

Czech University of Life Sciences Prague

Faculty of Economics and Management

Department of Economics and Management



Bachelor Thesis

**Experiences of Ukrainian Migrant Workers
in the Czech Republic since 2014**

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CZECH UNIVERSITY OF LIFE SCIENCES PRAGUE

Faculty of Economics and Management

BACHELOR THESIS ASSIGNMENT

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Business Administration

Thesis title

Experiences of Ukrainian Migrant Workers in the Czech Republic since 2014

Objectives of thesis

The thesis will look at the experiences of Ukrainian migrant workers in the Czech Republic since the Maidan Uprising of 2014. It will examine changes in the legal frameworks and political attitudes governing migration by Ukrainian workers in this period, and how these were experienced by the migrants themselves. This will include analysis of official statistics regarding the number of Ukrainians working in the Czech Republic, the forms of work and employment (both regular and irregular), their relative incomes, and the role of remittances sent back to Ukraine. It will also involve interviews with Ukrainian migrant workers and case study analysis based on their experiences.

Methodology

The thesis will develop a literature review covering core theories in migration studies related to labour and economic migration and Ukrainian migration to EU and the Czech Republic in particular. It will present and analyse the changing legal framework governing Ukrainian migrants from 2014 to the present, considering it in the light of international standards of migration. It will investigate the experiences of Ukrainian migrants in the Czech Republic using qualitative interviews with migrants and volunteers at a Czech NGO supporting undocumented migrants.

The proposed extent of the thesis

40-50 pages

Keywords

Ukrainian migration, foreign labour law, Czech workforce

Recommended information sources

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- PRÁT, Šárka and BUI, Thu Minh. (2018). A Comparison of Ukrainian Labor Migration in the Czech Republic and Poland. East European Politics and Societies and Cultures 32(4): 767-795.

Expected date of thesis defence

2022/23 SS – FEM

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Prague on 10. 03. 2023

Declaration

I declare that I have worked on my bachelor thesis titled "Experiences of Ukrainian Migrant Workers in the Czech Republic since 2014" by myself and I have used only the sources mentioned at the end of the thesis. As the author of the bachelor thesis, I declare that the thesis does not break copyrights of any their person.

In Prague on 15.03.2023

Acknowledgement

I would like to thank Ph.D., MA Daniel Rosenhaft Swain for his insightful guidance, valuable feedback, and constant support throughout the entire process of writing this thesis. I would also like to express my gratitude to the Ukrainian migrants and the legal counsellor who participated in the interviews and shared details about their personal experiences, as well as the dedicated NGO workers who provide migrants with moral support, assistance with housing and document processes, and tirelessly advocate for their rights. The interviewees' contributions were essential to accurately portraying the events analysed in this study.

Experiences of Ukrainian Migrant Workers in the Czech Republic since 2014

Abstract

This thesis delves into an analysis of the advantages and disadvantages of labour migration through the lens of Ukrainian nationals migrating to the Czech Republic. The study explores the irregular migratory flows that occurred after the revolution of dignity in Ukraine and examines how the Czech Republic responded to such significant waves of migrants. It was essential to examine development of migration in the Czech Republic and its impact on the country's economy and public discourse. The thesis aims to identify the underlying factors that have led to the mass migration of Ukrainian nationals by investigating relevant migration theories, Ukrainian migration history, and political and economic events that have driven this population's desire to leave their home country. The impact of the Maidan uprising on the decision-making process of Ukrainians who were already working and living abroad and changes in the legal framework are also examined through qualitative interviews with Ukrainian migrants and a legal counsellor sharing their firsthand experiences and personal views. Although labour migration is often recognized as a crucial driver of socioeconomic development, it was also important to examine the working conditions of migrants and the practices of employment agencies operating illegally.

Keywords: Ukraine, labour migration development, Czech legal framework, Maidan uprising, asylum process, remittances, foreign workforce, migration crisis, illegal employment.

Zkušenosti ukrajinských migrujících pracovníků v České republice od roku 2014

Abstrakt

Tato práce se zabývá analýzou výhod a nevýhod pracovní migrace optikou ukrajinských občanů migrujících do České republiky. Studie zkoumá nelegální migrační toky, ke kterým došlo po revoluci důstojnosti na Ukrajině, a zkoumá, jak Česká republika reagovala na tak významné vlny migrantů. Zásadní bylo prozkoumat vývoj migrace v České republice a její dopad na ekonomiku země a veřejný diskurz. Práce si klade za cíl identifikovat základní faktory, které vedly k masové migraci ukrajinských státních příslušníků, zkoumáním relevantních migračních teorií, ukrajinskou migrační historií a politickými a ekonomickými událostmi, které vyvolaly touhu této populace opustit svou domovskou zemi. Dopad povstání na Majdanu na rozhodovací proces Ukrajinců, kteří již pracovali a žili v zahraničí, a změny v právním rámci jsou rovněž zkoumány prostřednictvím kvalitativních rozhovorů s ukrajinskými migranty a právním poradcem, který se podělil o své zkušenosti a osobní názory z první ruky. Přestože je pracovní migrace často považována za klíčovou hybnou sílu socioekonomického rozvoje, bylo také důležité prozkoumat pracovní podmínky migrantů a praktiky pracovních agentur působících nelegálně.

Klíčová slova: Ukrajina, vývoj pracovní migrace, český právní rámec, povstání na Majdanu, azylový proces, převod, zahraniční pracovní síla, migrační krize, nelegální zaměstnávání.

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1 Introduction

The phenomenon of migration has long been recognized as a crucial driver of socioeconomic development in countries worldwide; labour migration has become one of the most significant ways a state can reach its maximum economic potential by introducing a new productive population group to the labour market. Labour migration has its advantages and disadvantages that this thesis will explore on the example of Ukrainian nationals migrating to the Czech Republic.

It is crucial to first understand why migration not only influences a chain of events causing certain economy trends in the country but to what reasons we should attribute such massive migratory flows that have taken place in the last three decades in the Czech Republic. This will be explained in a more elaborate description of migration theories and how they manifest themselves in the real-life example of Ukrainian migration following Maidan uprising meltdown. To identify why Czech Republic has become one of the most desired destination countries in the EU, the country's migration development must be investigated, specifically the time frame of events influencing changes in the legal framework (i.e., imposing campaigns of making visa processes more accessible for foreigners) and an analysis of significant irregularities of migrant waves due to multiple economic recessions and the so-called "migration crisis" of 2015. Positive and negative effects on Czech economy caused by international labour migration and reasons behind Ukrainian nationals occupying the secondary economic sector on the job market.

In order to gain a deeper understanding of why Ukrainians have become one of the largest ethnic groups in the Czech Republic, it is necessary to examine the history of Ukrainian migration waves and how political events have impacted both the legal and social frameworks, resulting in various instances of insecurity in the community.

By operating with current data and statistical figures of Ukrainian migrants in the Czech Republic (e.g., number of migrants, types of residencies; their length, number of asylum applications submitted, and remittances sent to Ukraine over the years), it will be possible to observe a current state of Ukrainian migration.

The practical part of the research involved qualitative interviews with Ukrainian migrant workers who shared details about their personal experiences, including the reasons why they migrated and whether it was due to political events in 2014. The interviews provided insightful information supporting the arguments of migration theories and helped

identifying which theories may be most relevant to Ukrainian migration, contributing to a deeper understanding of the phenomenon. The personal and professional experiences shared by the interviewees offered valuable insights into the challenges faced by migrant workers in the Czech Republic, including working conditions and behaviours they have encountered while residing in a foreign country.

While evaluating changes in the social framework of both origin and destination countries, it was vital to observe changes in the legal framework as well. The research included an interview with a legal counsellor who shared his experience working with Ukrainian migrants who were requesting asylum that added a practical aspect to the research. The legal counsellor's interview highlighted the difficulties and complexities involved in navigating the asylum process in the Czech Republic, including long waiting times for decisions and the bureaucratic nature of the process. Overall, the analysis of Ukrainian migration and asylum in the Czech Republic presented in this research provides an understanding of the experiences of Ukrainian migrant workers and the challenges they face in seeking international protection.

2 Objectives and Methodology

2.1 Objectives

The thesis will look at the experiences of Ukrainian migrant workers in the Czech Republic since the Maidan Uprising of 2014. It will examine changes in the legal frameworks and political attitudes governing migration by Ukrainian workers in this period, and how these were experienced by the migrants themselves. This will include analysis of official statistics regarding the number of Ukrainians working in the Czech Republic, the forms of work and employment (both regular and irregular), their relative incomes, and the role of remittances sent back to Ukraine. It will also involve interviews with Ukrainian migrant workers and case study analysis based on their experiences.

2.2 Methodology

The thesis will develop a literature review covering core theories in migration studies related to labour and economic migration and Ukrainian migration to EU and the Czech Republic in particular. It will present and analyse the changing legal framework governing Ukrainian migrants from 2014 to the present, considering it in the light of international standards of migration. It will investigate the experiences of Ukrainian migrants in the Czech Republic using qualitative interviews with migrants and volunteers at a Czech NGO supporting undocumented migrants.

3 Literature Review

3.1 Migration Theories

Migration theories explain the reasoning behind one's choice to relocate, whether it's within the same country or internationally. People tend to have different motivations for such a drastic change and according to the *Routledge International Handbook of Migration Studies* written by Stephanie J. Nawyn and Steven J. Gold, there are six theories of migration that explore contemporary desire to move abroad indefinitely (Gold and Nawyn, 2019).

There are split into two groups: theories of the initiating causes of migration and theories of the self-perpetuating causes of migration (Gold and Nawyn, 2019). Although, the theories do differ in their causes and nature, it is important to note that they corroborate each other and should be viewed as complimentary.

Theories of the initiating causes of migration:

- *Neoclassical theory of migration* is to be analysed in the realm of both micro- and macroeconomics. From a microeconomic perspective, the theory suggests people migrate solely to increase their income and capital, and if it weren't for the differences in wage levels, labour migration would cease to exist, according to the *Synergy of Migration Theories: Theoretical Insights*, Vilmante Kumpikaite and Ineta Zickute concluded that "the main reason of migration is difference in wages" (Vilmante Kumpikaite, 2012). However, taking into consideration the cost of living in the destination country does discourage many to migrate. From the angle of macroeconomics, migration is considered one of the most essential development stages of any country (Hagen-Zanker, 2008). Neoclassical theory explains a long process of initial development stages, surplus labour in the agricultural sector (lack of jobs and low wages compared to a more business-advanced sector) supplies labour to the industry sector thus contributing to the country's development (Gold and Nawyn, 2019). The neoclassical theory of migration has faced valid criticism with respect to its underlying assumption that all migrants possess an equal opportunity to secure suitable employment, without regard for important factors such as age, gender, and educational level (Lendel, 2016).

