversity of migrant nationalities and continues to be the most perilous, with a consistently high fatality rate. Despite measures to combat COVID-19, this route has seen a substantial increase in migrant arrivals in recent years, with numbers in 2023 reaching 157,314, a 50% increase from 2022. The Western Mediterranean route, primarily used for entry into Spain, has experienced fluctuations in popularity influenced by border control policies. After becoming the most utilized route in 2018, it saw a significant decrease in 2019 due to collaborative efforts between Morocco, Spain, and the EU. However, migration pressure along this route has intensified since 2021. Each

route has its specific challenges and trends that change depending on the geopolitical situation, security measures, and socioeconomic factors in migrants' countries of origin.

The dynamics of illegal migration in the Czech Republic have exhibited significant fluctuations over the past decade, influenced by various factors including geopolitical events, policy changes, and global crises. The year 2015 marked a peak in illegal migration due to the European refugee crisis, followed by a decline and subsequent gradual increase from 2017 onwards. The COVID-19 pandemic in 2020 led to a spike in illegal migration, primarily due to violations of pandemic-related border restrictions. However, the most dramatic change occurred in 2022, with an unprecedented surge in transit illegal migration, accounting for 99.3% of total illegal migration. In response to this situation, various measures were implemented, including the temporary reintroduction of border controls with Slovakia, participation in joint operations within the EU framework, and international cooperation. The implementation of border control measures proved effective in significantly reducing illegal migration numbers. In the current year, the Czech Republic faced increased migratory pressure, particularly in connection with the refugee crisis from Ukraine. The Czech Republic actively responded to the Ukrainian refugee crisis by providing temporary protection and establishing Regional Assistance Centers for Ukrainian. Many Ukrainians also took advantage of the opportunity to legalize their previous illegal residence in the territory of the Czech Republic. Despite this, Ukrainians constituted the largest group of foreigners issued with administrative expulsion orders (over 30% of the total number of decisions issued that year).

Coordination at the EU level played a key role, including the activation of the temporary protection directive and financial support for the most affected member states. Non-governmental organizations also played a significant role in supporting the integration of Ukrainian refugees. The Czech legal framework has been continuously adapting to the changing migration landscape, with EU membership and participation in the Schengen Area playing crucial roles.

The Czech Republic has experienced a significant transformation in its foreign resident population, largely due to the Russian aggression in Ukraine. In 2022, the country granted the highest number of temporary protections per capita in the EU, with 473,216 issued. This led to a dramatic increase in the Ukrainian population, which grew by 223.2% year-on-year, constituting 57.0% of all legally residing foreigners in the Czech Republic. By the end of 2023, the foreign national population in the Czech Republic reached 1,065,740, with a majority under temporary protection or residency status. Ukrainian nationals, fleeing the war, accounted for 53.9% of all registered foreigners. This influx has shifted the demographic landscape, with third-country nationals now comprising 78% of legally residing foreigners, compared to 22% from EU, EEA, and Switzerland. These figures underscore the Czech Republic's significant role in providing humanitarian support during the Ukrainian crisis. They also highlight the need for comprehensive integration policies and infrastructure to accommodate this rapid demographic change. The situation presents both challenges and opportunities for the Czech Republic in terms of social cohesion, economic integration, and long-term population dynamics.

In summary, illegal migration poses a complex challenge with far-reaching implications for the internal security and stability of destination countries. In combating illegal migration, it is necessary to focus on new trends in transit illegal migration and coordinate security measures across the entire territory of the Czech Republic. Facilitating legal migration enables the reduction of illegal migration and associated risks, including enhanced control and registration of incoming foreign nationals. Furthermore, within the context of international relations, it strengthens diplomatic ties between countries and promotes global cooperation in this field. The Czech Republic must strike a delicate balance between safeguarding its borders and democratic values while ensuring equitable treatment for legal immigrants. Effective resolution necessitates international cooperation, robust integration policies, and open dialogue with the public. Only a balanced approach to migration can ensure long-term societal stability and prosperity. The results of the conducted analysis can serve as a basis for the development and improvement of migration issue resolution in the future.

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