Illegal Migration across the Czech State Border "before the Schengen" (… apprehended migrants in Czech detention centers)

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Nelegální migrace přes českou státní hranici "před Schengenem" (… zadržení migranti v českých detenčních centrech)

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Abstract

The main aim of this study is to shed light on a phenomenon of migrants´ illegal crossing of the Czech state border, to enrich official statistics by own empirical research. One specific data set providing information about who was going to cross, or, has already crossed, the Czech state border, and how, is used and analysed. The article offers the results of a questionnaire survey carried out with 99 illegal migrants who tried or successfully completed crossing of the Czech (and sometimes other) state border(s), were apprehended by the Czech Police and held in detention centres. The results tell us that those who arrived to Czechia illegally have some specific characteristics and behavioural models vis-a`-vis those who came to the country legally. Authors believe that despite joining the "Schengen Agreement" in December 2007 and, thus, abolishing the "classical outer state borders" of Czechia, such analytical experience is worth "testing" now in other European Union (EU) Central/Eastern European countries that border on the "third-country world".

Keywords: Czechia, illegal migrants, detention centres, crossing the Czech state border, questionnaire

Abstrakt

Hlavním cílem této práce je osvětlit fenomén nelegálního překročení české státní hranice migranty a obohatit oficiální statistiky o vlastní empirický výzkum. Vzniklý datový soubor zde analyzovaný poskytuje unikátní informace o tom, kdo a jak chtěl hranici překročit nebo již hranici překročil. Příspěvek tak poskytuje výsledky dotazníkového šetření

provedeného s 99 migranty, kteří se pokusili nebo již úspěšně dokonali přechod české (a někdy i jiné) státní hranice a byli zadrženi Policií ČR a poté umístěni do detenčních center. Výsledky analýzy ukazují, že migranti, kteří se dostali do Česka nelegálně mají některé specifické vlastnosti a modely chování ve srovnání s migranty, kteří přišli do země legálně. Autoři se domnívají, že i přes připojení se k "Schengenské dohodě" v prosinci 2007, kdy došlo k faktickému zrušení "klasické vnější státní hranice" Česka, je přínosné i nyní analyzovat obdobně dané migrační procesy také v dalších zemích EU regionu střední a východní Evropy, které hraničí s tzv. "třetími zeměmi".

Klíčová slova: Česko, nelegální migrace, detenční centra, přechod české státní hranice, dotazník

This paper is structured in two main parts. It starts with a brief introduction where importance of the topic is presented and justified. The second part concentrates on our own quantitative empirical survey (a questionnaire) which involved respondents in Czech detention centres. The conclusion summarizes the main results and suggests directions for further research and possible use of the results.

Introduction

Illegal migration movements[1] including those in Europe are increasing over time and, at the same time, are one of the most rapidly growing migratory forms in the world today (Düvell 2006). These movements are triggered by myriads of factors whilst economic and political ones seem to be the most important. Migrants often come to Europe illegally from regions that are not geographically distant whilst the influence of colonial history is mirrored in migratory relations between countries of origin and destination (Jandl 2007). Many of those migrants come from Central and Eastern European countries. Illegal migration flows match migratory systems that were established in Europe after the Second World War. Due to deep societal changes, however, migratory systems (and subsystems) in the south and east of the continent have been reshaping. These changes affect Italy, Spain and Greece, but also Central and Eastern European countries that joined the EU in 2004 and 2007. This allowed the opening of an "eastern access channel". It has had a new and significant influence on the nature and make-up of illegal migration and migrants´ irregular activites throughout Europe. Various mechanisms are used to enter a destination country and its labour market – be it private or smugglers´ cross-border networks, ethnic immigrants´ institutions, recruitment agencies or individuals who themselves organize immigrants. Mediating jobs for irregular migrants via various subjects that also often exploit them (including real criminals) is not exceptional. Many migrants misuse the asylum regime that helps them to operate easily in a destination or transit country, at least for some time. It seems that as a whole the structure of all irregular migrants in Europe is greatly diversified. What they do have in common are the sectors in which they are involved: mostly unattractive jobs/types of work, demanding, some even dangerous and not well paid (see Drbohlav 2008). Obviously, there is relationship between irregular migrants and seasonal work. As far as irregular migrants´ spatial concentrations are concerned, there is a clear migratory preference for major cities, European global cities and ports, due to their strong economic and political ties to "the World" (generally more work opportunities) and because of networks of already established migratory communities. Who comes? Mainly younger migrants between 20 and 40 years old, with a low level of education, often with the support of friends and family are on the move. The proportion of females among those who illegally cross borders has been growing (see more in Drbohlav 2008). Data or generally statistics on those migrants (including trafficking and smuggling) - are rare and imperfect. Mostly such data (rather estimates/guesstimates) is based on unpublished sources, often trivial presumptions and supported by empirical findings that are mostly only partial and are far from covering the complexity of the phenomenon.