- The concept of *the New Economics of Labour Migration (NELM)* was originally introduced to explain how migration from rural to urban areas could serve as an additional source of income for households facing economic instability. However, it has since been argued that this theory also applies to international migration (Bloom, 1985). In comparison to the neoclassical theory of migration, NELM acknowledges interpersonal connections with family and friends that have a big impact on a person's decision to migrate and contradicts expectations of a migrant to stay in the destination country permanently (i.e., earning remittances to support the family and going back home (Kazi Abdul Mannan, 2015). NELM offers three hypotheses on determinants of migration assuming households make a collective decision (Gold and Nawyn, 2019):
 - *The insurance hypothesis* suggests that households anticipate unforeseen future events (related to health issues or natural disasters) that might require financial support and an extra source of income (Hagen-Zanker, 2008).
 - *The investment hypothesis* explains how some households cannot afford to expand or open a business and have trouble obtaining loans thus start sending migrants to earn higher income that might cover the costs (Gold and Nawyn, 2019). Remittances received are often invested in the private sector activities (Pieńkowski, 2020).
 - *The relative deprivation hypothesis* affirms that households feeling comparatively less fortunate than migrant households, are incentivized to send their family members abroad in order to earn remittances (Gold and Nawyn, 2019).
- *Segmented/dual labour market theory, SLM* explores social issues like differences in working conditions for certain individuals, low returns to education and workplace discrimination associated with labour migration on a macroeconomic level that result in labour market segmentation (Gold and Nawyn, 2019). Workers are being divided into two sectors: Primary and Secondary. *Primary sector* tends to attract natives by offering career prospects, job security, higher earnings, whereas *secondary sector* is associated with job insecurity, low-skilled, low-wage labour that's considered most suitable for migrant workers (Klimczuk, 2016). Dual labour market theory explains labour division that is being caused by factors such as gender, age, and race (Klimczuk, 2016). It also answers the question of why low-skilled and physically demanding jobs often attract more vulnerable social groups, such as migrants (Kumpikaite, 2012).

Theories about the self-perpetuating mechanisms of migration:

- **Network theory** similar to NELM assumes people stay in touch with their family and friends from their origin area, by experiencing struggles of assimilating and sharing insights on job opportunities, living costs, processes of attaining proper documents, etc., people back home can be influenced to migrate as well (Gold and Nawyn, 2019). Network theory is considered one of many fuels of migration flows, experienced settled migrants inspire doubtful newcomers to migrate, an emotional aspect like a sense of community or volunteered assistance allow new migrants to feel more confident about their decision. Šárka Prát and Thu Minh Bui concluded in *A Comparison of Ukrainian Labour Migration in the Czech Republic and Poland*, “the connection to social networks remains a dominant incentive for migration” (Prát, 2018).
- **Cumulative causation theory** originally coined by Gunnar Myrdal explains how certain events influence changes in other institutions on a larger scale. In terms of migration, *Routledge International Handbook of Migration Studies* offers an example of how families with a new source of income (i.e., remittances sent from destination area) make their economic status stand out compared to other “non-migrant households” which results in more households participating in migration (Gold and Nawyn, 2019). Jessica Hagen-Zanker argues that “once migration is in place, it sustains itself”, when more and more people start migrating, social framework changes with migration becoming an ordinary practice, migrants themselves reduce living costs for future migrants, send money back home, in essence, finance their friends and family’s big move thus contributing to migration expansion (Hagen-Zanker, 2008).
- **Institutional theory** assumes migration leads to development and creation of more institutions (both public and private) in the country (Wimalaratana, 2016). Migration leads to institutional development, for example, countries preventing

migrants to relocate by imposing restrictive laws encourage migrants to obtain false documents and stay in the country illegally, therefore it creates a new “underground institution” (Gold and Nawyn, 2019). However, the creation of additional institutions does not always have to negatively impact communities; it can also lead to the formation of migrant institutions that allocate financial resources to contribute to the country's economic development (Wimalaratana, 2016). Such institutions are on a spectrum that ranges from government-funded organizations and humanitarian NGOs to illegal temporary employment agencies (Hagen-Zanker, 2008).

3.2 Migration Development in the Czech Republic

Before investigating Ukrainian migration, it is essential to examine development stages of migration in the Czech Republic that involve policy changes, impact on the Czech economy and public discourse. Over the last three decades Czech Republic has faced many “flows” of migration due to perpetual changes in migration trends and political climate (Fedyuk, 2016).

In a short span of time from 1989-2000 important historic events such as the Velvet Revolution and dissolution of Czechoslovakia have triggered a significant shift in the Czech migration statistical overview demonstrating a rise in immigration rather than emigration (which have been the case before) after embracing liberal regime in the post-communist era (Stojanov, 2022). It did not appear to have such a substantial impact on numbers of foreigners residing in the Czech Republic as we are witnessing it today, however, the average annual influx of foreigners to the country has risen dramatically from roughly 10,000 in the latter half of the 1990s to between 70,000 and 80,000 by 2007 (Bartoňová, 2009). Such a marked increase serves as a testament to the growing attractiveness of the Czech Republic as a destination for migrant populations, it was the beginning of labour migration starting to gain momentum.

The number of migrants with permanent residency and long-term visas increased exponentially from 35,198 in 1990 to 200,951 in the year 2000 due to the Czech Republic undergoing a transition from centrally planned economy to a market economy, making job opportunities more available for foreigners, and issuing more work permits (Kněžáčková, 2012). Dissolution of Czechoslovakia caused “domestic migration to change into international migration” (Kněžáčková, 2012). Czech Republic received a big number of

Slovak citizens who have arrived for the purposes of both employment and education. Notably, there has been a marked increase in the issuance of residence permits to Slovaks, who are granted *usual residency* with the expectation of their prolonged stay in the country for a minimum of one year, in contrast to Ukrainian and Russian citizens, who have been mostly granted temporary visas (Kněžáčková, 2012).

Currently, there are 658,564 foreigners residing in the Czech Republic (Český Statistický Úřad) indicating how much labour migration evolved and has become an essential part of a country's economic prosperity.

After Slovaks, Ukrainians are considered the largest ethnic group (permanent residents and acquiring long-term residency) in the Czech Republic (Český Statistický Úřad). Over the last two decades, number of Ukrainian migrants has been increasing continually (slight decrease in the year 2008 due to lack of job opportunities) compared to other ethnic groups residing in the Czech Republic.

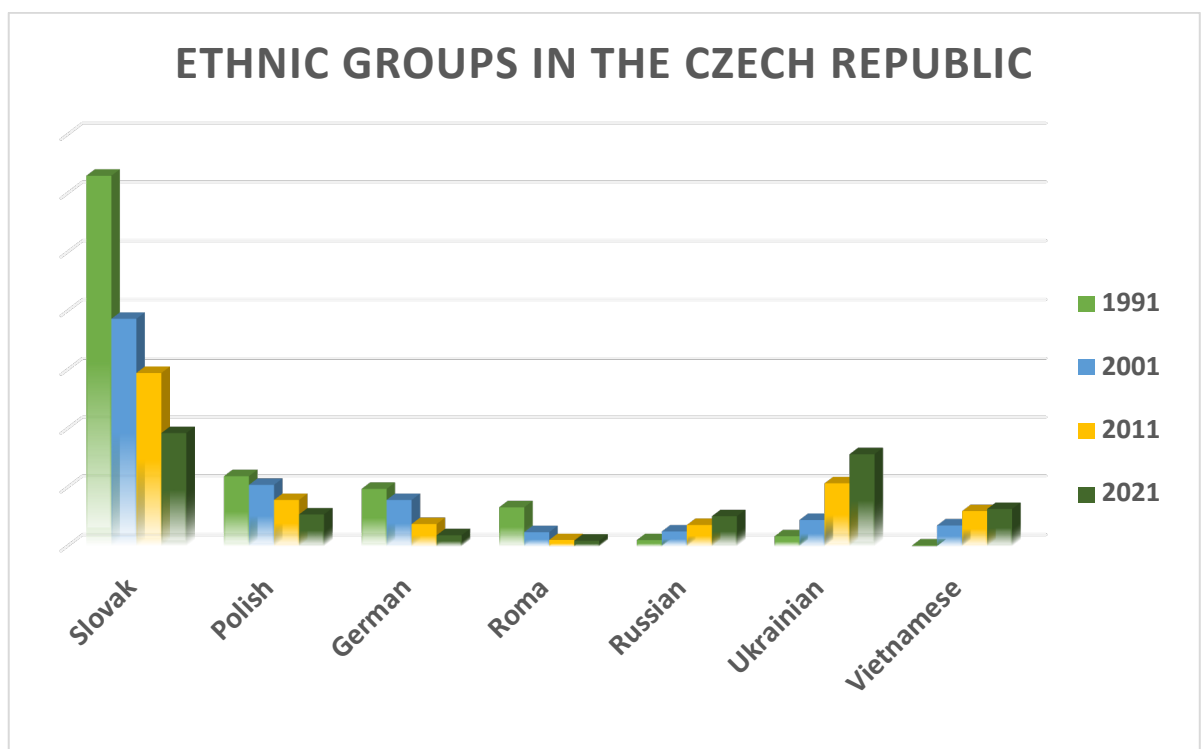


Figure 1 Ethnic Groups in the Czech Republic, Source: Český Statistický Úřad

3.2.1 Impact of Labour Migration on Czech Economy

Migrating for work has become a prevalent practice many communities (who are looking to relocate) adopt due to more advantageous job opportunities and high expectations of sustaining themselves and possibly providing for their families back home (Tokhirov, 2020). It is crucial to examine the degree to which the Czech economy depends on foreign labour and to identify advantages and disadvantages of opening the job market to all individuals without restrictions, from the viewpoints of both origin and destination countries.

Employers and government officials often view recruitment of foreign labour as means of reducing unemployment rates, which is deemed to be a desirable solution (Weyskrabova, 2013). As a result, job applicants with specific skill sets are given preference, leading to a relaxation of border controls and implementation of initiatives designed to welcome migrant workers (Stepanek, 2021).

Labour migration enhances the imbalance of productive and non-productive population. This unequal distribution causes understaffing due to recent trends of lower birth rates and higher life expectancy in destination countries, it is undeniable many countries depend on labour migration and the Czech Republic is one of them (Šimková, 2015).

Over the past two decades, the birth rate has significantly decreased while life expectancy, last analysed in 2020, has risen to 78 years. Such a shift possesses a risk to pension liabilities and has prompted reform planning. According to the Czech Statistical Office there was a significant increase in population by 21.9 thousand of people in 2021 which must be attributed exclusively to international migration and the inclusion of foreigners in the demographic analysis (Český Statistický Úřad, 2021). Czech Statistical Office reported that as the year was ending, the population stood at 10.516 million, indicating a rise of 21.9 thousand people overall (Český Statistický Úřad, 2021). However, there was a negative natural change as the number of deaths exceeded live births by 28.1 thousand (Český Statistický Úřad, 2021).

Although, number of migrants in the Czech Republic contributed to an increase of birth rates, it was still insufficient to compensate for the devastating surge in deaths with the number so high, last occurrence of such an event has taken place in 1918. (Český Statistický Úřad, 2021).

