

Ad Hoc Committee on Migration

REPORT ON THE FIELD VISIT TO THE CZECH REPUBLIC

Prague, 14-16 December 2022



Prepared by the OSCE PA International Secretariat

20 February 2022

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Report on the Field Visit to the Czech Republic

(Prague, 14-16 December 2022)

I. Introduction

From 14 to 16 December 2022, a delegation of the OSCE PA Ad Hoc Committee on Migration consisting of OSCE PA Vice-President and Migration Committee Chair Mark Pritchard (MP, United Kingdom), Committee Vice-Chair Kyriakos Hadjiyianni (MP, Cyprus) and Committee Member Georgios Varenos (MP, Greece) travelled to Prague with the objective to learn more about how the Czech Republic has dealt with an influx of nearly half a million people fleeing the war in Ukraine since Russia's invasion in February 2022.

The visit aimed to bring greater recognition to the significant efforts made by the Czech Republic to welcome and integrate this unprecedented numbers of refugees, to identify examples of 'best practice' as well as highlight areas where further action is needed.

The delegation was hosted by the Chamber of Deputies of the Parliament of the Czech Republic and the Delegation of the Czech Republic to the OSCE PA headed by Mr. Jan Bauer. Czech PA delegation members Ms. Lucie Potůčková, Mr. Hayato Josef Okamura and Ms. Jana Pastuchová also participated in some of the meetings.

The OSCE PA Ad Hoc Committee on Migration was established in 2016 with the aim to identify good practices with respect to migration management. It has carried out numerous field visits and developed targeted recommendations with the aim to promote comprehensive, effective and humane migration management in the OSCE area with special regard for migrants and refugees in vulnerable categories, in particular unaccompanied minors.¹

II. Background

1. The 2022 Ukraine Refugee Crisis and the Czech Republic

At the time of the Committee's visit, 464,910 refugees from Ukraine had been recorded in the Czech Republic, of whom 464,701 were registered for Temporary Protection (figures as of 7 December 2022), equivalent to about 4 per cent of the country's population (10.2 million). This represents the largest number of Ukrainian refugees per capita in Europe.

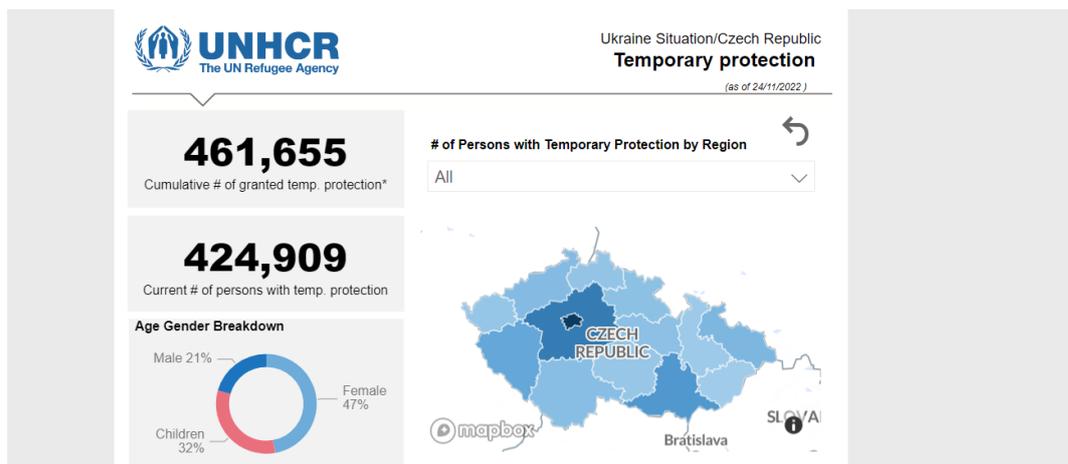
¹ For more on the OSCE PA Ad Hoc Committee on Migration, please see: <https://www.oscepa.org/en/activities/ad-hoc-committees-and-working-groups/migration>.

Refugees from Ukraine across Europe as of 06 December 2022



One explanation for why the Czech Republic attracted such large numbers of refugees from Ukraine can be linked to the sizeable Ukrainian community already living there. Numbering fewer than 10,000 in the early 1990s, by early 2022 the official number of Ukrainian citizens residing in the country had risen to over 130,000, making them the largest migrant group, ahead of the Slovak and Vietnamese communities. Furthermore, many Ukrainians in the Transcarpathian region, a former part of Czechoslovakia, continued to have a close connection to the Czech lands.

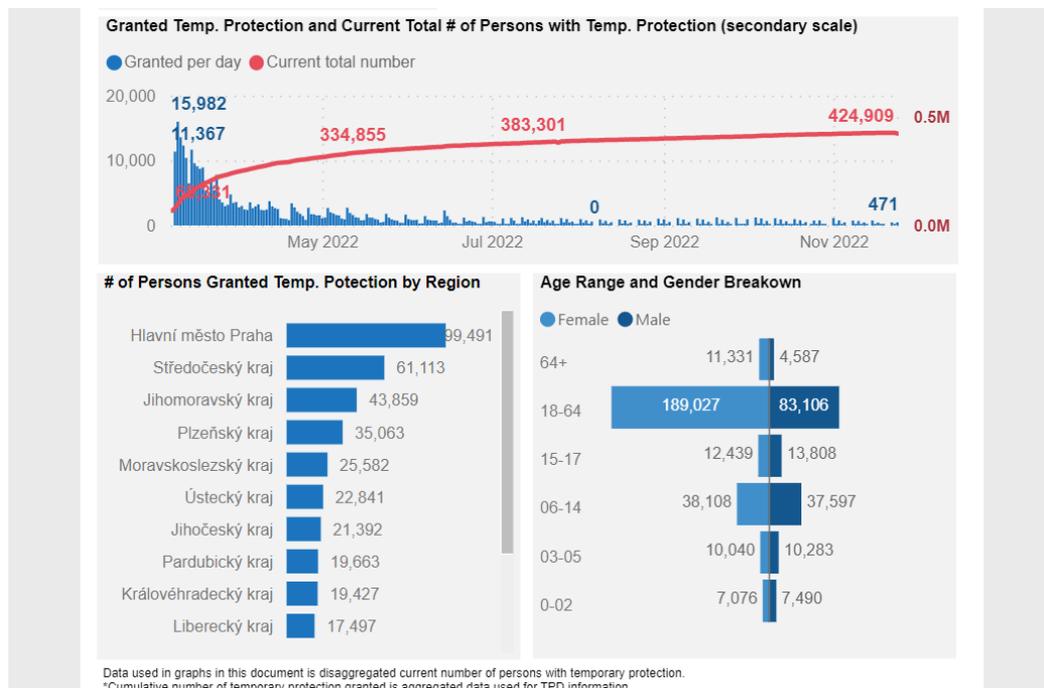
The gender and age structure of the Ukrainian refugee community in the Czech Republic is similar to that in other countries: Almost half (47 per cent) are women; 32 per cent are children.



The influx of refugees peaked in March 2022 and started levelling off at the beginning of the summer and has since been increasing at a relatively stable rate.

It was expected that, due to the onset of winter and attacks on Ukraine's energy infrastructure, the numbers of people fleeing the country would pick up again. At the same time, the Czech

Republic warned that it has a capacity to receive a maximum of half a million people. If more refugees were to arrive, this could cause a housing crisis, and would also represent a significant strain on the health care and education systems.²



Source: UNHCR, Ukraine Situation, Czech Republic Temporary Protection,

2. Main features of the Czech response

Shortly following the Russian Federation’s invasion of Ukraine on 24 February 2022, the Czech government approved a package of laws (*Lex Ukraine*) on 17 March focusing on the rapid registration and integration of refugees. It allowed people to remain in the country for up to 1 year (or until 31 March 2023 at the latest) and took a broad approach to applying the EU Temporary Protection Directive (TPD)³.

Temporary Protection (TP) applies to the following categories:

- citizens of Ukraine who were resident in Ukraine before 24 February as well as to those who arrived in the Czech Republic after 24 February;
- those who were residing in Ukraine lawfully without a visa or on a short-term visa;
- those who do not yet have a long-term EU residence permit;
- third-country nationals, stateless persons, and foreigners who were granted some form of international protection in Ukraine and who resided in Ukraine before 24 February and to family members of those eligible for TP.

² “Rakušan: Returned Ukrainian refugees could come back before winter,” Radio Prague International (1 November 2022),

<https://english.radio.cz/rakusan-returned-ukrainian-refugees-could-come-back-winter-8765761>; see also: https://www.idnes.cz/zpravy/domaci/ukrajina-valka-uprchlici-rakusan-navrat-zima-rusko.A221101_102540_domaci_remy.