What is the situation in the Czechia with respect to illegal migration movements and those who are in irregular position? Although Czechia joined the "Schengen Agreement" on December 21st, 2007 and its borders were thus somewhat dissolved away, there is a basis for this research into these phenomena. First, there were some studies

done mainly on a client system and trafficking in human beings (see more in Drbohlav 2008). Furthermore, other studies tackled illegal and/or irregular migration movements and related issues in Czechia in a more complex way – see Drbohlav (2008), Drbohlav, Janská (2009), Drbohlav, Medová (2010), Kubát (2012), Drbohlav, Štych, Dzúrová (2013). Despite this, there are still many questions which wait for answers.

The knowledge we gained from the research done below cannot be directly used in practice in the environment where it originated (in Czechia), anyways, it brings new facts and „directions" which contribute to mapping and understanding what is going on in the field of illegal crossing the state borders and migrants´ irregular economic activities. In fact, this contribution should be understood as a sort of a follow-up to the previous study (Drbohlav, Štych, Dzúrová 2013) where we tackled the illegal migration issues in Czechia through analyzing three specific and different databases. Here we decided to make use of another specific database. Hence, while also asking different research questions we elaborated on the same "general issue" but from another angle and perspective (see more below). Moreover, such research activities widens the horizons of understanding of this field in the Central Europe region too (see also Neske 2006, Bilger, Hofmann, Jandl 2004, Neske, Doomernik 2006)."Research of this type, however, should not generally contribute only to building new barriers. We recognize that improving the situation often calls for more than just strengthening restrictions, oppression, or the militarization of borders ... the path to success in the struggle against unauthorized migration must also lead to proactive approaches on the part of destination countries" ... (Drbohlav, Štych, Dzúrová 2013).

Own empirical research and its principal aims

Below we present an empirical investigation materialized via a questionnaire survey. The main research goal was to ascertain whether immigrants entering Czechia illegally are in some ways different from those who entered legally, in most cases on tourist visas (although following the expiration of their visas they often continue to reside or irregularly work, or try to illegally leave the country further "to the west"). The key question was – Why do some migrants choose difficult and often dangerous illegal route across the green border when one could get into Czechia relatively easily via official channels? What is behind this behaviour?

The questionnaire survey – its design and applied research methods

Data were obtained from our own survey in April 2006 among migrants detained by Czech authorities (or in some cases by the authorities of neighbouring countries) and held in two Czech detention centres located in the village of Velké Přílepy (near Prague, Central Bohemia region) and Poštorná (in South Moravia). Those migrants were detained since they illegally crossed or attempted to illegally cross the Czech state border and, moreover, some of them, consequently, also stayed in irregular position in Czechia. The organization of investigations was accomplished in collaboration with relevant bodies of the Ministry of the Interior that also administer the detention centres. Own research, however, was done independently, and migrants-respondents were clearly told that the research team has its "academic goals" and it has absolutely no relationship to the Ministry of the Interior or to any other state bodies.

To disclose and analyse links in illegal boundary crossings, a questionnaire consisting of 34 questions was prepared. It mapped out reasons for respondents leaving their home countries and the means by which they arrived in Czechia, and also looked at the conditions of the migrants' lives (stressing their economic engagement) in their new country. In this contribution we focus particularly on data describing illegal border crossings and some related facts. All those staying in these two centres who had tried to illegally cross the Czech state border in their respective "migratory histories" – either successfully or unsuccessfully – were asked to take part in the research on a voluntary basis[2]. 99 respondents were contacted successfully in the two detention centres, representing 38% of all those migrants detained in the two centres at that time.