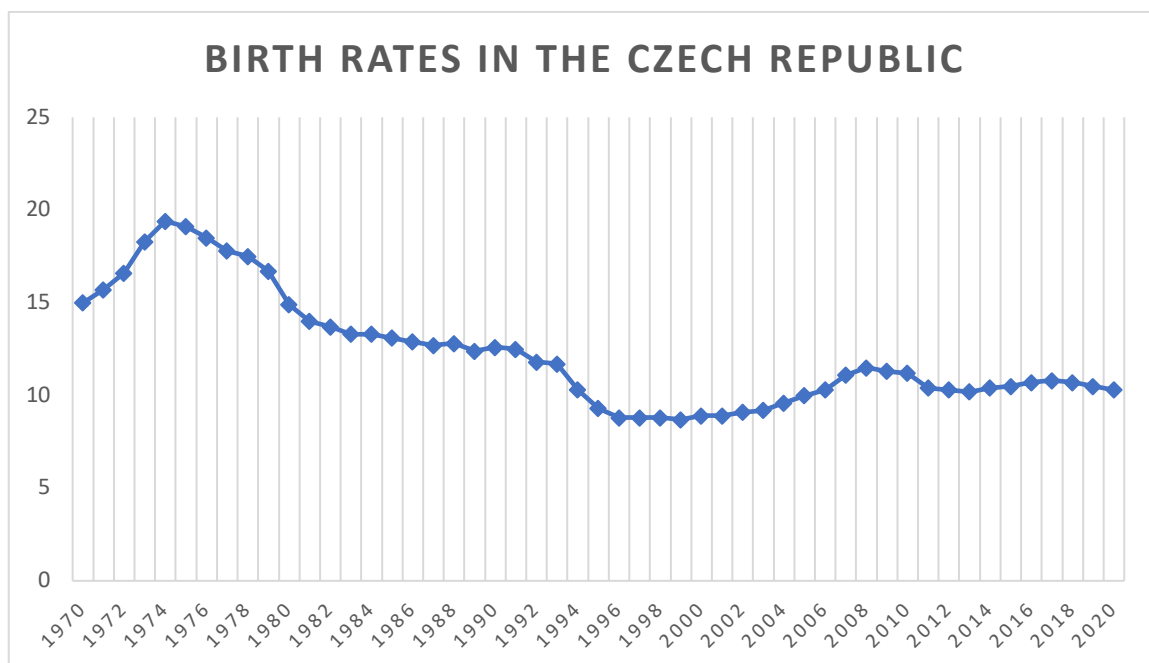


Figure 2 Birth Rates in the Czech Republic, Source: Český Statistický Úřad

The aging population in the Czech Republic poses a serious challenge for the country's pension system. It is expected for pension liabilities to worsen in the foreseeable future and prolonging the age of retirement would only postpone the inevitable. With new workforce being introduced to the labour market, migration is playing a major role in the process of stabilizing shortcomings, especially after the most recent recession.

The analysis by Martin Stepanek in *Sectoral Impacts of International Labour Migration and Population Ageing in the Czech Republic* is forecasting a 5.4% decrease in birth rates and life expectancy increase by 4 years in the next 30 years which negatively affects industrial sectors and prevents the country from further development and financial stability (Stepanek, 2021).

The report has outlined some scenarios regarding the changes in productivity, production, and labour costs. *Baseline scenario*, for example, explains how decrease in labour results in higher costs of production while demand for goods and services increases regardless (especially with people reaching the retirement age and using up their savings) but productivity is in decrease which forces raising of wages (Stepanek, 2021).

Immigration although, not a flawlessly superlative solution does introduce a new group of productive population which in the future will positively contribute to Czech economy's competitiveness on the market (Stepanek, 2021).

3.2.2 Impact of Labour Migration on the Origin Country's Economy

To gain a deeper comprehension of why labour migration is a significant factor in the development of both home and host countries, it is essential to examine its impact on the economy of the origin country. In this case, we will focus on how the Ukrainian economy responds to an overwhelming influx of remittances received (Pieńkowski, 2020).

Remittances sent from migrant workers to their countries of origin generate enormous amounts of money (Weyskrabova, 2013). In 2022, the collective value of global remittances surpassed \$630 billion, with Ukraine standing out as the primary beneficiary in both Europe and Central Asia (The World Bank 2022). This record-breaking figure was largely due to the easing of COVID-19 restrictions which enabled migrants to travel and work internationally (The World Bank 2022).

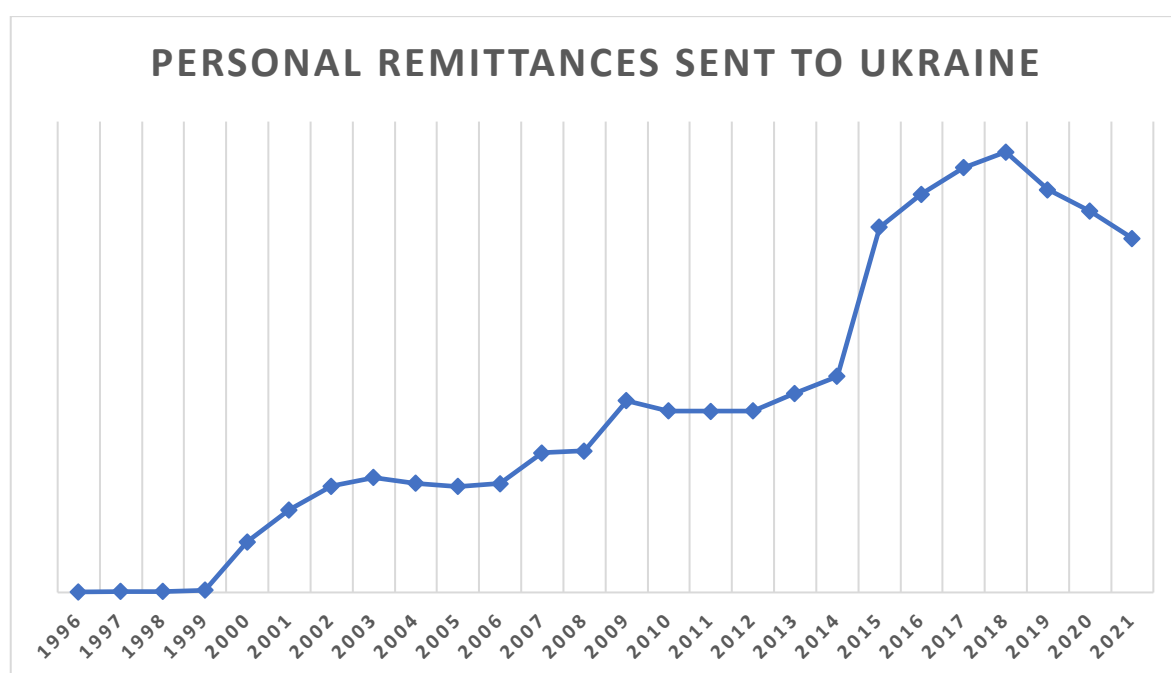


Figure 3 Personal Remittances Sent to Ukraine, Source: The World Bank

There are two ways in which remittances can be used in the home countries: for private consumption or for investment in productive assets and businesses. Usually, in the case of working migrants, all earnings are sent to their households in a financial predicament. However, as mentioned in *The Impact of Labour Migration on the Ukrainian Economy* by Jerzy Pieńkowski, statistical analysis has shown that remittances actually contribute to an increased domestic investment rate by supporting private sector activities, such as alleviating loans and lending costs for entrepreneurs (Pieńkowski, 2020).

Undoubtedly, remittances create a safety net for families who are prone to face financial turmoil due to unexpected events in their home countries. Not only migrants' earnings contribute to private consumption of their households, but on a larger scale, remittances reduce economic fluctuations in the country with the reoccurring trend of migrants sending even more money during an economic crisis or a natural disaster that occur quite frequently (Weyskrabova, 2013).

Remittances are not taxed directly but rather on consumption basis, they create a countercyclical effect on tax base and lower tax revenues' volatility contributing to the decrease of public debt and country risk (Pieńkowski, 2020). At the macroeconomic level, remittances can help subsidize public infrastructure and welfare enhancements, providing a much-needed boost to the country's economy (Pieńkowski, 2020).

While flows of remittances have numerous advantages, external sources of money negatively impact country's economy as well. Households with newly acquired additional source of income are now contributing to the increase of tradable goods' demand by consuming more, this obviously leads to non-tradable goods' prices going up. Such an imbalance demands higher wages and prevents the country from reaching its goal of self-sufficiency in relation to international trade (Weyskrabova, 2013). Dependence on financial support from abroad discourages the public from agreeing to reservation wages in the receiving country, which creates a shortage of the productive population and puts a burden on companies with demands for salary raises (Pieńkowski, 2020). It is quite fascinating to observe how migrants positively contribute to the lack of a productive population in destination countries but create a deficit in the working population in their home countries.

3.3 Approaching a New Wave of Ukrainian Migration

"Four-wave migration" term is commonly used to describe massive waves of Ukrainians migrating both internally and internationally that started in the early 20th century (Fedyuk, 2016).

Previously it was discussed how political changes helped shape migration in the Czech Republic and around the same time similar events have influenced migration development in Ukraine. Dissolution of the Soviet Union negatively affected citizens' salaries, employment and inflation rates that contributed to Ukrainian labour migration development (Fedyuk, 2016).

First occurrence of Ukrainians migrating abroad is dated before World War 1 and was caused by political upheavals that only induced population's desire to leave their home country. During the second and third waves USA and Canada have become primary destination countries for Ukrainian nationals to migrate to, and from mid 1990's to 2000's Ukrainians started relocating in bigger numbers to European countries (Fedyuk, 2016).

What makes the contemporary fourth wave so fascinating is the fact that first three were politically driven in contrast to the post-1991 labour migration satisfying the socio-economic needs of the population, however, as noted in *Ukrainian Migration to the European Union*, Ukrainian nationals stand out with the biggest number of work permit applications submitted (compared to other third-country nationals) (Fedyuk, 2016). In 2014, there was a significant increase in asylum applications, indicating that certain anxieties about the future have influenced the decision of some Ukrainians to relocate indefinitely, not solely for work opportunities. Since the most recent fourth wave of migration, two political events have taken place which begs the question if they contributed to creation of a politically driven "fifth wave".

3.3.1 Migration after the Maidan Uprising

The Maidan protests were sparked on November 21st, 2013, in response to the former president Viktor Yanukovich's rejection of the Association Agreement with the European Union, in favour of strengthening ties with Russia (Ishchenko, 2020). At the outset, the protests were intended to be a completely peaceful and nonviolent movement. However, after two months of government inaction and the enactment of oppressive laws aimed at suppressing citizens' right to protest, the protests turned violent. Escalation of violence has led to more citizens publicly joining the demonstrations in support of the Maidan protestors across the country (Ishchenko, 2020).

The migration patterns of Ukrainian citizens have been unusual, and this can be attributed to a number of factors. The population was fearful of the financial and political instability that may result from Russia taking control of the country. The Crimean Tatar minority group has expressed concerns about potential repression from the terrorist state and has therefore fled the region. As a result, many Ukrainian citizens from the Donbas region and Crimea have acquired the status of "internally displaced persons" (Jaroszewicz, 2015). In order to avoid military action, they have moved to other regions within Ukraine (often remaining somewhat close to their cities of departure to stay in touch with family members

with the hope of returning in the future) or to other countries such as the Russian Federation and various European countries (Lendel, 2016). According to Marta Jaroszewicz, the number of internally displaced persons has reached 1,438,000 with refugees from the Donbas region making up 80% of the IDPs in the country (Jaroszewicz, 2015).

As for external migration, primary migratory trend among Ukrainians going abroad (caused by economic reasons only) indicates that migrants prefer “seasonal commuting” that allows them to be more financially stable and still have freedom to go back to their homeland any time (Uherek, 2016). Prior to the war sparked by the Maidan protests, Ukrainians faced decrease in labour demand in their regularly visited destination countries due to economic recession of 2008 when foreign workforce wasn’t required, job opportunities were gradually dwindling leaving migrants without much choice (Fedyuk, 2016).

Pre-war number of applications for a refugee status submitted by Ukrainians nationals was miniscule. Despite open borders for foreign labour workforce (in a time frame of 2010’s when world’s economy was recovering post-recession), there was an increase in asylum applications submitted by Ukrainian citizens to the EU (Lendel, 2016).

A new wave of Ukrainian migration was induced by both political and economic reasons. Unfortunately, Eurostat did not provide numbers before 2014, according to *the Migration of Ukrainians in Times of Crisis*, there were only 1,120 refugee status application submitted by Ukrainians in 2013 and then it reached 13 270 in 2014 (Jaroszewicz, 2015).

Prior to the Russian invasion in 2022, Ukraine was categorized as a safe country of origin by the European Union. Consequently, numerous Ukrainian migrants who applied for international protection were advised to move to the western regions of the country, which could account for the significant number of internally displaced persons (European Union Agency for Asylum).