³ https://home-affairs.ec.europa.eu/policies/migration-and-asylum/common-european-asylum-system/temporary-protection_en.

Three pieces of legislation have been adopted as part of the governmental response: a law on temporary protection; a law on employment and social security; and a law on education. The response is driven mainly by the Ministry of the Interior which, together with other ministries, prepared materials setting out the government's strategic priorities for the medium- and long-term management of the situation in the Czech Republic. The government strategy is articulated around thirteen priority areas and implemented through thirteen working groups, including coordination, communication, financing, digital management, and all the relevant aspects of refugee integration (housing, education, health, social affairs, security, etc.).

A National Coordinator coordinates and manages the measures in cooperation with departments, regions and cities. The National Coordinator is directly subordinated to the government and has its own strategic team, including a Strategic Communication Coordinator (media and disinformation commissioner Michal Klíma) and a Coordinator for securing financial support from the EU budget (European Affairs Minister Mikuláš Bek). The position of National Coordinator was initially held by Interior Minister Vít Rakušan. He has been replaced as National Coordinator by the Government Commissioner for Human Rights.

Funding has been allocated by the EU to the most affected Member States, mainly under the Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund (AMIF). In addition, in March 2022, the Council of Europe Development Bank (CEB) approved, among others, a EUR 400,000 grant to finance the provision of accommodation, information, employment, health, legal and social services, and an initial EUR 200 million humanitarian aid loan, allowances for housing, and hiring of temporary staff to provide reception support. The US also provides humanitarian assistance to support those affected by Russia's war against Ukraine, including USD 10.2 million for organizations working in the Czech Republic such as IOM, UNICEF, UNHCR and WHO.

As of October 2022, Czech spending on the Ukrainian Refugee Crisis had reached CZK 16.9 bln (EUR 687 million). However, actual spending for the whole of 2022 was expected to be lower than the initially estimate of CZK 25 billion (EUR 1 bln). Most of the costs, CZK 13.9 billion (EUR 575 million), were earmarked from the state budget. The largest amount was for social benefits, amounting to CZK 7 billion (EUR 287 million).

It is also important to note that, at the onset of the war, humanitarian funding was only allocated to the five countries bordering Ukraine listed in the UNHCR's Regional Refugee Response Plan (Poland, Romania, Slovakia, Moldova, Hungary). A number of countries that had also accepted large numbers of refugees relative to their population, such as the Czech Republic and Estonia, were originally excluded.

Amendments to *Lex Ukraine* adopted in May 2022 tightened certain conditions:⁴

- Applicants for TP who do not have housing will have to prove that they have secured accommodation in order to qualify for TP. Changes of residence in the Czech Republic must be reported to the Ministry of Interior within 3 working days (down from 15 days).
- An application for TP will not be accepted if an application for temporary or international protection has been made in another EU Member State or if one of these forms of protection has been granted.

⁴ <https://www.praguemorning.cz/czech-republic-tightens-entry-conditions-for-ukrainian-refugees/> and <https://visitukraine.today/blog/1100/ukrainians-in-the-czech-republic-what-changes-are-expected-for-refugees-in-2023>

- The state will cover health insurance for refugees for a maximum of 180 days (this measure does not apply to children and the elderly). Thereafter, they must pay for health insurance themselves, be employed, or be registered with the labour office as a job seeker. Students between 18 and 26 years of age who are studying at secondary and higher education institutions in Ukraine are considered dependent children for the purposes of health insurance and do not have to pay insurance premiums.
- Refugees will receive a humanitarian allowance of CZK 5,000 (EUR 205) to purchase basic necessities to start life in the Czech Republic, for the month in which they obtained a protection visa. They can receive an allowance for a further five months if they prove that they need it. People who have been provided with free accommodation, food, and basic hygiene products will not receive a humanitarian allowance.

At the time of the Committee's visit, the Czech government announced a third round of amendments to *Lex Ukraine* as follows⁵:

- Extension of the TPD for an additional year until March 2024; registration via an electronic form on the Ministry of Interior's website by end March 2023 plus in person visit to the Ministry of Interior.
- Softening of employment conditions for general practitioners and paediatricians;
- Provision of emergency shelter (gyms) for a maximum of 30 days; emergency accommodation (hotel rooms) for a maximum of 150 days;
- Increase in state support to families providing accommodation from CZK 250-350 / day to CZK 300-400 (€ 12-16) per day;
- Some other changes were also foreseen in relation to social benefits for low-income families, persons with disabilities; education, and the school enrolment process.

As a part of the response, fourteen (14) Regional Assistance Centres for Ukraine (KACPU) were established to process and register people arriving in the Czech Republic and to immediately grant TP to those who qualify, as well as facilitate the process of organising accommodation, and registering offers of assistance from civil society. These centres also provide services of registration of Ukrainian citizens with the police and further assistance in connection with residence in the Czech Republic (accommodation, etc.).

The list of Regional Centres can be found here: <https://www.mvcr.cz/clanek/seznam-krajisnych-asistencnich-center-pomoci-ukrajine.aspx>.

3. Measures related to accommodation, education, employment, health care

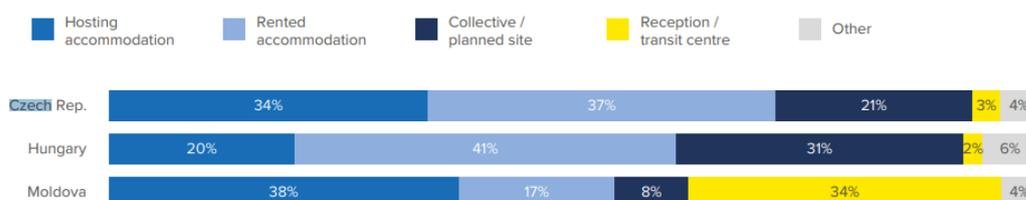
One main challenge in providing accommodation is the uneven distribution of refugees between different parts of the country, with the highest pressure on the capital Prague. This has also led to strains on the healthcare and education sectors. The Mayor of Prague, Zdeněk Hřib, has drawn attention to the struggles of the capital and criticized the lack of a system to relocate refugees to other, less crowded regions within the country. However, the Czech national authorities are against a mandatory relocation system.

⁵<https://www.ceska-justice.cz/2022/11/vnitro-chce-prodlouzit-docasnou-ochranu-ukrajincu-zmekci-se-podminky-pro-lekare/>

Furthermore, most refugees do not want to move. According to a survey conducted by IOM during the summer,⁶ 49 per cent of respondents reported that they planned to remain in the same location in the Czech Republic; only 1 per cent were willing to relocate.

Czech authorities have been providing accommodation in hotels, dormitories and other state buildings. Hundreds of Ukrainians have also been hosted in Czech households. More than half of refugees live in cramped conditions with less than 6m² living space per person.

CURRENT ACCOMMODATION, BY HOST COUNTRY



Source: UNHCR, <https://data.unhcr.org/en/situations/ukraine> as of June 2022

The transition from collective accommodation to private housing is a priority of the government and will rely on (1) the establishment of a database on the number of private individuals offering accommodation; this will also enable risk mitigation; (2) a national grant programme for municipalities and NGOs to finance the repair of vacant apartments/houses; (3) support to real estate developers/rental housing companies to offer vacant apartments; (4) installation of furnished and equipped housing containers.

The Czech state also provides a solidarity household allowance for Czech providers of accommodation to beneficiaries of TP. Government regulations determine the amount as well as maximum numbers of persons accommodated per household.

As mentioned above, following amendments to *Lex Ukraine*, applicants for TP will have to prove that they have secured accommodation if they do not already have housing provided by a regional assistance centre. Furthermore, persons with free accommodation, food and basic hygiene products are not eligible to receive a humanitarian allowance.

4. Unaccompanied and Separated Children from Ukraine

Czech authorities differentiate between unaccompanied minors (children arriving without adults – UAMs) and separated children (children arriving with another adult person than their own parents). For the purposes of social and legal protection, legal guardians of children according to Ukrainian law, such as grandparents or adult siblings, are also accepted.