The individual data of respondents were categorized according to whether they had crossed the Czech state borders legally or illegally, according to age (two age categories – up to 30 years and 31 years and over), according to level of education (into 3 education levels – basic, secondary and university) and according to marital status (into 3 categories – single, married and other).

We used descriptive and multivariate analyses. Crosstabs's statistics was applied (associations were computed for two-way tables). The nominal variable is the declared opinion as to how foreigners living in Czechia should behave and thus the Chi-Square test, Asymp. Sig. (2-sided) method was used within the bounds of the Crosstabs's statistics. The migrants' characteristics were analyzed via a multivariate statistical method - the logistic regression. It is a variation of ordinary regression where the dependent variable is a dichotomous variable (takes only two values, coded as 0 – legally or 1 - illegally) and the independent (input) variables are continuous or categorical. Logistic regression produces Odds Ratios (OR) associated with each predictor value. The OR for a predictor is defined as the relative amount by which the odds of the outcome increase (OR ? 1.0) or decrease (OR < 1.0) when the value of the predictor variable is increased by 1.0 units.

Results

As mentioned above, the data file was divided into two groups (Table 1). The first group was defined on the basis of the non-legal method of crossing the Czech state border. 22 persons had crossed the border illegally, most often either hidden in a motor vehicle (46% cases), with a smuggler across the green boundary (36%), or crossing the green border independently (18%). The second group of respondents, 77 persons, entered Czechia legally, most with a valid tourist visa (61%). 17% migrants also came legally and immediately requested political asylum.

	Categorization by 2 groups:					
Types of the crossing	Illegal		Legal		Total	
	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%
Organized illegal transport across a border in a car/truck	10	45.5	0	0	10	10.1
illegally smuggled by a smuggler via a "green border"	8	36.4	0	0	8	8.1
Illegally went (alone) across a "green border"	4	18.2	0	0	4	4.0
With fake documents	0	0	2	2.6	2	2.0
Legally - with a valid tourist visa	0	0	47	61.0	47	47.5
Legally with a temporary stay visa	0	0	7	9.1	7	7.1
Legally - with other type of visa and immediately asked for asylum	0	0	13	16.9	13	13.1
Other ways	0	0	8	10.4	8	8.1

Total	22	100	77	100	99	100

Table 1: Respondents by (il)legality of the crossing the Czech state border when entering the country by types of crossing the border (N=99) (source: own survey)

With respect to the reasons for their being in detention both groups compared showed significant statistical variations (the Pearson Chi-Square test, Sig.=0.007). Those respondents who had crossed the state border illegally were, logically, in detention mainly for irregular residence (57%) or for illegal border trespass (33%). In other words, this means that many were successful in crossing illegally into Czechia. Among respondents who had entered the country legally the prevailing reason for detention was irregular stay (85% cases; Table 2).

	Crossing borders		
Reason	Illegal	Legal	Total
	%	%	%
Irregular stay	57.1	85.3	79.2
Apprehended when illegally crossing the state border	33.3	6.7	12.5
Irregular work	0	2.7	2.1
Other reasons	9.5	5.3	6.3
Total	100	100	100

Table 2: Respondents by (il)legality of the crossing the Czech state border when entering the country by reasons for which they had to stay in the detention centres (N=99) (source: own survey)

It seems that the most frequent section for illegal crossing is the Czech-Polish state border followed by the Czech-Slovak and the Czech-German ones. However, this data is significantly fragmentary since, for instance, this question was answered only by the third of those in the group of so-called "illegals".

Table 3 shows the important spread of respondents into the two groups according to their citizenship. Overall Ukraine was the dominant country of origin while two main source regions are clearly indicated: Ukraine and other European post-Soviet countries (Belarus and Moldova), and Asian countries (Vietnam, China and Mongolia). The third region, though hidden in the category "other", includes countries like Bangladesh, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, as well as Georgia and Kyrgyzstan, the citizens of which dwelled in India for a considerable period of time prior to their migratory pilgrimage.