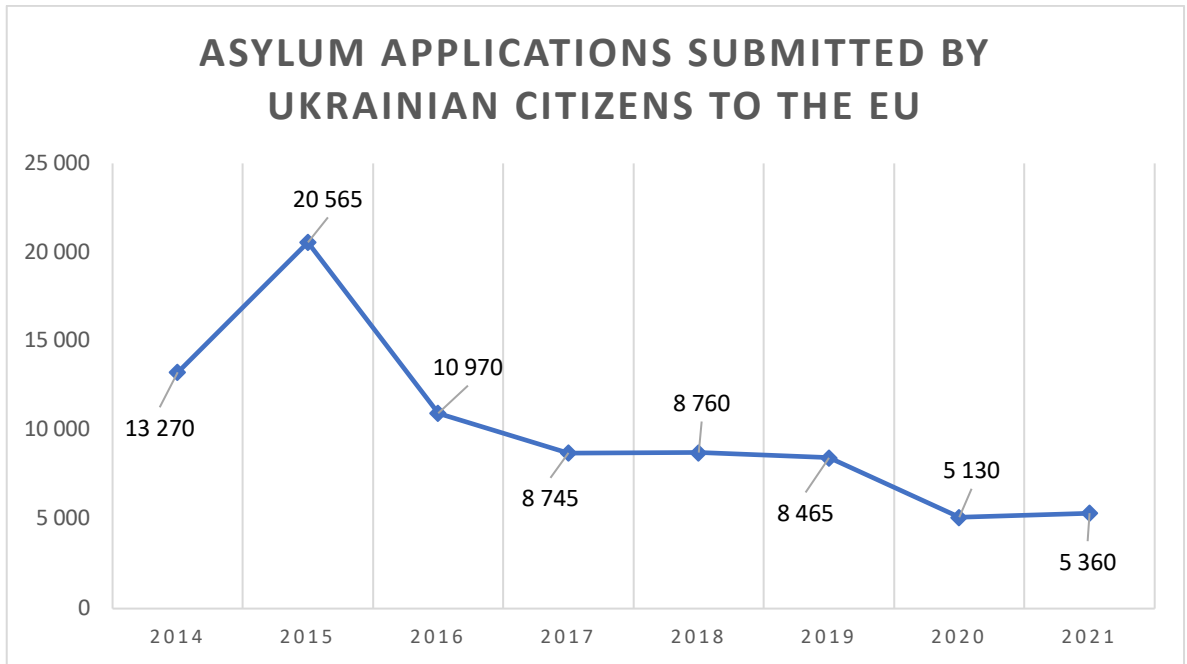


Figure 4 *Asylum Applications Submitted by Ukrainian Citizens to the EU, Source: Eurostat*

Although many Ukrainian nationals submitted asylum applications to European countries, refusal rate reached 78%. This was disclosed by the EU as a consequence of the huge flows of migrants from the Middle East (Stojanov, 2022).

Meanwhile, migrating for labour reasons was the only viable option for Ukrainian nationals to leave their home country (Lendel, 2016).

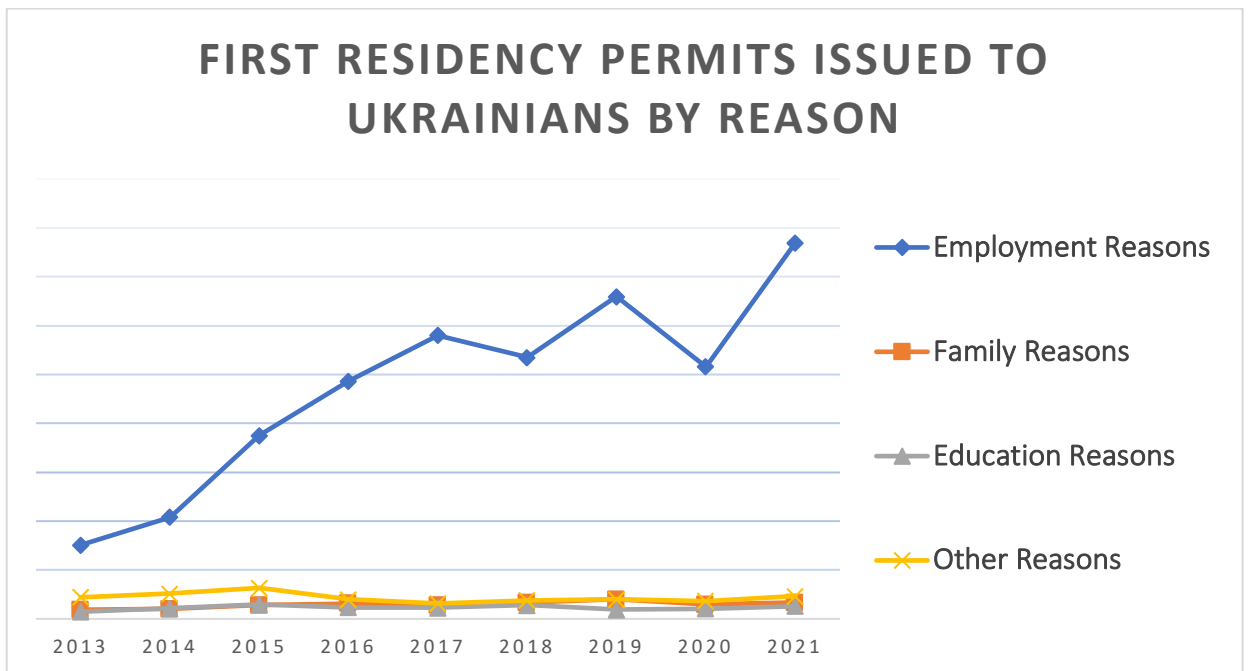


Figure 5 *First Residence Permits Issued to Ukrainians by Reason, Source: Eurostat*

To demonstrate how migratory flows have been influenced by such a significant political event, in 2014 Ukrainian citizens have reached the highest number of first residence permits in the EU exceeding the number of American, Chinese, Indian, and Moroccan citizens (Lendel, 2016). In 2014 the EU issued 300,000 first residence permits to Ukrainian nationals (Fedyuk, 2016).

It is important to note that post Maidan, Russia, Poland, and the Czech Republic have become top destination countries for Ukrainian migrants (Lendel, 2016). Common language, cultural similarities, and a lack of financial opportunities have made Russia a popular destination country, with many Ukrainian nationals applying for permanent residency, temporary residence rights, and temporary refuge status (Lendel, 2016). In 2015 the situation changed: Poland has issued more residence permits to Ukrainians than Russia. Although the number of permits was rising, there was a decline in asylum applications submitted. This could mean that Ukrainian nationals were discouraged from applying by witnessing a very high rate of rejection, and instead adopted a different method of entering the EU by arriving for temporary employment and staying indefinitely (Lendel, 2016).

3.3.2 Migration Policy Changes in Favour of Working Migrants

Contemporary labour migration has been shaped by two significant events: 2008 economic recession that left many without work and pressured people into “seasonal commuting” in hopes of finding additional source of income abroad, and the 2015 migration crisis that to this day left traces of financial burden on the EU countries allocating resources to welcome refugees fleeing conflict and persecution. This section will examine the Czech Republic’s response to an overwhelming amount of visa and asylum applications and the policy reforms (if there were any) that were implemented to support refugees entering the country.

The word “migration” has acquired negative connotations in the Czech Republic and has resulted in ongoing public debates. During the 2015 migration crisis, the Czech Republic, among other V4 countries (the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, and Slovakia), vocally rejected newly proposed EU migration policy reforms in favour of welcoming refugees from the MENA region (Stojanov, 2022). Although migratory flows would not have been significant in numbers, government officials turned the public and media against

this idea under the pretence of a national security threat, which led to majority of the population supporting anti-immigration restrictive laws (Stojanov, 2022).

A country with a high population of migrants may face multiple types of migration, including secondary immigration, forced migration, irregular migration, and, most commonly, labour migration (Stojanov, 2022). However, labour migration is typically prioritized only under the assumption that migrants won't stay in the destination country for an extended period of time. As a result, the state has implemented integration programs that are favourable to working migrants. Most government-funded programs are targeted towards foreign workers, such as the "Program kvalifikovaný zaměstnanec" and "Program klíčový a vědecký personál." (Ministerstvo průmyslu a obchodu). External support for migrants with daunting visa and asylum application processes is provided by non-profit organizations that offer legal counselling, translation services, moral support, and most importantly, defend immigrants against injustice, such as those who face punishment after being detained.

Public authorities kept pushing the agenda of potential security threat (illegal immigration was pronounced as one of top security threats by the National Security Audit in 2016). They refused all means of simplifying asylum proceedings, reuniting families, and approving permanent residence applications (Stojanov, 2022).

Unfortunately, working migrants are still perceived exclusively as “labour force”, and the overall attitude remains the same: to use foreign productive population for their contribution to the Czech Republic’s economic development for a short period of time (up to 12 months) rather than put in the effort to integrate migrants into Czech society (Jungwirth, 2019).

According to Myroslava Lendel's research, in 2015 Ukraine acknowledged the beneficial effects of remittances in reinforcing its economy and enacted the *Law on External Labour Migration*. This law offers migrant workers and their families "social guarantees," which comprise of the option for social insurance while residing abroad, a guarantee of reintegration after returning home, and overall protection while abroad (Lendel, 2016).

As mentioned earlier, the increasing migratory flows since the early 90s led to the creation of a relatively new institution, the Ministry of Interior, that handles all ongoing visa processes and deals with foreigners. With the adoption of the Foreigners Act, the Interior Ministry gained power over all migration proceedings, “a 2019 amendment of the Foreigners Act specifically stipulated the key role of MI’s Department of Asylum and Migration Policy

in the design and implementation of both immigration and integration policy” (Stojanov, 2022).

In response to the influx of migrants, the Czech government has directed considerable resources towards the securitization of the country and the dissemination of a prejudice narrative against the Muslim community accusing MENA refugees of being a potential threat (Stojanov, 2022). Meanwhile, Ukrainians have felt the tension created by Czech citizens who feared that the increase in migrant workers will make it harder for natives to find jobs (through qualitative interviews, the practical part of this study will reflect the accurate perception of Ukrainian migrants by Czech society) (Fedyuk, 2016). Keeping vocalized antipathy in mind, overall public opinion toward Ukrainians is fairly positive which explains evident emphasis on the noteworthy increase of work permit approvals and lack of political refugee-related reforms materialization.

When examining alterations in migration legislation during the period surrounding the Maidan uprising, it is worth mentioning that the Czech Republic implemented a new form of long-term visa named the "employee card" in 2014. This is highlighted in Olena Fedyuk and Marta Kindler's research on "Ukrainian Migration to the European Union" (Fedyuk, 2016). The graph demonstrates that the number of Ukrainians registered at the Czech labour office grew rapidly after 2015.



Figure 6 Ukrainians Registered at the Czech Labour Office, Source: Český Statistický Úřad

This visa allows migrants to reside in the country for up to two years as long as they have a valid contract with an employer. This simplifies the process of obtaining a long-term visa, as applicants only need to submit one application for the employee card instead of two separate applications for residency and a work visa (Ministerstvo vnitra České republiky). The employee card is accessible to working migrants without any strict requirements for higher education or advanced qualifications (Fedyuk, 2016).

4 Practical Part

For the practical part of my thesis, I decided to conduct qualitative interviews with Ukrainian nationals who could share their first-hand experiences and provide an accurate portrayal of events following the Maidan Uprising. This chapter will consist of interviews with four Ukrainian migrants expressing their opinions on the migration process and the struggles they have faced in being accepted by the Czech Republic. In addition, an interview with a lawyer representing migrants who has agreed to provide information on what the process of requesting asylum looks like and the legality behind migrants working abroad and obtaining short-term visas.