Only a small number of children arriving in the Czech Republic from Ukraine are believed to be unaccompanied minors. However, exact figures are hard to come by due to the lack of proper

⁶ IOM, Ukraine Response 2022 – Czechia, Displacement Surveys, Refugees from Ukraine and other TCNs, data collected 15 June – 29 July 2022, at: https://displacement.iom.int/sites/g/files/tmzbd11461/files/reports/IOM_DTM_CZE_Surveys_UKR%20response_Jun-July%202022.pdf

registration⁷. As the Czech Republic does not share a border with Ukraine they are not systematically registered, which heightens the risk of them going missing.⁸

UAMs need to approach regional assistance centres in order to receive protection. If a UAM is located by the police or another authority, they are by law obliged to contact local social authorities in order to arrange protection measures. The office of the Social and Legal Child Protection Authority (OSPOD) is responsible for designating an employee as a guardian for the child in case there is no other relevant person.

Separated children receive protection and help as needed. Social and legal protection authorities keep records of these children if they are informed about their arrival by a regional assistance centre (KACPU) or the police.

According to UNICEF, if and once an UAM is identified, the effective referral system in place prior to the crisis enables a quick response through the municipality. UAMs are offered accommodation including through foster families and community care, guardianship, social support and schooling. Czech authorities report that Ukrainian authorities prefer that UAMs are not placed in foster families as the latter would be considered as adoptive parents.

At the same time, the Special Representative of the Council of Europe Secretary General on Migration and Refugees (CoE SRSR), Leyla Kayacik, has emphasized that the best interests of the child and Council of Europe standards on prioritizing family-based care should prevail.⁹ The CoE SRSR has welcomed the flexibility of Czech authorities who seek to keep groups together by recognizing non-legal guardians (uncles, aunts, grandparents, friends, neighbours). At the same time, she has warned that the guardian needs to be carefully monitored.

Issues related to the guardianship of the large numbers of pupils from institutions or boarding schools, half of whom have disabilities, have been flagged, with a recommendation to carry out thorough monitoring.

According to Ukrainian legislation, unaccompanied minors aged 16-18 may travel abroad without parental consent. They therefore consider themselves autonomous and are reluctant to register and tend to avoid entering into foster care or guardianship. The CoE SRSR has recommended that specially trained social workers identify and liaise with these children at high risk of abuse and human trafficking.

5. Combatting Trafficking in Human Beings

According to the US Department of State's 2022 report,¹⁰ the Czech Republic fully meets the minimum standards for the elimination of trafficking. Nonetheless, observers have noted that many Ukrainian women and children that have crossed the Czech border are vulnerable to trafficking. In the early days, large numbers of unmonitored individuals offered transport and housing. As the Czech Republic has only open land borders with neighbouring EU countries,

⁷ https://supportkind.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/Note-on-Unaccompanied-Children-Fleeing-from-Ukraine_Updated.pdf

⁸ <https://eurochild.org/uploads/2022/06/Czechia-CZ-country-profile-for-Alt-Care-and-UASC-for-Ukrainian-children.pdf>

⁹ Report of the fact-finding mission to the Czech Republic by Ms. Leyla Kayacik, Special Representative of the Secretary General on Migration and Refugees, 4-6 May 2022 (5 July 2022) (SG/Inf(2022)25), pp. 13-14, <https://rm.coe.int/report-of-the-fact-finding-mission-to-the-czech-republic/1680a72648>.

¹⁰ <https://www.state.gov/reports/2022-trafficking-in-persons-report/czech-republic/>

it was impossible to establish efficient registration procedures. NGOs suspect that cases of trafficking are more widespread than official reports would seem to suggest.¹¹

Traffickers increasingly use online platforms to recruit victims. The commercial sex industry increasingly operates out of private residences, complicating efforts to identify sex trafficking victims. Private, unregistered labour agencies often use deceptive practices to recruit workers from abroad as well as from inside the country. Some agencies sell their registration to unqualified recruiters. There is also evidence that the Czech Republic's prostitution industry¹² is increasingly drawing female refugees from Ukraine.¹³

The CoE SRSG observed that groups of migrants of Roma origin were not allowed to register until they had found accommodation, making them easy targets for traffickers.¹⁴ She also noted that onward travel from Prague free of charge was only possible after registering with the Prague KACPU. This increases the risk of refugees being stranded overnight if they arrive after the KACPU has closed and also deters them from quickly moving on.

Effective registration and protective care arrangements, including specialized accommodation, are necessary to counter risks of trafficking of children on the move.

OSCE recommendations on preventing trafficking in human beings among Ukrainians are being disseminated here: <https://www.helpforukrainians.info/>, as part of a campaign implemented in partnership between the Office of the OSCE Special Representative and Coordinator for Combating Trafficking in Human Beings and Thomson Reuters.

6. Non-Ukrainian and Roma Refugees from Ukraine

In principle, TP should also be given to non-Ukrainians, stateless persons, and foreigners who resided in Ukraine until 24 February 2022. Nonetheless, the CoE SRSG has reported evidence that non-Ukrainians have been encouraged to return to their country of origin through voluntary return flights organized by the International Organization for Migration (IOM).¹⁵

It is estimated that there are several thousand Romani refugees from Ukraine currently in the Czech Republic, with the biggest concentration in Prague. In May, more than 100 were living at the main railway station in Prague and later in tents erected by the government.¹⁶ Czech authorities have acknowledged difficulties in finding accommodation for these refugees. Some have been housed in former Covid-19 quarantine facilities belonging to the Refugee Facilities Administration (SUZ), along with other refugees from Ukraine.¹⁷

¹¹ Report of the fact-finding mission to the Czech Republic by Ms. Leyla Kayacik, Special Representative of the Secretary General on Migration and Refugees, 4-6 May 2022 (5 July 2022) (SG/Inf(2022)25), pp. 18-19.

¹² <https://klymenko-time.com/en/novosti/v-chehii-rastet-kolichestvo-ukrainskih-prostitutok-sutenery-vse-chashhe-vtyagivayut-v-seks-biznes-bezhenok/>

¹³ <https://www.praguemorning.cz/why-would-you-pay-for-a-czech-woman-when-you-can-have-a-much-cheaper-ukrainian/>

¹⁴ Report of the fact-finding mission to the Czech Republic by Ms. Leyla Kayacik, Special Representative of the Secretary General on Migration and Refugees, 4-6 May 2022 (5 July 2022) (SG/Inf(2022)25), p.19.

¹⁵ Report of the fact-finding mission to the Czech Republic by Ms. Leyla Kayacik, Special Representative of the Secretary General on Migration and Refugees, 4-6 May 2022 (5 July 2022) (SG/Inf(2022)25), p.16.

¹⁶ <https://romea.cz/en/news/czech/slovak-mep-of-romani-origin-peter-pollak-it-is-incomprehensible-that-the-czech-republic-is-unable-to-help-a-few-hundred>.

¹⁷ <https://tol.org/client/article/nowhere-to-run.html>; <https://romea.cz/en/news/czech/czech-detention-facility-housing-130-refugees-from-ukraine-half-of-them-are-romani>

Roma refugees have reported xenophobia¹⁸ and differential treatment by authorities. The Czech government has also reportedly denied refugee assistance to persons with dual Hungarian-Ukrainian citizenship, most of whom are Roma¹⁹.

At the same time, by end of May, about 50 Romani refugees had been accommodated in the Hradec Králové Region and their registrations had all been processed by the Regional Assistance Center. The Regional Governor for Hradec Králové Martin Červíček has rejected claims that Romani refugees are coming to the Czech Republic for ‘benefit tourism’.²⁰

7. Public opinion regarding refugees from Ukraine

There are signs of crisis fatigue in the Czech Republic. According to a survey published in September 2022,²¹ 75 per cent of Czechs favoured accepting refugees from Ukraine in the country. A later survey in November²² showed that while most Czechs, Poles, Slovaks, Hungarians and Bulgarians are willing to accept refugees fleeing from Ukraine, Czechs were the least willing to let the refugees live in their own homes (while 61 per cent of Czechs were willing to let Ukrainian refugees in the country – the second highest share, only 12 per cent were willing to host them in their own homes).

In recent months anti-refugee sentiment has reared its head at pro-Russia demonstrations. Organized by far-left and far-right groups under the banner “Czech Republic First,” they have called for early elections, negotiations over Russian gas, military neutrality, and an “end to the planned dilution of the nation” by Ukrainian refugees. Demonstrators have also demanded that the country end its support to Ukrainian refugees.²³

¹⁸ <https://euobserver.com/world/154968>

¹⁹ <https://tol.org/client/article/nowhere-to-run.html>

²⁰ <https://romea.cz/en/news/czech/czech-region-accommodating-roughly-50-romani-refugees-from-ukraine-without-problems-benefit-tourism-is-not-their-motivation>

²¹ <https://www.euronews.com/my-europe/2022/09/29/while-ukrainian-refugees-accepted-new-fears-in-central-europe-over-middle-eastern-migrants>

²² <https://www.expats.cz/czech-news/article/czechs-show-strong-support-for-helping-ukraine-but-there-are-limits>

²³ https://www.b92.net/eng/news/world.php?yyyy=2022&mm=11&dd=07&nav_id=114810

III. Programme on the ground

1. Overview of the strategic priorities of the Czech government regarding the reception of refugees from Ukraine

The Czech government developed early on a comprehensive integration agenda through a three-phased strategy: flight for safety; adaptation and coexistence; long-term solutions. The Government strategy is articulated around 13 priority areas implemented through 13 working-groups, incl. coordination, communication, financing, digital management, and all the relevant aspects of refugee integration (e.g., housing, education, health, social affairs, security, etc.).