	Crossing borders					
Citizenship	Illegal		Legal		Total	
	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%
Ukraine	6	27.3	50	64.9	56	56.6
Belarus	2	9.1	7	9.1	9	9.1

Moldova	0	0	1	1.3	1	1.0
Russia	2	9.1	1	1.3	3	3.0
Vietnam	4	18.2	4	5.2	8	8.1
China	2	9.1	2	2.6	4	4.0
Mongolia	1	4.5	5	6.5	6	6.1
Other	5	22.7	7	9.1	12	12.1
Total	22	100	77	100	99	100

Table 3: Respondents by (il)legality of the crossing the Czech state border when entering the country by their citizenship (N=99) (source: own survey)

From the perspective of respondents' demographic structure, the entire sample, as well as both monitored groups, consisted primarily of men. However, the age differed significantly between the two groups (Pearson Chi-Square test, Sig.<0.001): respondents who had crossed illegally were particularly younger persons (81% were in the under 30 years age group) while those in the second group were considerably older (61% were in the over 31 group). With respect to marital status further statistical differences were confirmed between the parallel groups (Pearson Chi-Square test, Sig.=0.047) since respondents who had entered illegally were (also according to their age) mostly single (64%) while respondents who had entered legally were evenly spread across all three categories of marital status. On the base of the highest level of education the two groups of respondents varied significantly, too (Pearson Chi-Square test, Sig.=0.014), since respondents who had crossed the border illegally were almost exclusively persons with lower than university education (see all in Table 4).

	Crossing borders					
	Illegal		Legal		Total	
	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%
Sex						
Males	19	86.4	57	74.0	76	76.8
Females	3	13.6	20	26.0	23	23.2
Age						
-30	18	81.8	30	39.0	48	48.5
31+	4	18.2	47	61.0	51	51.5
Marital status						
Single	14	63.6	26	34.2	40	40.8

Married	4	18.2	25	32.9	29	29.6
Other	4	18.2	25	32.9	29	29.6
Educational level					
Basic[1]	9	40.9	15	20.3	24	25.0
Secondary	12	54.5	34	45.9	46	47.9
University	1	4.5	25	33.8	26	27.1
TOTAL	22	100	77	100	99	100

[1] Including uncompleted basic education and vocational training.

Table 4: Respondents by (il)legality of the crossing the Czech state border when entering the country by sex, age, marital status and educational level (N=99) (source: own survey)

Table 5 shows adjusted odds ratios for illegal crossing of the Czech border by sex, age, marital status and educational level. After simultaneously controlling for 4 covariates, the effects of age and educational level were detected. The odds ratio of illegal crossing was 5.22 (95% CI 1.43-19.01) for immigrants aged under 30 years compared to immigrants aged 31 or over, and it was 13.17 (95% CI 1.35-128.65) for immigrants with primary education compared to those with university education. To sum up, using this method it has been confirmed that illegal crossing of the Czech state border was significantly higher among younger migrants (younger than 30 years) and migrants with a basic level of education. The effect of sex and marital status was less pronounced.

	Dependent variable: Illegal crossing – Yes = 1/No = 0				
		Sig.	95.0% C.I.for EXP(B)	
Characteristics (independent)			Lower	Upper
Age				
-30	**5.219**	**0.012**	**1.433**	**19.012**
31+ (referent)	1			
Sex				
Males	1.588	0.565	0.328	7.684
Females (referent)	1			
Marital status				
Single	1.940	0.403	0.411	9.163

Married	1.544	0.633	0.260	9.172
Other (referent)	1			
Educational level				
Basic	**13.167**	**0.027**	**1.348**	**128.654**
Secondary	7.383	0.070	0.850	64.129
University (referent)	1			

Table 5: Odds ratios (OR) and 95 percent confidence intervals (CI) for demographic predictors of illegal crossing the Czech state border among respondents (N=99) (source: own survey)

In considering differences in the ability to speak Czech it became clear that there is a significant statistical difference between the groups compared. Respondents crossing the Czech state borders illegally assessed their ability to speak Czech on average as 2.39 (on a scale from 1 = not speaking at all to 5 = speaking without any difficulty), i.e. their language knowledge and skills were significantly worse than in case of the second group where the average was 3.15 (the Pearson Chi-Square test Sig.=0.031).

An analogous method was used to test respondents' self-assessment of their state of health (also on a scale of 1–5 where 1 = least satisfied and 5 = most satisfied). Calculations proved that both groups of respondents evaluated their health condition entirely consistently, approximately and relatively positively: the average score was 3.68.