I believe that these discussions will demonstrate how Ukrainians are perceived in the Czech Republic and provide insights into their opinions on whether their journey of migration was worth it.

The acquisition of data is facilitated through the implementation of qualitative interviews with Ukrainian migrants, who share their experiences living and working in the Czech Republic. While it is assumed that interviewees may have similar experiences, the extent of these experiences varies greatly based on their backgrounds, motives for migration, purposes of their stay (i.e., visa type), and specific regions of Ukraine they are from.

The process of collecting data involved several steps that gradually led me to certain conclusions on the pre-existing assumptions about the impact of the Maidan Uprising on the Ukrainian population's decision to migrate. Careful participant selection was essential as their opinions vary depending on regions of Ukraine they are from. All four respondents are from different cities which provided a diverse range of perspectives.

Development of questions was a crucial part of the process since all the respondents had different stories, follow-up questions were necessary to obtain a more detailed portrayal of events. All the interviews were conducted face-to-face, and while I had a list of pre-

determined questions, many new questions emerged during the interviews, providing additional information.

4.1 Influence of the Maidan Uprising on Migration Trends

The Maidan uprising had a significant impact on the lives of Ukrainian migrants who are currently residing in the Czech Republic. All four respondents reported how the revolution of dignity affected their lives in one way or another, ultimately planting the idea that Ukraine was too politically and economically unstable, which encouraged them to migrate to the Czech Republic. The first section of my questions is about the Maidan uprising and it aims to determine whether the significant migratory flows of Ukrainian nationals migrating to the EU in 2014 were induced by the economic or political situation. All four participants belong to different age groups, ranging from 21 to 48 years old. This will provide a more diverse perspective on the events.

All four interviewees expressed gratitude and respect for the people protesting and fighting back home for their beliefs and freedom. Even though the events after Maidan drastically changed plans for their future in Ukraine, they did not regret them. Respondent 1 stated, “this made me feel hopeful that our people could stand up for themselves and reject joining Russia.”

Respondents 1, 2, and 3 had initially planned to stay in Ukraine, but after the Maidan protests, they considered migrating to the Czech Republic. Respondent 1 noted, “Ukrainian economy was not thriving before 2014, and inflation rates grew rapidly, which made my parents concerned about my future there.” Although respondents mostly talked about their personal safety concerns, particularly respondent 2 who is from Donetsk where military action took place, economic instability was also a significant factor in their decision-making process regarding whether moving to the Czech Republic was worth it.

When the protests happened, Ukrainians from Donbas region and Crimea had the option to migrate internally or internationally (Lendel, 2016). Respondent 2, who is from Donetsk, expressed hesitation to migrate inside Ukraine due to fears of how she would be perceived by other Ukrainians, which could explain the significant increase in Ukrainian refugees migrating to the EU (Lendel, 2016). However, not many Ukrainians were granted the opportunity to migrate to European countries and were left with the choice of moving to the western parts of Ukraine or Russia. She stated, “It seemed my political views and opinions needed to be proven in every discussion with a Ukrainian which was exhausting

and unfair. Moving from Kyiv (where she was forced to move from Donetsk) to Prague was a way for me to escape from the people and their politics.”

Respondent 2 and 3 also noted a considerable shift among their relatives and friends when Maidan happened, “people did not drop everything and move away, but rather started planning for their children to move abroad,” respondent 3 reported. Respondent 3 added, “there wasn’t a substantial migration trend among people from my hometown, however, I noticed that older generation began saving money to fund their children to study abroad. Their lives were comfortable, they had their jobs, friends, and family, but there was definitely a collective anxiety about what awaited Ukraine in this political game.”

While many migration theories and remittance rates suggest that households send family members abroad primarily to increase income, the interviewees pointed out that post-Maidan Ukrainians were uncertain about their country's future. As a result, they considered sending their younger family members abroad for education as a safer option. Three out of four interviewees who experienced the Maidan protests in Ukraine noted a shift in the way families started preparing for unpredictable events and saving up to send their children abroad.

When asking why they chose the Czech Republic out of V4 countries that accommodated both their financial opportunities and language resemblance, the interviewees stated that the Czech Republic stands out with its modern advancements and diversity, and all stated they had pre-existing connections in the country. Respondent 1 talked about her parents’ fear of sending her all alone abroad and she confirmed having an acquaintance in Prague who helped her with the process of adopting to a completely new and uncharted territory, “my mom's friend's daughter was already living here, which made my mom feel more confident about sending me to the Czech Republic.”

During the period of the Revolution of Dignity and the migration crisis, it appears that the Czech Republic did not provide significant aid to countries in need or offer refuge to those displaced, the Czech government took measures to securitize the country (Stojanov, 2022). Respondent 5, who provides legal counselling, works closely with asylum seekers, and helps them throughout the process of obtaining international protection, reported that Czech migration laws have become significantly stricter since 2014, up until the invasion in 2022, with a very low success rate of asylum status granted to Ukrainian nationals. He informed me that he joined the NGO (that provides support to immigrants residing in the Czech Republic) in 2016 and worked closely with migrants leaving Ukraine due to the

Maidan uprising. Although there was a noticeable increase in the number of Ukrainian nationals who sought asylum between 2014 and 2015, he claimed that by 2016 the number of refugees applying was miniscule. This assertion supports the statistical analysis presented by Oldřich Bureš and Robert Stojanov in their work on *Securitization of Immigration in the Czech Republic and Its Impact on the Czech Migration Policy: Experts' Perceptions*, which shows that 78% of asylum applications were rejected (Stojanov, 2022).

Obtaining permanent residency in the Czech Republic was not an easy process. Respondent 5 noticed that many Ukrainians felt disheartened during the process of legalizing their stay in the country. It became apparent that the only way for Ukrainian nationals to settle in the Czech Republic was to enter the country with temporary visas, find employment, and apply for an employee card that would guarantee their stay for up to 2 years (Fedyuk, 2016). Respondent 5 stated that the NGO he currently works for even advises this method since they have witnessed the Ministry of Interior not providing a clear path for Ukrainian migrants to obtain permanent residency. According to Eurostat data, there has been a significant increase in the number of first residence permits granted to Ukrainian nationals in the Czech Republic. The number rose from 12,867 in 2014 to 23,207 in 2015, which could support the argument that many Ukrainians have chosen to relocate to the Czech Republic through this avenue (Eurostat, 2023).

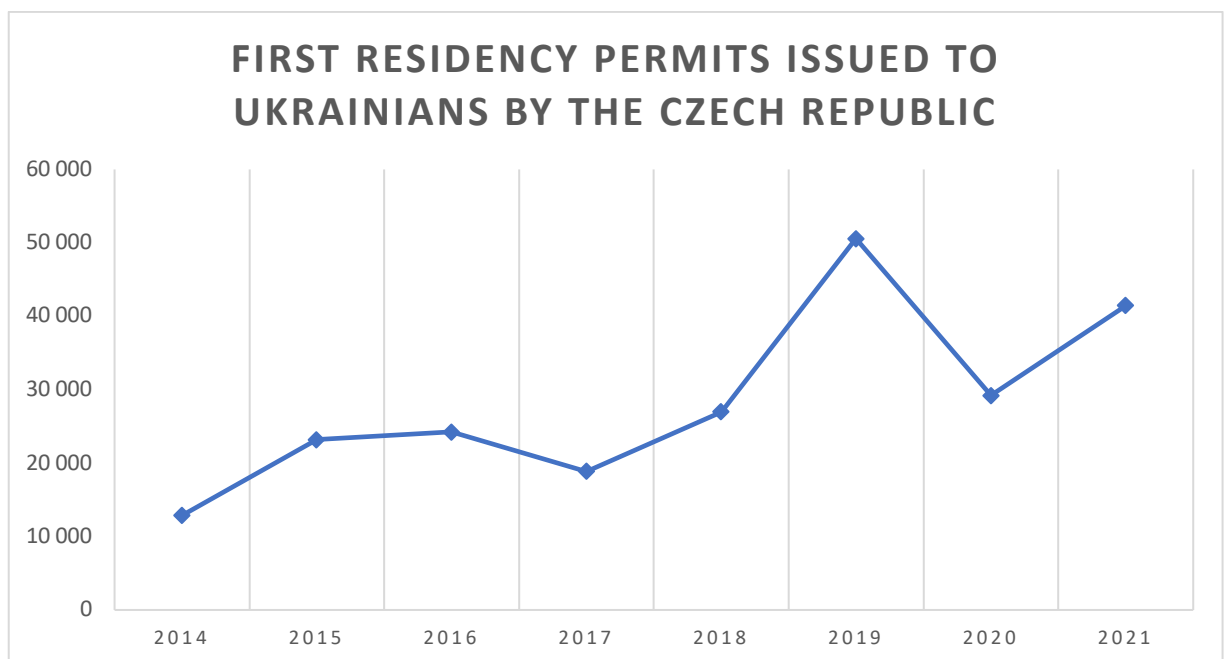


Figure 7 First Residency Permits Issued to Ukrainians by the Czech Republic, Source: Eurostat

4.2 Ukrainian Migrants in the Czech Labour Market

In this section, I aimed to get the interviewees' opinions on working conditions in the Czech Republic and their professional experiences. All four respondents shared their stories about the types of jobs they held and the working conditions they endured.

In their analysis of the *Ukrainian Middleman System of Labour Organization in the Czech Republic*, Dita Čermáková and Michal Nekorjak outline the primary occupations held by Ukrainian nationals in the Czech labour market (Čermáková, 2008). These positions are primarily in the building, food, and hospitality industries, where Ukrainian workers are often employed in physically demanding and low-skilled jobs (Čermáková, 2008). In *The Impact of Labour Migration on the Ukrainian Economy*, Jerzy Pieńkowski reported that the construction sector in Ukraine witnessed a 20% decline in employment between 2012 and 2017, with approximately 40% of Ukrainian migrants working abroad being employed in this sector (Pieńkowski, 2020). Furthermore, Pieńkowski's research revealed that labour shortages emerged among teachers, drivers, and healthcare workers (Pieńkowski, 2020). Based on interviews with the respondents, it is evident that many of them were employed in the food and hospitality industries, where they often worked as kitchen staff, waiters, and washing dishes. Within the hospitality industry, common positions held by Ukrainian workers include housekeeping and reception roles (Fedyuk, 2016).

After arriving in the Czech Republic, all four respondents found jobs in the secondary sector. Respondents 1 and 2 came to the Czech Republic seeking educational opportunities but found temporary employment within the first two months of their stay. They were both hired by one of many temporary employment agencies operating in the Czech Republic, which typically provide job opportunities in the hospitality industry or cleaning services. All respondents held jobs such as housekeeper, hotel hostess, waiter, and bus tour guide. Respondents 3 and 4 often visited Prague solely for work opportunities. Respondent 3 stated, "I knew that I wouldn't make the same pay check in Ukraine, even if I worked long shifts. The wage difference was the biggest factor in my decision to come to Prague every year for three months to work." According to Jerzy Pieńkowski, for 84% of Ukrainian migrants difference in salary levels was the primary motivation to migrate for work opportunities, although there was a slight increase in wages in Ukraine, the average gross monthly salary in Ukraine was only EUR 276 in 2018, which is less than a quarter of the average salary level in Poland and the Czech Republic (Pieńkowski, 2020). Respondent 3 has been commuting to the Czech Republic every year for seasonal work since she 16. The

interviewee said that around the time of the Maidan events, she would stay in Prague for longer than her original plan due to financial insecurities in her home country.