The Ministry of the Interior of the Czech Republic established a Strategic Group to serve as a working group of the Central Crisis staff, chaired by Lt. Gen. Vladimír Vlček, Director General of the Fire Rescue Service of the Czech Republic. The Strategic group consists of representatives of the key ministries at the Deputy Minister level²⁴ as well as representatives of other central administrative offices.²⁵

The delegation was comprehensively briefed on how the Czech Republic has managed the influx of refugees from Ukraine by the Chair of the Strategic Group, Lt. Gen. Vladimír Vlček, as well as members of the Strategic Group at the Deputy Minister and expert level.

Temporary Protection (TP) had been granted by the Czech Republic to 467,418 persons, representing 4.5 per cent of the population of the country. TP had been terminated for 19,214 persons.

The Regional Centres for Assistance to Ukraine (KACPU) had so far registered a total 468,750 refugees. The KACPU had accommodated a total of 137,929 people; that figure was currently at 73,715 people, while a further 48,636 people were being accommodated in so-called “solidarity households” (as of 31 October 2022).

Lt. Gen. Vlček emphasized the prompt reaction of the Czech Republic to the influx of refugees, as it established the foundations of a strategy already in meetings starting on 25 February with the governors of the 14 regions and crisis staff of the Ministry of the Interior.

On 28 February, a National Centre for Assistance to Ukraine (NACPU) was set up in Prague, followed by the declaration on 4 March of a State of Emergency on the territory of the Czech Republic with the aim to provide more effective assistance.²⁶

By 10 March, more than 250,000 Ukrainian citizens had crossed the border of the Czech Republic, with an average of 18-19,000 refugees per day, thereby greatly exceeding the crisis planning for 5,000/month. This prompted the Czech Republic to apply for assistance from the European Commission under the Union Civil Protection Mechanism (UCPM).

A set of laws on Ukraine (*‘Lex Ukraine’*) was adopted on 21 March.

²⁴ Ministry of the Interior; Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs; Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports; Ministry of Finance; Ministry for Regional Development; Ministry of Industry and Trade; Ministry of Health.

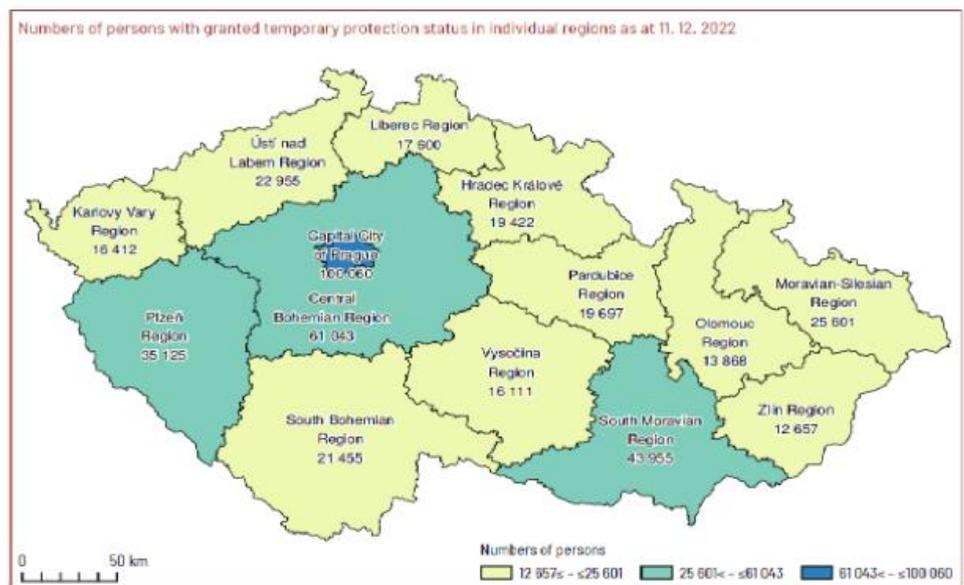
²⁵ Government Office; Ministry of Transport; Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

²⁶ The State of Emergency was prolonged twice, with the approval of the Chamber of Deputies (lower house) of Parliament, ending on 30 June 2022.

Other key events highlighted by Lt. Gen. Vlček included:

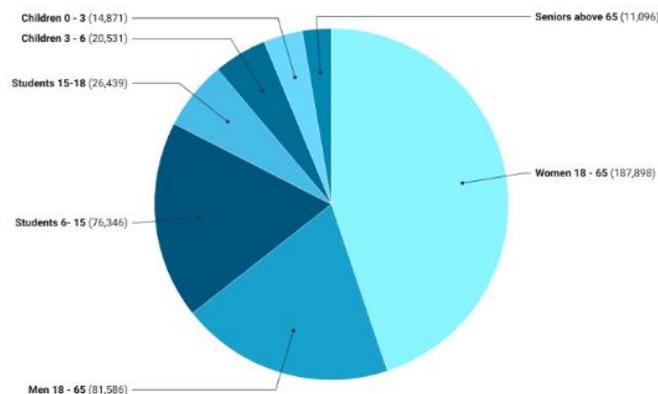
- 6 April 2022: adoption of a government resolution on the provision of assistance for particularly vulnerable people
- 13 April 2022: appointment of a National Coordinator: Interior Minister Vít Rakušan
- November 2022: appointment of a new National Coordinator: Government Commissioner for Human Rights Ms. Klára Šimáčková Laurenčíková

The largest share of refugees is in Prague (100,060) followed by the Central Bohemian region (61,043), South Moravian region (43,955) and Plzeň region (35,125) (as at 11 December 2022).



Source: Lt. Gen. Vladimír Vlček, Director General of the Fire Rescue Service of the Czech Republic, “Management of Refugee Wave from UA into the Czech Republic” (Prague, 14 December 2022).

Persons with temporary protection - age and gender distribution



About 40 per cent are women, while another 40 per cent are children.

Source: Lt. Gen. Vladimír Vlček, Director General of the Fire Rescue Service of the Czech Republic, “Management of Refugee Wave from UA into the Czech Republic” (Prague, 14 December 2022).

The Czech response is based on the “one stop shop” approach which aims to provide all services in one place.



Activities have been coordinated between the central, regional and municipal levels: A registration point (Regional Centre for Help and Assistance to Ukraine / *Krajské asistenční centrum pomoci Ukrajině* – KACPU) was established in each of the 13 regions as well as the Capital City of Prague.²⁷ The activities of these regional centres was is coordinated by a national centre – NACPU – which is also tasked with coordinating the activities of the central administrative offices; organization of humanitarian aid to Ukraine; and cooperation with international organizations and NGOs. The NACPU also coordinated the activities of liaison officers who were deployed in Poland and Slovakia between 1 March and 30 April 2022.

Authorities have had to rely on volunteers as they could not manage alone.