It was also considered whether the reasons which drove respondents into Czechia would be significantly different between the two groups (on a scale of 1 = absolutely insignificant reason and 5 = very important reason). The three main reasons were identified, which were economic (low wages, lack of job opportunities, low social security, etc.), political (political instability, poorly developed democracy, etc.) and family (following a family member). The survey showed that on the whole for respondents the most significant reasons for entering Czechia were economic (average 3.95), followed by political reasons (3.60) and the least importance was assigned to family reasons (2.31). In dividing respondents into the two groups, a relatively wide variation of the assessment of importance was identified among respondents who had entered illegally, i.e. from an average of 4.33 for economic reasons to 1.78 for family reasons. In the second group of respondents the variation was narrower, from 3.85 for economic reasons to 2.48 for family reasons. However, the statistical significance of the importance of reasons for arrival in both groups was not shown to be significant.

From the perspective of respondents' experience of working in Czechia (either legally or irregularly) there was no statistically significant difference between the two groups (Pearson Chi-Square test, Sig.=0.109). Among respondents who had crossed the borders illegally before their detention the proportions of persons who had never worked or worked irregularly were approximately equal (47%, respectively 42%) while among persons who had entered legally a slightly higher percentage of respondents had worked irregularly (56%) (see Table 6).

Q21: Type of work before detence:		Q16: Crossing borders		
		Illegal	legal	Total
Didn´t work	%	47.4	22.5	27.8

Irregularly worked	%	42.1	56.3	53.3
Legally worked (with a work permit or a trade license)	%	0	11.3	8.9
Other	%	10.5	9.9	10.0
Total	%	100	100	100

Table 6: Respondents by (il)legality of the crossing the Czech state border when entering the country by type of work before they have been apprehended/detained (N=99) (source: own survey)

Note: 9 respondents with missing data

Overall, 28% of respondents answered the question about where they are likely to go following their release from a detention centre by saying that they would want to return to their home country. On the contrary, 57% of respondents want to stay in Czechia. However, among the group of "illegals" as many as 74% want to stay in Czechia. Similar inclinations in favour of Czechia also resonate in answers to the question where the respondents want to be living and working in several years time (58% of "legals" and 73% "illegals" see their future as within Czechia). 45% from the group of "illegals" would certainly or probably migrate if they were again faced with the decision of whether to do so (50% were undecided), and 59% of "legals" would do the same (30% were undecided).

Conclusions

Our own research – a questionnaire survey of 99 migrants detained and held in Czech detention centres – showed that there are statistically significant differences between immigrants who came to Czechia illegally and those who entered the country in a legal way (with visas and only subsequently broke the law – for instance by irregular residence or work). Those who had entered the country illegally were, in comparison with the second group, significantly younger, more often single and gained significantly lower levels of education, as well as were less able to speak Czech. At the same time, their economic reasons for entering the country were more distinctly crystallized. In comparison with the second group they also link their future lives much more with Czechia.

We know that the presented results suffer from some shortcomings. First, they are based on a non-representative sampling method. Second, one may also question the environment of detention centres where the research was carried out … Moreover, the quantitative analysis is useful but, to some extent, limited. It is necessary to supplement it with the qualitative research in which respondents would be interviewed e.g. about how they actually crossed the border illegally, in what circumstances and what was behind their motivations. Such wider context can be found, for example, in Drbohlav (2008), Drbohlav, Janská (2009), or Kubát (2012). Nevertheless, despite some problematic aspects that come into the play we are convinced that lessons might be learnt from such research activities and applied to many different areas. Anyways, the existing experience of illegal migration movements rather indicates that increasing restrictions and more closely guarded borders cannot stop the migration without being supported by other measures. Rather, it worsens the situation of these migrants, who resort to more sophisticated, expensive and dangerous means of crossing the state borders.

Acknowledgement

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[1] In this article we stick to the term "illegal migration" that is here chiefly connected to illegal crossing of state borders (see also Jandl 2007). On the other hand, migrants who stay in the country without valid documents or perform informal economic activities we call "irregular" ones.

[2] The questionnaire was translated into Russian, English and Vietnamese and took about 30 minutes to complete. Subjects filled in questionnaires in groups in detention centres (a member of the research team was available to explain some questions in more detail) in a separate room without any ministerial officials, policeman or any other employees of the centres. Those detained migrants who were willing to take part in the research were rewarded with a small gift (coffee, cosmetics etc.). The research was anonymous (making it impossible to find out further information about a respondent) and the answers of respondents were used only for this research.

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