Respondent 4 came to the Czech Republic out of financial need and worked 30 shifts a month, sending all her earnings to her relatives in Ukraine. All four respondents agreed that physical labour was extremely challenging and exhausting, but there were benefits to temporary employment. Respondent 1 stated, "A big advantage of working through agencies that send you places whenever they need people is that it's very flexible." Although the interviewees reported that temporary employment agencies take a percentage off the hourly rate for each employee, they were satisfied with the deal because such work opportunities provided flexible hours and payment if not after a week, then sometimes right after the shift. Respondent 5, who closely works with Ukrainian migrants, usually advises migrants to find permanent jobs with an actual contract. However, he encountered hesitation from Ukrainian nationals who expressed how much they enjoyed receiving their payment on the spot.

When asked if they had experienced any tension working alongside Czech citizens, all four respondents acknowledged feeling slightly scrutinized at times, but overall, they reported that working in the Czech Republic was a positive experience. Respondent 1 stated, "there were moments when I felt like a misfit in a work setting surrounded by Czechs (snide comments or laughs at my expense), but it felt like the animosity wasn't directed towards me specifically, but rather towards Ukrainian migrants in general". She went on saying that she even understands where that subtle hostility might be coming from and that physically demanding labour wasn't the employer's or her colleagues' fault, it was simply the nature of her work at the time.

Respondent 2 supported first respondent's answer by agreeing that Czech citizens view migrants as "thieves of resources that every Czech citizen relies on", and she can understand that perception to some extent. However, she stated that as working migrants, people should always consider challenges that come with such a lifestyle before deciding on moving abroad indefinitely, "migrants live under constant fear of being deported or having their documents rejected for permanent stay. These are the things that every migrant must deal with."

Respondent 3 stated that usually people she worked with were "very polite and respectful". She stated, "to be fair, I worked mostly with other Ukrainians and made many friends while working."

Respondent 4 like respondent 3 was working with Ukrainians most of the time. She stated, “I actually found many good friends at all my jobs”. She never encountered a bad manager or was judged by her Czech colleagues. She stated “yes, it was hard adapting to my life here, considering, I wanted to go back home to my family, but financial trouble seemed like the end of the world at the time”.

Despite their qualifications and experience, all four respondents reported finding work through dubious channels, such as employment agencies or personal connections. This often resulted in accepting jobs with lower salaries than what they could have earned finding employment directly, without the intermediary. Wage reduction ranged from 30-60 CZK. Respondent 4 stated, “I thought it was a bit unfair, but I wouldn’t have made the same money in Ukraine even if they doubled my shift.”

According to Velvyslanectví České republiky v Kyjevě, the Ukrainian nationals holding a biometric passport have been allowed to stay in the Czech Republic for up to 90 days within a 180-day period since 2017 (Velvyslanectví České republiky v Kyjevě). Respondent 5 stated that under no circumstances could Ukrainian nationals work in the Czech Republic if they obtained this type of document. However, many Ukrainian clients have requested legal counselling after getting caught working illegally by the authorities.

As discussed earlier, there are many temporary employment agencies in the Czech Republic that provide free access to the labour market, even “an unusually large number of these agencies”, said respondent 5, however, not all of them operate legally. Many of these agencies hire migrants without documents, provide no basic benefits, and take a big percentage of their hourly pay. “The reason for this is that many employers prefer to hire illegal workers who do not require health benefits or additional tax expenses,” stated interviewee 5. In *Ukrainian Middleman System of Labour Organization in the Czech Republic*, Dita Čermáková and Michal Nekorjak refer to these agencies as the "middleman system of labour organizations" (Čermáková, 2008). When Ukrainian working migrants started coming to the Czech Republic in bigger numbers, the middleman's area of responsibility included activities such as job seeking, negotiations with authorities, interpreting, provision of accommodation, and solving emergency situations related to migration (Čermáková, 2008). An individual who could provide help in this area for a certain payment turned into a full-blown organizational system in the form of employment agencies that connect employers with migrant workers (Čermáková, 2008).

When asked how these agencies operate illegally when it is very much punishable and can result in a deportation process for migrants, respondent 5 said that “shutting down an agency or reporting it to the authorities is a very difficult process, as it is challenging to prove that the agency employs illegal workers. Even if there’s proof, the agency will likely only receive a financial penalty, close down, and then start operating under a new name.”

Respondent 5 stated “In Czech law, it is difficult to separate the company from the individuals behind it. These agencies would operate under a company name, and as soon as they were hit with a lawsuit, they would disappear”, the agencies would not even consider a big financial penalty as serious punishment since “they would make a lot of money, pay the fine, and continue working.”

Respondent 5 said that activities such as regulating working conditions and monitoring illegal agencies are in the realm of responsibilities of the State Labour Inspection Office. “The Labour Inspection provides advice to employers and employees in the area of labour relations and conditions” which includes issues such as illegal employment, unequal treatment, and discrimination (Státní úřad inspekce práce). Although issues regarding illegal employment are taken seriously and heavily regulated, respondent 5, basing his opinion on personal experience, stated “it is almost impossible to catch all of them.”

4.3 Legal Framework

According to the Asylum Act, to request asylum in the Czech Republic an individual must submit an application to the Ministry of Interior’s Department of Asylum and Migration Policy (Ministerstvo vnitra České republiky). This application can be submitted at various locations including border crossings, Foreign Police departments, detention centres, or directly to the ministry (Ministerstvo vnitra České republiky). The applicant is then required to provide information about why they request international protection and undergo an interview. Once this is completed, they’re being sent to a refugee camp where, as respondent 5 stated, they must stay for two weeks. “If you request international protection, you are offered accommodation in a refugee camp”, although it is possible to find private housing while your application is being processed, respondent 5 said, “you must stay (in the refugee camp) for the first two weeks to undergo fingerprint verification, a medical examination, and an interview.”

In the Asylum Act, it is stipulated that once the person is placed in a regional centre, the asylum officer would make a decision based on the evidence provided by the applicant for requesting international protection (Ministerstvo vnitra České republiky). However, respondent 5, who has been working on such cases since 2016, stated that the decision-making process can last for 1.5 – 2 years, “from my experience, the longest a person waited was two years, after that they went to the court.” If the application is denied, the applicant can appeal to the Ministry of Interior and, if necessary, go to court to defend their case (Ministerstvo vnitra České republiky). Respondent 5 explained that in the event that the lawsuit is valid, “the court announces that the ministry has made an error, sends the case back to the ministry for appeal, and the ministry takes another one to two years to make a decision, and this game of ping pong can last for years.”

When asked about the longest waiting period one of his clients had experienced while waiting for a decision from the Ministry, respondent 5 stated, “I had a client who waited for 8 years to reach a final decision, but eventually received asylum. In some cases, if the court grants asylum but the ministry is hesitant, the court can give the asylum directly.” Respondent 5 also added, “the asylum procedure in the Czech Republic is a very lengthy process, it’s in their best interest to intentionally delay the proceedings to wear down the asylum seekers until they give up. One of my clients sought asylum due to Maidan in 2016, but they were only granted subsidiary protection in 2021.”

The concept of safe countries of origin, as decided by the European Union, refers to a list of nations considered to have a stable political and social climate, where citizens are not subjected to physical violence, inhumane treatment or discrimination (European Union Agency for Asylum). Ukraine was on the list of safe countries up until the Russian invasion in 2022.

Respondent 5 was tasked with assisting Ukrainian migrants seeking international protection and provided them with support throughout the process of obtaining asylum seeker status. While working closely with Ukrainian migrants who had submitted asylum applications due to the Maidan Uprising, he observed that the number of applications was decreasing while the rejection rate was increasing. He stated that “if a Ukrainian refugee asked for protection feeling unsafe residing in Ukraine, the Czech government would just advise them to move to a safer more western part of Ukraine.” As previously mentioned, the number of internally displaced persons has reached 1,438,000, and many Ukrainian refugees

from the Donbas region had no other option but to move within the country (Jaroszewicz, 2015).

According to respondent 5, “the Czech migration policy has been strict, but laws became even stricter where the Ministry of Interior would grant asylum in very rare cases.” The process of requesting and receiving international protection from the Ministry of Interior is complicated and time-consuming. Respondent 5 stated that “unless you are from an “unsafe” country, you must prove to the ministry why the conditions of your living are unsafe and in the case of a rejected application, go to the court.” Every migrant must present their case and convince the ministry that they are under threat in their home country and deserve to be granted asylum. After the invasion in 2022, Ukraine has become a part of the unsafe country list and since then, all Ukrainian refugees were granted international protection for a year, which has been prolonged for another in the period of 2023-2024, stated respondent 5.

According to the European Commission, the Temporary Protection Directive is a measure used to provide immediate and temporary protection to displaced persons from non-EU countries in the event of a mass influx or imminent mass influx when they are unable to return to their country of origin (European Commission, 2022). The Russian invasion of Ukraine in 2022 triggered the Directive as it was apparent that existing asylum systems would not be able to handle the scale of demand, leading to potential errors in the process of granting international protections, thus negatively affecting asylum processes' efficiency (European Commission, 2022). Therefore, all refugees escaping the conflict in Ukraine were granted temporary protection under the Directive (European Commission, 2022).

Respondent 5 stated, “all Ukrainian refugees who came to the Czech Republic were granted international protection for a year, which has been extended for another year.” He emphasized that this accommodation of the needs of Ukrainian refugees was critical and expressed excitement over the opening of borders for refugees in this crisis, as the process of obtaining international protection can be challenging. However, he also expressed his concern about the complicated process of transitioning from temporary protection to permanent stay and the Czech Republic's response to refugees in the coming years. Respondent 5 stated, “the Czech government is making a significant effort to integrate Ukrainian refugees into Czech society, but it is uncertain if they will be able to stay in the country permanently”. Nonetheless, the NGO he currently works for is helping clients find employment and obtain necessary documentation to facilitate their integration.

4.4 Placing Ukrainian Migration According to the Theories

Since migration theories are complimentary and interconnected, it is fair to say contemporary Ukrainian migration through many changes and development phases has become the ultimate consequential outcome of multiple theories.

According to Olena Fedyuk and Marta Kindler, who wrote "Ukrainian Migration to the European Union," one of the first instances of internal migration in Ukraine was rural-to-urban migration circa the 1960s and 1970s, which burdened the cities with infrastructural supply chain issues. The urge to relocate was due to financial need and a lack of proper education opportunities, which is thoroughly explained by the *neoclassical theory* and *NELM*. However, in this case, the migration flows have created a surplus of labour in the city, resulting in authorities enhancing living conditions for the rural population and contributing to the country's development (Fedyuk, 2016). Families depending on an additional source of income and sending migrants to bigger cities and even abroad demonstrate how *NELM* has manifested itself and developed over time, with Ukrainian migrants going on irregular commuting "work trips" and staying in the destination countries for as long as their visas allow them to.

Post-1991, international migration has become a common practice for many Ukrainians. Migration flows are heavily influenced by the economic conditions of both the origin and destination countries. During the 2008 economic crisis, the fear of losing their jobs pushed many migrants to take up manual labour jobs that were not significantly affected by the recession (a safe bet). This development could partly explain a noteworthy difference in the number of Ukrainian migrants who have built successful careers in the primary sector compared to those who occupy positions in the secondary sector, thus confirming the segmented duality of labour (*SLM*) (Gold and Nawyn, 2019). After coming to the Czech Republic, all four respondents stated that they have worked in the secondary sector, occupying jobs in the hospitality industry, retail industry, and cleaning services. According to the interviewees, it was very easy to find a job in the secondary sector since labour at that time (2015-2020) was highly in demand. However, there is a difference between students coming to the Czech Republic for educational opportunities and Ukrainian workers arriving solely for temporary work. Respondent 1 and 2, who both came on student visas, found internships in companies, and extended their stay with a provided work contract.