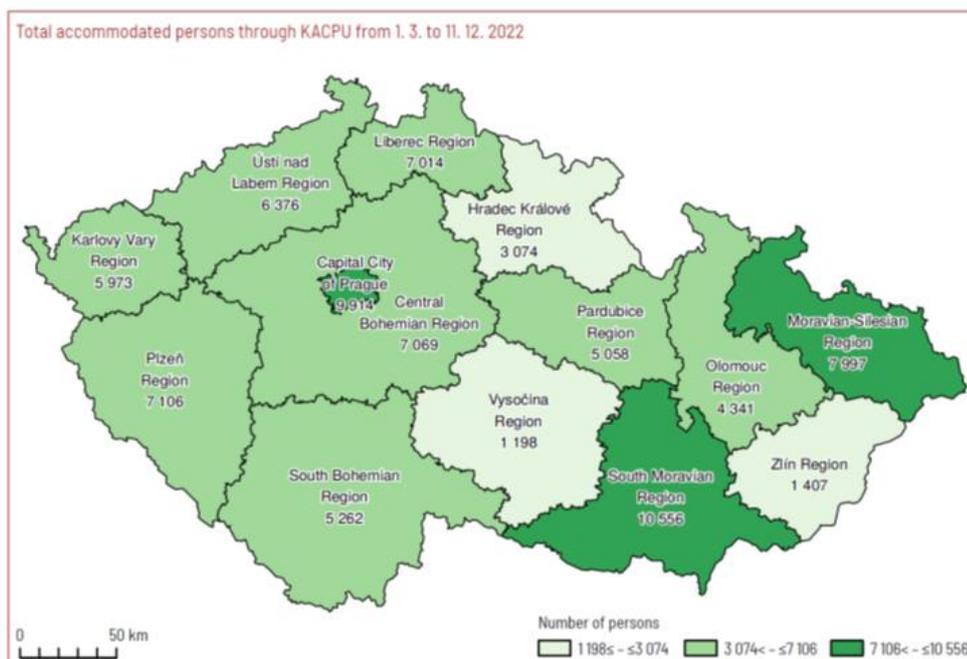
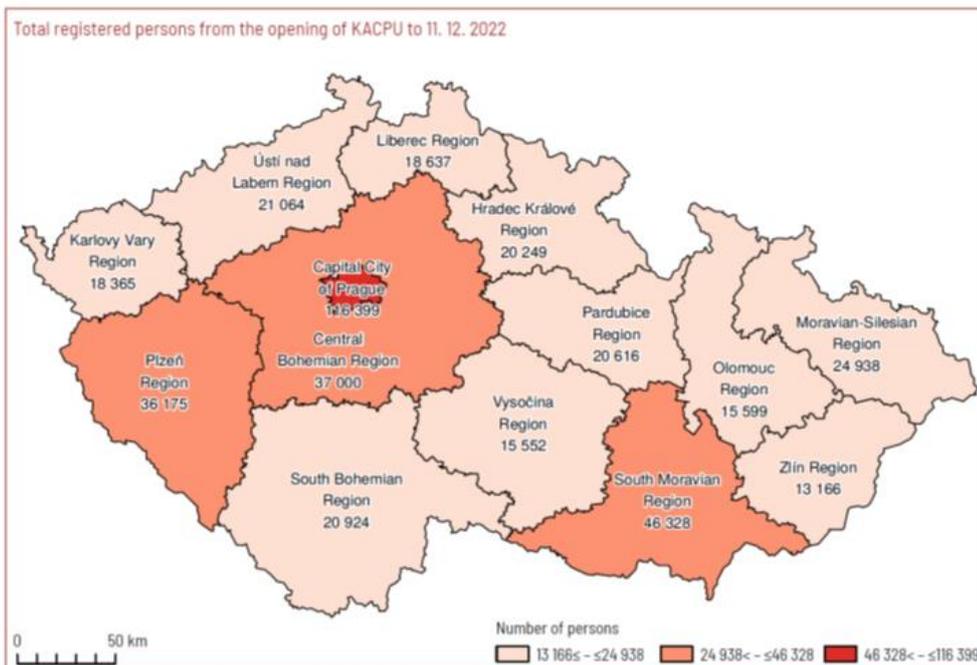
The Czech authorities used standard crisis management tools. Lt. Gen. Vlček also emphasized that a unified information tool and reporting system had been put into place, including a connection with the information systems of the Foreign Police (service of the Czech police dealing with foreigners), the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs; Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports; and the Ministry of Health.

The basic tasks of the regional assistance centres (KACPU) consist of:

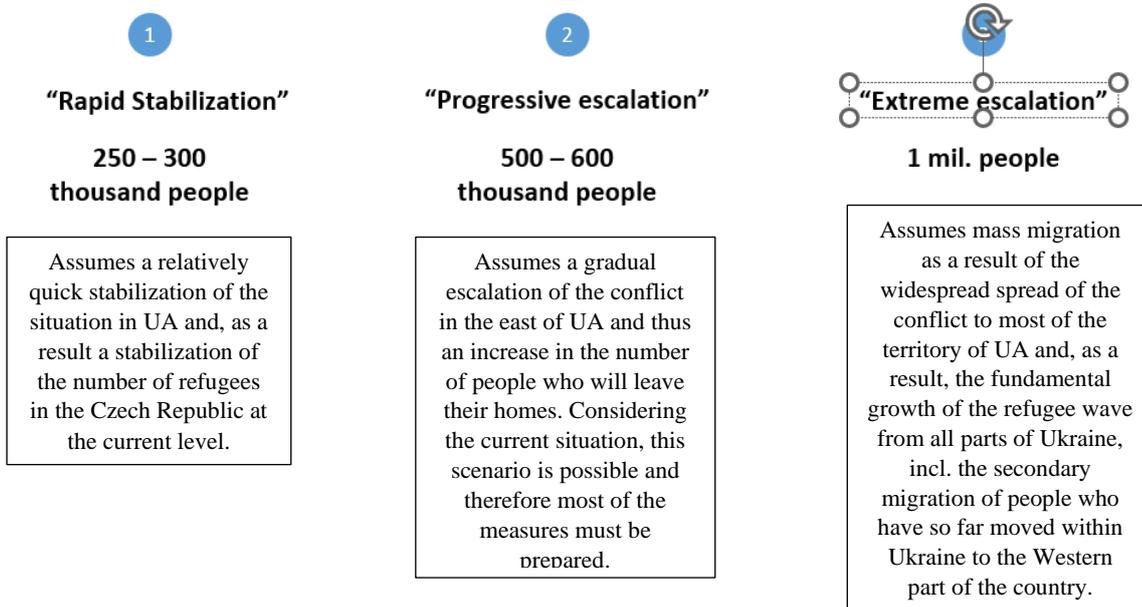
- Registration for issuing temporary protection visas
- Registration for the payment of humanitarian benefits
- Registration for health insurance
- Provision of accommodation
- Provision of psychosocial assistance

Between 1 March and 11 December 2022, a total of 116,399 persons were registered by the KACPU in Prague, which also arranged accommodation for 9,914 persons.

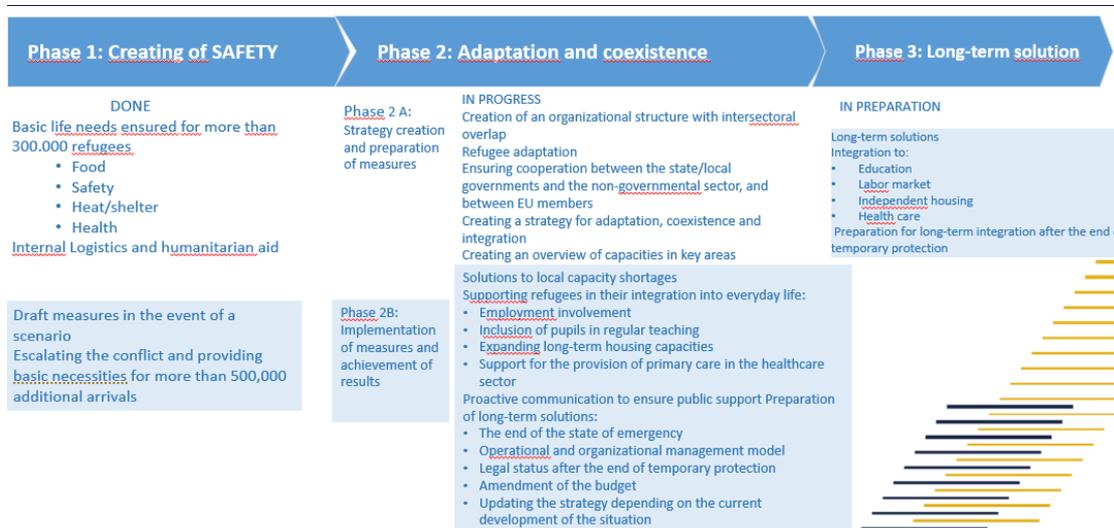
²⁷ At the peak of the influx, four registration points had to be opened in Central Bohemia.