When asked why they chose to migrate to the Czech Republic, all four interviewees stated that they had existing connections in the country. This made it a more rational decision, as they had someone who could provide them with support and guidance while residing in a foreign country, thus supporting the argument of the *network theory*. This support included finding housing, helping with university applications (in the case of respondents 1 and 2), finding employment, helping with bureaucratic processes in the Ministry of Interior. Social connections play a significant role in the expansion of a particular national community abroad. By aiding the integration of newly arrived individuals into the community, social connections contribute to the overall development of migration (Wimalaratana, 2016). As Wijitapure Wimalaratana mentioned in *International Migration and Migration Theories*: “it is revealed that network connections are a form of social capital which grants wide access to employment abroad” (Wimalaratana, 2016).

More frequent instances of migration waves have contributed to the creation of newly introduced institutions such as the Ministry of the Interior, which handles public and internal security, and the issuance of various documents to foreigners such as citizenships, work permits, and visa cards. Illegal agencies that hire foreign workers without proper documentation, underpay them while assigning long hours without basic benefits are examples of underground institutions. Institutional theory suggests that the creation of institutions has both positive and negative impacts on a country's development (Gold and Nawyn, 2019).

5 Conclusion

In conclusion, based on the conducted research on migration patterns of Ukrainian nationals residing in the Czech Republic, it is apparent that labour migration is essential for both origin and destination countries. To determine the factors contributing to the notable migratory flows of Ukrainians, it was necessary to examine various migration theories. Although the neoclassical theory strongly supports the phenomenon of Ukrainian migration, qualitative interviews revealed that political turmoil in Ukraine, particularly the Maidan Uprising and its consequences, played an equally significant role as the socio-economic needs of the population. These events caused many Ukrainians to face an emotional dilemma regarding the political stability of their country and whether to continue living there.

The interviewees shared that they had initially planned to work and study in the Czech Republic on a temporary basis. However, they ended up extending their stay due to multiple factors, including the political situation in Ukraine and the opportunities of better living standards in the Czech Republic. Collective anxiety about Ukraine's prosperity was the most prominent factor that influenced their decision to stay in the Czech Republic.

That being said, socio-economic factors cannot be overlooked, and it is vital to consider the reasons behind Ukrainian migration through a different migration theory, such as the segmented labour market theory. Qualitative interviews and statistical overview from scholarly articles revealed that Ukrainians primarily occupy the secondary labour sector which confirms the Czech republic's reliance on migrant workers, as they improve the state of the productive population imbalance and solve issues such as pension liabilities and demographic overview of the population.

By evaluating the interviewees' stories and gaining insights into how temporary employment agencies underpay Ukrainian migrants, it has become clear how much the Czech business industry relies on this productive population. Many employers prefer to hire migrants without having to pay for health benefits and tax expenses, which reinforces their dependence on this workforce. While the secondary sector offers various job opportunities, the interviewees agreed that wages and working conditions are often subpar compared to those offered to Czech citizens. However, despite these challenges, all respondents stated that they were satisfied with this arrangement, as these temporary jobs provide a flexible schedule and higher pay. Also, they have formed meaningful connections and social

networks with other Ukrainian migrants and Czech citizens, which have helped them integrate into the community.

The aim of this study was to investigate the experiences of Ukrainian migrants who live in the Czech Republic. Given the significant migration waves during the time of the migration crisis and the revolution of dignity, it was equally important to assess changes in the legal framework and their impact on Ukrainian migrants. As the migration crisis of 2015 unfolded in Europe, Czech migration laws became more even stricter. The government reduced the number of asylum seekers it accepts and increased the number of rejected applications. Despite these restrictions, the Czech government has continued to encourage the migration of foreign workers, especially from Ukraine, as a means of improving labour shortages in various sectors and demographic challenges. The Czech government implemented a number of initiatives to attract working migrants. While the introduction of the Employee Card has made it easier for Czech employers to hire foreign workers, the country's stricter migration laws highlight the government's efforts to limit the number of migrants entering the country.

The Czech Republic has historically maintained a delicate balance between the need for foreign workers to fill labour shortages and the desire to maintain control over the number and type of migrants entering the country. This approach was reflected in the country's immigration policies, which prioritized working migrants. However, the approach changed drastically after the Russian invasion of Ukraine in 2022. The Czech Republic, like many other European countries, faced a surge of displaced persons and refugees from Ukraine. As a result, the Czech government changed its immigration policies and granted temporary protection to all Ukrainian refugees.

Experiences of Ukrainian working migrants in the Czech Republic illustrate the complex nature of migration and how it impacts people on multiple levels. While labour migration can offer numerous benefits, it also presents challenges that working migrants encounter daily.

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7 Appendix

7.1 Interview Results

Respondent 1

What is your opinion on the Maidan Uprising? How did it affect your life?

I am a patriot. Although I was a teenager when Maidan happened, I was able to recognize the importance of such an event. My perception of my home country and its people have changed drastically. I learned that Ukraine's population is very strong, and that just because things are a certain way for a long time, it doesn't mean it's too late for a change. This made me feel hopeful that our people could stand up for themselves and reject joining Russia.

You came to the Czech Republic on a student visa, were your parents planning on sending you abroad before Maidan, or was it a turning point in the decision-making process?

My parents vaguely suggested the idea of me moving abroad after graduating, but it was just one of many options. Maidan made it very clear that I should migrate since the situation in the country, both politically and economically, felt very unstable and uncertain. Ukrainian economy was not thriving before 2014, but inflation rates grew rapidly which made my parents concerned for my future there. Although Ukraine had great education opportunities, people were anxious and scared that it would turn into a full-blown war (which eventually happened).

Would you have moved back home after graduating?

Yes, that was my initial plan, a year ago I was seriously considering moving back after my graduation.

And your parents are still in Ukraine?

Yes, they are. I am from the western part of Ukraine. Although there are rockets flying once in a while, my parents have their lives, work, and friends there. Moreover, my dad is still of age to serve, so coming to the Czech Republic was out of the question. If the situation gets too critical, leaving Ukraine would be an option.

You were a teenager when Maidan happened. Do you remember if your relatives, friends, or parents' friends started migrating more often?

Yes, I do remember, but as I mentioned earlier, since my region wasn't as affected as Donetsk, Luhansk, or Kyiv oblasts, there wasn't a significant increase in migration. I have friends and family members from Donetsk who experienced large waves of migration. In comparison, Chmelnycky did not experience such large migratory waves.

Why did you choose the Czech Republic? Was it because of the cultural resemblance, the not very costly lifestyle, or existing connections in Prague that would guide you through the process of assimilation?

We considered countries such as Poland, Slovakia, and Slovenia. A big factor for us was the universities in the Czech Republic, which had better faculties of economics and business compared to Poland and Slovenia. The language seemed to be resembling Ukrainian the most, also, my mom's friend's daughter was already living here, which made my mom feel more confident about sending me to the Czech Republic.

When did you start working in the Czech Republic?

Within the first two months of my arrival to the Czech Republic to finish a year-long Czech course, I started working for temporary employment agencies, such as Česko evropská agentura and Art Viko. These agencies offered positions like waiter, bus tour guide, and shop assistant.

Did you like the jobs you were offered?

A big advantage of working through agencies that send you places whenever they need people is that it's very flexible. If I had more time on my hands and they let me know that a waitress or a hostess was needed, I would go for that shift. When I left for holidays, I wasn't attached or obligated to work full-time, so it was maybe the most prominent plus of these gigs. But, in general, the work was hard and physically demanding, which I never enjoyed.

Why did you feel the need to start working so early?

I didn't feel pressured to send money back home to my parents since they were supporting me for the first couple of years in Prague. However, I needed to gain work experience for my CV and did not want to burden them financially with extra expenses on my account.

Did you ever feel tension from your Czech colleagues? A certain level of disrespect or animosity towards you?

Yes, there were moments when I felt like a misfit in a work setting surrounded by Czechs (snide comments or laughs at my expense), but it felt like the animosity wasn't directed towards me specifically, but rather towards Ukrainian migrants in general. I am quite frustrated with how Czechs act now; they tend to put us in the same category as Russians and think of us as the same nationality. At first there was plenty of support coming from them, but now it seems like they're exhausted from hosting so many Ukrainians in their country.

While it is understandable, I can't help but feel like their acts of kindness are disingenuous. But again, it depends on a person, many Czech acquaintances of mine came through offering their help and support after the invasion in 2022 and I never felt uncomfortable.

Respondent 2

How have the events at Maidan affected your life?

It was an extremely negative experience for me. I was in my senior year of high school, about to graduate, and I had my whole future mapped out. I was set on staying in Donetsk to study at the university that I had fulfilled all the requirements for. But my plans for the future changed so rapidly, all in just one month. I then wanted to go to the university that my grandmother and mother had studied at, with a clear idea of where I would be living and what I would be doing. However, life had a way of turning it all around and I was left with no choice but to apply to Kyiv. I studied there for four years and eventually decided to pursue my master's degree in Prague. I simply fell in love with the city, but prior to 2014, I never thought I would move there.

Did you have any plans to move abroad or within Ukraine before the events of Maidan?

No, not really. I did want to travel, but there was so much negativity towards Ukrainians moving from Donetsk and Luhansk regions within the country. It seemed my political views

and opinions needed to be proven in every discussion with a Ukrainian which was exhausting and unfair. Moving from Kyiv to Prague was a way for me to escape from the people and their politics. I moved to Prague to finish my master's degree and later realized that I wanted to stay here.

So, you arrived here on a student visa. When did you start working?

I started working through agencies after a month of moving to Prague. Initially, I worked as a waitress, tour bus guide, and hostess. Later, I found a position as a receptionist on my own since the rate agencies were paying and taking their cut was ridiculous. As a student, I found an internship and have been working at my current position in a company ever since.

After graduating you applied for a work visa, correct?

Yes, I did. I applied for a work permit after graduating from the university. Initially, I wanted to keep my options open and have the freedom to switch jobs, but later, I realized that the benefits and convenience of working where I am now are too valuable to give up.

Do you like working in the Czech Republic?

Yes, I worked in a bank in Ukraine and absolutely hated it. If you work for a company, especially in an international environment, treatment of employees is very up to standard and work-life balance is very good in the Czech Republic.

Do you feel like there is prejudice regarding your nationality?

I think all migrants feel that way, as if they are thieves of resources that every Czech citizen relies on. Migrants live under constant fear of being deported or having their documents rejected for permanent stay. These are the things that every migrant must deal with. At my current job, I don't feel any tension because I am Ukrainian. But before the invasion, although treatment of Russians is not any different, you can tell that Russians (especially the rich ones) are treated with respect and assumed to belong to a higher class. However, since most Ukrainians work either on construction sites or as cleaning ladies, they don't expect much from us, and it's definitely frustrating. Especially now, I find it suspicious how we were treated like second-class citizens just recently, and now there is an overwhelming amount of love and support. I just don't trust it. And now that it has been a year, I can feel the amount of support decreasing, and Ukraine is just becoming one of the news items.

Why did you choose the Czech Republic?

Among the countries that were close to us, the Czech Republic stood out for its opportunities, financial stability, and diversity. Poland felt too close, our countries were too similar to drop everything in Ukraine and move to Poland. I loved Prague so much, even though the cost of living was more expensive and less attainable, it was worth it since I knew I would be working there. Free education was a big plus, and since the Czech language is similar to Ukrainian, it wasn't much of a challenge to study in Czech.

Did you have any pre-existing connections in the Czech Republic?