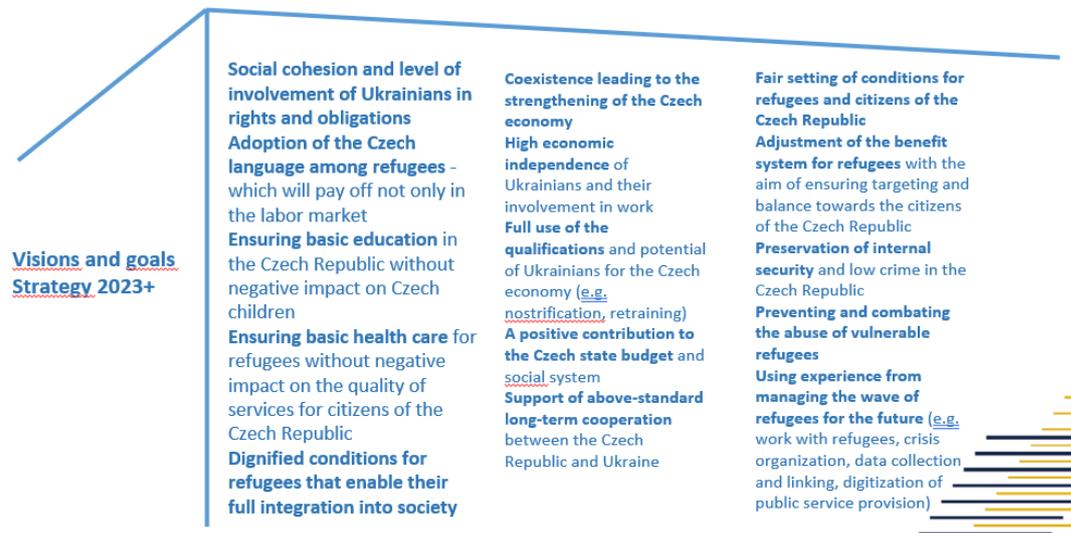
The Czech authorities are envisaging three scenarios. The country is currently experiencing scenario #1, preparations are being made for scenario #2 while scenario #3 cannot be excluded.



Phase 1 (creating safety) having been completed, the Czech Republic is currently in Phase 2 (adaptation and coexistence) and preparing for Phase 3 (long-term solution).



The government is currently updating its “Vision and Goals Strategy 2023+”. The focus for 2023 will be on providing dignified conditions for refugees that will enable their integration, with Czech language training being key; as well as promoting social cohesion.



The following points were raised during the discussion:

- What are the actual numbers of refugees from Ukraine in the Czech Republic, reasons for discrepancies with figures provided by UNHCR, and whether the authorities know how many refugees have left the Czech Republic.
 - The Chair of the Strategic Group underlined the difficulty in getting an accurate picture of the number of refugees remaining. This is due to the fact that TP holders may move freely within the EU and that the Czech Republic is party to the Schengen agreement.
- Breakdown according to country of citizenship of refugees from Ukraine?
- Clarification regarding the State of Emergency and eventual impacts on citizens.
 - The State of Emergency was also used during the Covid-19 pandemic. In the current case it does not have an impact on the everyday lives of citizens.
- Is the level of public support in the Czech Republic declining, in line with the fatigue setting in a number of other countries.
 - Czech citizens displayed tremendous solidarity towards refugees from Ukraine. Support is declining although there are over 50,000 refugees accommodated in so-called “solidarity households”. Czech citizens have also been impacted by the economic and energy crisis, and rising inflation (17-18 per cent).
 - There is a steady decline in public support of 1-2 per cent each month. Currently, about 57 per cent of the population support helping Ukraine.
 - Czechs feared that the influx of refugees would lead to an increase in crime rates but this has not materialized.
 - A new coordinator for strategic communication has been appointed a public campaign is planned to counter disinformation and propaganda.
- Estimate of the share of refugees who intend to stay in the Czech Republic?

- At least 2/3 of refugees are unsure as to whether they will return to Ukraine. Czech authorities expect that about half of them will want to stay. TP will be extended for a further year until end March 2024.
- Factors which make the Czech Republic attractive include a higher standard of living, the closeness of the Czech and Ukrainian languages, and the presence of a large Ukrainian diaspora in the Czech Republic.
- Challenges in relation to the provision of psychosocial support to refugees from Ukraine, e.g. shortages of child psychologists?
- Challenges in the area of education, incl. language barriers, special needs.
 - Language is a significant barrier due to the different alphabet. Adaptation activities focussing on language support, psychological help and socialization have been rolled out so that children from Ukraine can integrate classes with other children after a few months.
 - Communication between schools and parents is challenging due to the language barrier. Special Coordinators have therefore been appointed to facilitate communication.
- Specific challenges in the area of health care?
 - A decision was made from the start to grant full access to health care rather than emergency health care only. Persons under state insurance still get full coverage.
 - A balance had to be found so as not to create resentment amongst the local population.
 - The number of primary care General Practitioners and paediatricians have been increased.
 - Recruiting new, qualified people and language barriers are the main hurdles.
 - A call centre has been set up and Ukrainian/Russian interpreters were hired so that refugees can enquire about health needs.
 - Authorities try to use refugees with a medical background. The Ministry has organized training for medical professionals from Ukraine. However, the Czech Republic does not recognize Ukrainian medical diplomas, although exceptions are sometimes made at the middle level. Professional doctors are offered a three-month internship at the hospital during which they can provide services to Ukrainian patients, under the supervision of a Czech doctor. They then have one year to prepare for an exam.
 - At the same time, Ukrainian authorities fear that they will lose their human resources.
- How have authorities dealt with unaccompanied minors (UAMs)? Have any gone missing?
 - There is a large number of UAMs in the Czech Republic, largely because only parents are recognised as legal guardians. Often, children travel with extended family members and will therefore be considered as UAMs.
 - There is close cooperation with the Ministry of Labour and Social Services in this area.

2. Discussions at Parliament

At Parliament, the delegation met with the Vice-President of the Chamber of Deputies Dr. Olga Richterová; Mgr. Lucie Potůčková - Member of the Czech OSCE PA Delegation, Vice-Chair of the Committee on European Affairs, Member of the Committee on Constitutional and Legal Affairs, Member of the Mandate and Immunity Committee; Mgr. Jana Pastuchová, Member of the Czech OSCE PA Delegation, Vice-Chair of the Committee on Social Policy, Member of the Committee on Health Care; as well as Mgr. Tomáš Helebrant, Chair of the Sub-Committee on Migration of the Committee on European Affairs of the Chamber of Deputies; and Mr. Martin Exner, Vice-Chair of the Committee on Security, Member of the Committee on European Affairs, and Member of the Sub-Committee on Migration of the Committee on European Affairs of the Chamber of Deputies.

The mass arrival of refugees was a new experience for the Czech Republic which is not a destination country. This has generated more empathy for countries dealing with large numbers of migrants, such as Greece and Cyprus. The parliamentary interlocutors expressed their appreciation that more attention was being paid to the Czech Republic's response. They also agreed that there was a need to exchange best practice between countries in this area.

During the discussions, a number of positive aspects which have contributed to making the Czech response an example of best practice were identified:

- cultural, religious and linguistic affinity between Czechs and Ukrainians;
- presence of a sizeable Ukrainian community (about 250,000) prior to the war;
- huge outpouring of public solidarity, which has its roots in the events of the 1968 Prague Spring and sympathy for Ukrainians standing up to Russia.
- the hosting of refugees by Czech families
- dedicated efforts of the Czech government

- Specific challenges in the area of education included:
 - Strain on kindergartens and elementary schools in Prague as refugees all want to live in Prague. This is compounded by the lack of a system to equitably distribute children across schools.
 - The capacity of schools on paper is out of date, do not reflect current demographics. Some schools are also reluctant to accept refugees. At the same time, the Ministry of Education cannot impose quotas due to the decentralization of elementary schools.
 - More than 50 per cent of children reportedly don't want to learn Czech and integrate schools. Teenagers in particular hope to return to Ukraine.
 - Low share of children in Czech schools is also due to the fact that a large share attend online classes back in Ukraine.
 - Some mothers are reportedly not pushing for their children to attend school.
 - Language barriers: Czech and Ukrainian are relatively close, it should be possible to learn Czech within a few months. The need to motivate parents to learn Czech too was also underlined.
 - Some of the parliamentary interlocutors had a more positive perception of integration in schools and noted that children were learning Czech.
 - Positive experience with informal children's groups set up with state support, as an alternative to formal education in response to the lack of spaces in schools.

- The suggestion by a member of the Ad Hoc Committee on Migration to set up a separate school for Ukrainian children to relieve the pressure on schools in Prague was not viewed as a possible solution as it would mean keeping the two communities apart.
- Lack of expert psychological help not only for refugee children but for Czech children too; teachers have to deal with issues in the classroom.
 - Psychological stress experienced by refugees due to uncertainty about their future.
 - A suggestion to offer psychological help online in Ukrainian so that experts from outside the country could contribute was received positively.
- Labour market:
 - Many refugees have found jobs.
 - However, shortage of childcare is hindering women's access to employment.
- Access to health care:
 - Full access to health care was prioritized from the start.
 - Specific issues mentioned included cases of tuberculosis, AIDS and lack of vaccinations which is an issue for school age children,
 - Provision of psychological care was highlighted as a specific area for improvement (this is also an issue for Czech citizens).
 - A new law was adopted on 13 December lowering requirements to qualify as a psychologist. This could open the way for Ukrainians to qualify.
- Provision of social assistance: The Czech authorities granted humanitarian assistance in the amount of 5,000 CZK per person for the initial period of 5-6 months. This allowance has not been extended. Refugees get social benefits at the same level as Czech citizens.
- Difficulty of ascertaining the exact number of refugees from Ukraine in the Czech Republic due to the free movement within the Schengen area. As beneficiaries of temporary protection will have to re-register online for the one year extension by March 2023, the Czech authorities will have a better idea of the exact numbers in the country.
- Lack of a complaints system for host families to report issues to the police.
- Need to tackle disinformation and manipulation of public opinion in social media, e.g. regarding crime: criminality levels of Ukrainian refugees at the same level as those of the Czech population.
- Negative impact of the huge number of Ukrainian refugees on the asylum and migration services, e.g. delays affecting applications by foreigners who need to extend their residence.

3. Discussions at the Ministry of the Interior: focus on unaccompanied and separated children and combatting trafficking in human beings

The interlocutors at the Ministry of the Interior which also included experts from the department of asylum and migration policy. Thirty per cent of refugees are children and a majority intend to stay. This is creating a strain on capacities.

Czech authorities are also preparing contingency plans for a potential further wave as a consequence of the attacks on Ukraine's energy infrastructure. It was also underlined that the Czech Republic also provides humanitarian aid to Ukraine in the amount of EUR 12 million.

Current arrivals in the Czech Republic have been steady since June/July at about 20,000/month. This is still very high for a country used to 2,000 asylum requests per year. There are fewer children arriving now,

The Czech Republic has decided to extend Temporary Protection for an additional year until March 2024. While the application is done online, the applicant has to come in person to receive their document. This will provide the opportunity to carry out an identity check; it was difficult to do a proper identity check in March 2022.

- Unaccompanied and Separated Children (UASC):
 - few unaccompanied minors in the Czech Republic (about 200).
 - There is also a large group of separated children who are not treated as unaccompanied as they are travelling with someone. They need to be registered at the social protection department.
 - It is also hoped that the digitalized extension process for TP will provide authorities with an accurate picture of exact numbers.
 - Authorities would also like to obtain data on the numbers attending school in the Czech Republic (this is mandatory) and how many are outside of the system.
 - There are no cases of children having gone missing. Children's homes are monitored to ensure their safety.
- Combatting trafficking in human beings (CTHB)
 - Interlocutors from the Ministry of Interior highlighted the efforts of Czech authorities to counter risks of trafficking amongst Ukrainian refugees, mostly women and children.
 - The good level of cooperation with the police and the national centre for fighting organized crime was noted.
 - All relevant actors, including representatives of non-governmental organisations, are members of an inter-ministerial group for CTHB.
 - The Czech Republic carries out a wide range of integration activities which also play an important role in prevention.
 - Awareness raising and educational activities targeted at people working closely with refugees as well as volunteers
 - Monitoring of the online environment
 - Czech anti-trafficking authorities also cooperate at the European level, Europol. CTHB is a priority area for the Czech presidency.
 - There are currently no confirmed cases of THB amongst refugees from Ukraine.
 - 3 persons have registered for a programme for victims: 1 case is not confirmed, the other 2 are under review.

- There are cases of persons engaged in prostitution. There are also cases of breaches of labour market regulations. However, neither constitute cases of THB.
 - Prostitution is only considered a case of trafficking if the person is forced.
 - It was also underlined that refugees are mostly educated women and that they are not vulnerable in that sense. Domestic violence is more of a concern.
 - Czech authorities focus on the long-term prevention of trafficking. An Inter-Ministerial Coordination Group was in place already before the Ukrainian refugee wave.
- Access to employment:
 - about 50 per cent of refugees have integrated the labour market, mainly temporary jobs.
 - there are certainly also people employed on the black market.
 - Disinformation:
 - The Czech police has a specialised unit dealing with cybercriminality.
 - The Interior Ministry also has specialised teams addressing disinformation, e.g. claims that the Czech Republic is helping Ukrainian refugees and not Czech citizens.

4. Education

a. Background

Refugee children from Ukraine have the right to education under conditions similar to Czech citizens. As of the beginning of June 2022, it was estimated that 130,000 Ukrainian students and children were on Czech territory of whom 57,000 had signed up to attend Czech schools in the 2022-2023 school year, according to figures of the Czech Education Ministry. School attendance is mandatory for all children aged 6-15.

As a part of the response scheme, the Czech Ministry of Education, Youth, and Sports launched a grant scheme to support children aged 3-15 enrolling in Czech schools with intensive language preparation and adaptation to the Czech environment prior to the 2022/2023 school year. 13 billion CZK (EUR 534 million) have been allocated to support education.

Adaptation groups²⁸ have been established to support Ukrainian children and their rehabilitation. They also employ Ukrainian teachers. In cooperation with the Ukrainian embassy, a proposal is being developed for Saturday schools, so that children can continue to keep in touch with Ukraine and study the Ukrainian language, history, traditions, and culture. In addition to schooling and counselling, children are offered more play time and activities, in an effort to facilitate the recovery process²⁹.

Low parental awareness is a key barrier to the enrolment of Ukrainian children in kindergartens and schools. The situation is complicated by ongoing Ukrainian online classes. Some Ukrainian principals insist on “distance” attendance for their students, including those abroad³⁰. This overlap has led to pupils focusing exclusively on online learning from Ukraine. Furthermore, in the Czech Republic, the requirement regarding children to be vaccinated has made some families reluctant to enroll their children.

²⁸ <https://www.kmu.gov.ua/en/news/ministry-osvity-i-nauky-ukrainy-ta-chekhii-obhovoryly-zaluchennia-ukrainskykh-ditei-za-kordonom-do-navchannia>

²⁹ <https://www.rferl.org/a/ukraine-refugee-children-play-czech-prague/32143977.html>

³⁰ https://www.euractiv.com/section/politics/short_news/ukrainian-children-sign-up-for-czech-schools/

Over half the schools teaching Ukrainian refugee children have already experienced problems with staffing and capacity issues.³¹

Most children have integrated regular Czech classes. Only one-tenth are being taught in separate groups with a focus on learning the Czech language. Most children in primary and secondary schools study Czech, but in half of the cases, the classes last only an hour a day.

As many as two thirds of parents say their children are not integrated into a collective of Czech children.³² Very few Ukrainian children participate in leisure activities, although there is a strong demand for such initiatives. Children from families living in non-segregated accommodation with contacts to the local community are more likely to attend school.

Ukraine recently recognized the education systems of five EU countries, including the Czech Republic,³³ so that children will not have to repeat their schooling when they return home.

b. Meeting at the Ministry for Education, Youth and Sports

Discussions with Minister for Education, Youth and Sports JUDr. Vladimír Balaš, and Dr. Michal Černý, Director of the Department for Primary Education and Youth, focused on access to education and the integration of Ukrainian children in Czech schools.

The Ministry of Education reacted swiftly to the arrival of refugees and has done its utmost to facilitate the entry of children from Ukraine into the Czech education system. It was necessary to secure capacities in schools as quickly as possible as well as additional funds from the state budget for the admission of new pupils and complementary activities. In order to increase capacity, requirements for hygienic conditions were relaxed and a procedure was put in place in case of full capacity. All of these measures were anchored in the *Lex Ukraine* Act which also addresses, inter alia, rules for the admission of children, the possibility of modifying the content of education for these children to ensure smooth integration, and the possibility of employing Ukrainian citizens as teaching staff.

Amendments to the *Lex Ukraine* Act allowed for the temporary establishment of segregated classes when, due to lack of capacity, pupils couldn't be integrated into mainstream classes. *Lex Ukraine* also enabled the employment as pedagogical workers of Ukrainian citizens with exceptional knowledge of the Czech language. A total of 1,520 teachers and non-teachers from Ukraine were employed as of 19 September 2022 – 351 of whom were teachers, 1169 non-teachers. Most were working in Prague (369) and the Central Bohemian Region (288).

Education authorities try to provide schools with as much support as possible on an ongoing basis. A special portal has been set up to this effect on the website of the Ministry: <https://www.edu.cz/ukrajina/> where all methodological materials for schools and parents, including bilingual materials, may be accessed. There is also a special telephone line for schools, parents and the general public (with Ukrainian operators since September 2022).