Yes, my mom had a friend in the Czech Republic who had been helping me a lot with university-related issues and giving me many tips on finding employment. While I do have acquaintances abroad, choosing the Czech Republic was based on various factors, and I don't think I wouldn't have moved here if that person wasn't living here. However, if she lived in a different city, such as Brno instead of Prague, I would have considered moving to that city first.

Do you financially support your family members?

With the salary I am currently making, I wanted to send money to my family in Donetsk many times, but the only option at the moment is to send it with a messenger. Unfortunately, there are no options for bank transfers because of the ongoing conflict in the region. I do my best to financially support my family whenever possible, but it is challenging due to the limitations.

Respondent 3**What are your thoughts on the Maidan Uprising? How did it affect your life?**

I strongly believe that it was a good decision to protest. I have always respected the amount of will the Ukrainian people had to try to change such fundamental issues, and even die for what they believed in.

Did you ever consider moving to the Czech Republic before the Maidan protests?

No, I was content with my life in Ukraine, and if it weren't for the war, I would still be living there.

Did you notice if people from your hometown were considering moving abroad?

People did not drop everything and move away, but rather started planning for their children to move abroad. There wasn't a substantial migration trend among people from my hometown, however, I noticed that older generation began saving money to fund their children to study abroad. Their lives were comfortable, they had their jobs, friends, and family, but there was definitely a collective anxiety about what awaited Ukraine in this political game.

When did you start commuting to the Czech Republic for work opportunities?

I started commuting to Prague for temporary work since I was 16 and went every year for 10 years. I knew that I wouldn't make the same pay check in Ukraine, even if I worked long shifts. Wage difference was the biggest factor in my decision to come to Prague every year for three months to work. It was easy to find a job with the same hours, a bigger pay check, and I enjoyed the flexibility that came with temporary employment. I came to the Czech Republic solely for work opportunities.

Why the Czech Republic?

Czechia, compared to Poland or Slovakia, felt like a very advanced and modern country. My aunt has been living here for many years, so I had someone to guide me through all the processes and stay with.

How did you find employment?

People who come here from Ukraine usually do not find a good job, as it is mostly either in the hospitality industry or on construction sites. I never actually worked through agencies, like many people do. I heard about different jobs through acquaintances, mostly my aunt's friends. The perks of working at temporary places like that also allowed me to get paid right away. I enjoyed not having to wait until the end of the month to get paid. Many young people I worked with also expressed how convenient it was to get paid right after their shift.

Were you making money for your personal expenses, or did you feel obliged to send it back home to your family?

The money I earned was enough to cover my personal expenses during my stay in Prague, as well as send some back to my family in Ukraine. They had been struggling with the increased inflation at the time so I knew it would be crucial to send at least some amounts back home.

What type of visa were you holding at the time of these trips?

I had a biometric visa that allowed all Ukrainians to travel within the EU for three months. After my most recent trip to Prague, I met my husband, who later shared his permanent residency with me after our marriage was registered.

Do you like living in the Czech Republic?

Yes, but honestly, I miss Ukraine a lot and I think I would have been living there right now if the invasion didn't happen.

Can you tell me about your work experiences and the types of jobs you've had?

My first job was cleaning houses. I went with my aunt, and we made around 85 CZK per hour, which was fair at the time. Then I worked as a cleaning lady in hotels, and later in a warehouse of a retail store. The retail store manager would let our boss know they need people, he would hire us and out of 110 CZK per hour for each person, we would get 85 CZK from that. Since most of the people I was working with only had tourist visas, the pay difference didn't bother them that much.

Did you feel like people were treating you badly at work?

No, actually, everybody was very polite and respectful. To be fair, I worked mostly with other Ukrainians and made many friends while working.

How did you learn about job opportunities in the Czech Republic?

Through my aunt, she has financial issues a difficult time in Ukraine and was forced to go to Prague for work. The wage difference between the two places was crazy to me, so I decided to financially support myself by going on these trips.

Respondent 4

What are your thoughts on the Maidan Uprising? How did it affect your life?

I moved to the Czech Republic in 2010, so I wasn't in Ukraine when the Maidan protests started. I come from a generation where I considered all nationalities from the Soviet Union to be the same nation. We all shared a similar upbringing and similar values, so it pains me to see what is happening right now. I have met many great Russians and also bad Russians and Ukrainians, but it all depends on the person really. I wish people didn't have to get hurt for their beliefs, but unfortunately, it seems to be the only way. I am from the western part of Ukraine, and although I didn't worry about my family, I still sent money back home every month.

Why did you relocate to the Czech Republic?

My family was burdened with financial debt, and I realized that I wouldn't be able to earn the same amount of money in Ukraine. Some of the people I knew had already left the country for employment opportunities, so I decided to give it a try as well.

Did you find employment right away?

Yes, I did. A friend of mine introduced me to a man who helped connect workers with employers, and he sent me to a few shifts to try out the work. I started by cleaning houses and offices, and then I worked some shifts washing dishes.

How many shifts did you work per week?

I worked every day, which means I had around 30 shifts per month. It was exhausting, but I knew that it was necessary to pay off my debts and send money to my family. I realized that it would have taken me twice the time and effort to earn the same amount of money in Ukraine.

So, you started commuting to the Czech Republic in 2010. Were you planning on staying in the country indefinitely?

No, not really. I was working a lot and thought that I would go home as soon as the debt was paid off. However, I met my Czech husband at that time and decided to stay. I obtained

permanent residency after marrying him, and now I have my citizenship. After settling down here, I also moved my son to Prague.

Do you like working in the Czech Republic? Did you ever feel any tension coming from Czech colleagues?

Yes, it was hard adapting to my life here considering I wanted to go back home to my family, but financial trouble seemed like the end of the world at the time and the work is definitely physically challenging, but then you kind of get used to your lifestyle.

Fortunately, the people I worked with were very nice, I actually found many good friends at all my jobs. Despite high unemployment rates during the crisis, I never received comments like "go back to your country" or "you're taking our jobs." In fact, most Czechs didn't want to work the jobs that Ukrainians typically worked, so I mostly worked alongside other Ukrainians.

What is your opinion on the working conditions for foreign migrants in the Czech Republic?

In my experience, the work is physically demanding and can be quite exhausting. I have had some bad managers who would get frustrated when we didn't understand what they were saying in Czech, or when the shifts lasted longer than 12 hours. However, it is the kind of work that you sign up for, and it is your choice to take on these jobs. When they were taking a significant cut out of my pay, I thought it was a bit unfair, but I wouldn't have made the same money in Ukraine even if they doubled my shift.

Respondent 5 (Legal Counsellor)

The NGO you're currently working for deals with different types of requests coming from Ukrainian migrants, did the number of migrants requesting international protection significantly increase after 2014?

I joined the NGO in 2016 and worked at our Plzen branch, which has a large Ukrainian community. I started working after Maidan happened and was assigned to work with refugees applying for asylum which was almost none. Most of the people we worked with were Ukrainians working legally in the Czech Republic with work visas, or those who came for temporary jobs and left after their three-month period ended. Most asylum seekers were in Prague, during the time of the migration crisis and Maidan happening, the Czech migration

policy has been strict, but laws became even stricter where the Ministry of Interior would grant asylum in very rare cases. If a Ukrainian refugee asked for protection feeling unsafe residing in Ukraine, the Czech government would just advise them to move to a safer more western part of Ukraine. The laws were very strict up until the invasion in 2022. In the EU they have a list of “safe” and “unsafe” countries, unless you are from an “unsafe” country, you must prove to the ministry why the conditions of your living are unsafe and in the case of a rejected application, go to the court. And Ukraine was one of the “safe” countries until the invasion. So, in order for Ukrainian migrants to stay in the country indefinitely, they should come here on tourist visa, apply for a job, and prolong their stay with a work visa, that has been the case since 2016 until 2022. When Czech government allowed issuing the 3-month tourist visas, it really shifted how Ukrainian migrant workers started going to the Czech Republic.

And is it illegal to work during the three-month tourist stay?

Yes, it is illegal to work in the Czech Republic if you only have a tourist visa. You are only allowed to work with a valid work visa, but the number of work permits issued by the Ministry of Interior did not meet the demand from Ukrainian migrants. There is a limited number of work permits the Ministry can issue, and it is common knowledge that the Czech embassy in Ukraine is prone to corruption. To obtain a work permit, applicants often have to pay someone to prioritize and expedite their application processing.

What does the asylum procedure look like in the Czech Republic?

The asylum procedure in the Czech Republic is a very lengthy process. Basically, it's in their best interest to intentionally delay the proceedings to wear down the asylum seekers until they give up. One of my clients sought asylum due to Maidan in 2016, but they were only granted subsidiary protection in 2021.

And where are they housed while waiting for a decision on their application?

If you request international protection, you are offered accommodation in a refugee camp. If you find private housing, you are free to leave. However, in the refugee camp, you must stay for the first two weeks to undergo fingerprint verification, a medical examination, and an interview.

If you find private housing while waiting for a decision on your asylum application, are there any restrictions on where you can reside?

While seeking asylum, you are not allowed to leave the country, but if you find private housing, you can live in an apartment or a house. They also take your passport during the procedure and return it once the decision is made. Afterward, you need to go to the ministry to renew your stay with your asylum application every month.

Can you be employed during this period?

For the first six months, you cannot be employed. After that, you can start working. However, it is important to note that this information is based on the situation before the war in 2022. The Ministry of Interior processes asylum applications for six months, during which time you cannot work. The process often takes longer, around 1-1.5 years, and if it is not resolved within that time, you can file a lawsuit in court.

What would be longest period one of clients waited for an answer from the Ministry of Interior?

From my experience, the longest a person waited was two years, after that they went to the court. The court announces that the ministry has made an error, they send the case back to the ministry and ask for appeal, the ministry then takes another one to two years to make a decision, and this game of ping pong can last for years. I had a client who waited for 8 years to reach a final decision, but eventually received asylum. In some cases, if the court grants asylum but the ministry is hesitant, the court can give the asylum directly.

If working on a tourist visa in the Czech Republic can lead to harsh punishment, such as a large penalty or deportation, how do illegal employment agencies manage to operate openly?

The Czech Republic has an unusually large number of these agencies. The reason for this is that many employers prefer to hire illegal workers who do not require health benefits or additional tax expenses. Initially, regulations were almost non-existent, and although the authorities are now trying to increase control, the regulations are still quite laughable. Shutting down an agency or reporting it to the authorities is a very difficult process, as it is challenging to prove that the agency employs illegal workers. Even if there's proof, the

agency will likely only receive a financial penalty, close down, and then start operating under a new name.

Can they be sentenced to imprisonment for their illegal activities?

In Czech law, it is difficult to separate the company from the individuals behind it. These agencies would operate under a company name, and as soon as they were hit with a lawsuit, they would disappear. Even the financial penalty was a joke to them because they would make a lot of money, pay the fine, and continue working. The State Labour Inspection Office is responsible for dealing with working conditions and should be in charge of shutting down such places, but it is not very effective in the Czech Republic, and it is almost impossible to catch all of them.

What about the refugees who arrived after the 2022 invasion?

All Ukrainian refugees who came to the Czech Republic were granted international protection for a year, which has recently been extended for another year. I am very happy to see that the laws are accommodating the needs of Ukrainian refugees in this predicament, as the process is incredibly daunting, and opening the borders for refugees was an urgent matter. However, it is now unclear what the future holds. Transitioning from temporary protection to permanent residency is very complicated and requires a lot of time spent on bureaucratic minutia. The Czech government is making a significant effort to integrate Ukrainian refugees into Czech society, but it is uncertain if they will be able to stay in the country permanently. Currently, we are working to extend their stay for our clients and help them find employment and obtain sufficient documents.