Mandatory Czech language training is provided to Ukrainian children. In kindergartens, language training is provided directly at the school attended by the child. In elementary schools

³¹ <https://english.radio.cz/most-ukrainian-child-refugees-not-enrolled-czech-schools-september-intake-8751216>

³² https://ec.europa.eu/migrant-integration/library-document/voices-ukrainians-experiences-and-needs-children-and-parents-czech-education_en

³³ An agreement has also been reached with Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania and Poland.

<https://news.err.ee/1608742297/ukraine-to-recognize-5-eu-school-education-systems-including-estonia-s>

it takes place at a school designated by the regional authorities. Since 1 September, language training is also offered in secondary schools.

Refugee children have about 90 days to enrol in school, during which period they can also attend state financed adaptation/integration classes. The aim of these classes, of which there are 61 in the whole country, is to support the adaptation and socialization of Ukrainian children to the Czech environment, develop language skills, prepare them for entering Czech schools and support their mental well-being. Authorities also finance sports and scouts activities.

Support positions of adaptation coordinators and Ukrainian Teaching Assistants were established in the 2021/2022 and 2022/2023 school years respectively. These are financed from the state budget and are geared towards kindergartens, primary schools, secondary schools with a large share of Ukrainian children. A total of 748 schools were supported during September-December 2022, educating a total of 18,207 pupils from Ukraine, through 727 full-time jobs totalling CZK 114 million. UNICEF and NGOs are also providing Czech textbooks for foreigners as well as support activities.

Number of children, pupils and students from Ukraine in regional education in September 2022 (as of 19/09/2022)

	Adopted On the whole	2021/2022 of which have quit school attendance	Adopted 2022/2023	On the whole	remaining
Kindergarten	5,164	1,256	5,275	10,439	9,183
Elementary school	32,541	8,422	19,566	52,107	43,685
Secondary school	1,569	388	2,954	4,523	4,135
Conservatories	71	13	60	131	118
College	35	7	81	116	109
On the whole	39,380	10,086	27,936	67,316	57,230

Source: Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports of the Czech Republic, status as of 19 September 2022.

In the discussion, the Minister highlighted a number of challenges. One major challenge relates to the need to reconcile in person and online schooling. The recognition of educational curricula is not an issue at preschool and elementary school levels but is a problem at higher levels.

Only about one third of Ukrainian teenagers are currently attending secondary Czech schools. Language is a barrier, although Czech authorities believe that learning Czech shouldn't be too difficult for Ukrainian children. Students in 9th and 10th grades do not want to learn Czech as they hope they can soon return to Ukraine. Teaching in English is not viewed as a solution as Czech is needed if they intend to stay.

The main goal of Czech educational authorities is to integrate Ukrainian children in Czech classes, with up to 5 Ukrainian children per class.

Authorities are concerned about the children who are not in school. They inform them about their rights and duties using social media such as Telegram and Tik Tok.

Insufficient capacity is also an issue. In some regions (mainly Prague), for example, there are up to hundreds of children for whom there was no place in local schools. In these cases, authorities tried to arrange temporary classes for Ukrainian children only, taught by Ukrainian teachers. Municipalities are expanding the capacity of schools so that every child of compulsory school age can attend school.

In some parts of the country such as Kolín where there is a Toyota factory employing Ukrainians, there were sufficient numbers of Ukrainian children for authorities to set up homogenous Ukrainian classes, as part of the Czech schooling system.

Discussions also focussed on children with special needs, noting that there were issues related to translating Ukrainian documents; it also takes time to issue a Czech certificate proving a disability. The authorities emphasized that they are still striving for inclusion rather than separated education.

The issue of decentralisation in the field of education was also raised. The representatives of the Ministry of Education did not view this as an obstacle, noting that schools have refused to accept Ukrainian children in exceptional cases only. Only one third of Czech schools have no Ukrainian children at all. There is also a large number of Ukrainian citizens (5-6,000) studying at universities in the Czech Republic.

The difference in the vaccination schedule between the two countries had caused some minor issues at the pre-kindergarten level where vaccination is mandatory.

The delegation also raised the issue of recognition of qualifications issued by Ukrainian authorities. Czech authorities are currently looking into extending the recognition of degrees beyond EU Member States to also include Ukrainian qualifications.

c. visit to Elementary School Tusarova (District of Prague 7)

The following day, the delegation visited an elementary school located in the district of Prague 7 where it met with the school director Mgr. Monika Nezbedová, teachers and teaching assistants, a representative of the municipal council of Prague 7 Mgr. Hana Šišková.

Elementary school Tusarova currently has 80 children from Ukraine. The aim is to integrate children in classes with other children. They first attend adaptation groups starting in May and integrated classes with other children in September.

There are 3-4 Ukrainian children in each class, most of them in 1st grade. Each 1st grade class has a Ukrainian Teaching Assistant. The school also has a teacher specialising in teaching children with special needs and in teaching Czech to non-native speakers. There is also a mediator to facilitate communication with parents.

5. Employment

a. background

According to data provided by the Labour Office of the Czech Republic, a total of 133,344 persons with TP had entered employment from the beginning of the war until 4 October 2022, with 88,411 still in employment.

Around 29 per cent of Ukrainians who have arrived in the Czech Republic in the past few months said that they have a higher education degree; another 23 per cent have a vocational degree; and 17 per cent have learned a new profession.³⁴ The remainder (less than a third), have a high school diploma only. Most are employed in manufacturing, the construction sector, the service sector, and transport in long-term vacant positions.

An OECD study found that the Czech Republic, which has the lowest unemployment rate in the EU, would add the most Ukrainians to its workforce by the end of the year, with an increase of 2.2 per cent, followed by Poland and Estonia. At the same time, due to the high percentage of women and children applying for TP, the Czech government anticipates low labour force participation and slow integration into the national economy³⁵.

Only 17 per cent of refugees are working-age men. This stands in stark contrast with immigration patterns in previous years when Ukrainian men came to work in the Czech construction, automotive, and manufacturing industries. Today, construction sites, factory assembly lines, and warehouses across the Czech Republic are scrambling to fill vacancies after tens of thousands of Ukrainian men left their blue-collar jobs to return home and fight.

In the Czech Republic, many refugees face difficulties in accessing the labour market. Some experts point out³⁶ that instead of getting Ukrainian refugees into the labour market as quickly as possible, the state should try to make the most of their qualifications and skills and avoid pushing them into low-skilled positions and at times precarious forms of work.

The main obstacle to more qualified and better-paid positions is lack of knowledge of the Czech language. In addition to language barriers, skilled workers from Ukraine often lack documentation to prove their professional credentials to get better-paid employment. Over 60 per cent of companies are willing to accept employer testing as sufficient proof of qualifications when filling more skilled positions. At the same time, some companies are concerned about the possible return of Ukrainians to their home country and might be reluctant to invest in the training needed for more skilled positions.

The Czech Ombudsman's Office has warned Ukrainian refugees to only trust official information and avoid various job brokers, so as not to become a victim of sexual or labour exploitation³⁷. Trade unionists from the Czech-Moravian Confederation of Trade Unions have asked³⁸ the Ministry of Interior and the National Centre for Combating Organized Crime to investigate the activities of employment agencies, requesting that the government temporarily

³⁴ <https://interfax.com/newsroom/top-stories/79308/>

³⁵ <https://jamestown.org/program/costs-of-accommodating-the-most-ukrainian-refugees-per-capita-in-the-eu-the-czech-case/>

³⁶ https://ec.europa.eu/migrant-integration/library-document/integration-refugees-ukraine-czech-republic-2022_en

³⁷ https://ec.europa.eu/migrant-integration/news/czech-republic-refugees-ukraine-face-precarious-situations-labour-market_en

³⁸ <https://www.novinky.cz/valka-na-ukrajine/clanek/odbory-chteji-lakat-ukrajince-do-svych-rad-40395453>

suspend their right to mediate employment. In April 2022, the government announced that it would address this issue by strengthening the capacity and capabilities of the State Labour Inspection Office and the Police of the Czech Republic.³⁹

b. Meeting at the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs

At the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs, the delegation met with Ing. Iva Merhautová, Deputy Minister of Labour and Social Affairs for the management of social insurance and non-insurance benefits, as well as experts of the Ministry, for discussions focussed on the access of refugees from Ukraine to employment.

About 465,000 persons have been granted TP, this amounts to 4,363 refugees/100,000 inhabitants. In Prague, the ratio is about 1 out of ten.

The gender and age breakdown of refugees from Ukraine is as follows:

Women:	44 per cent
Children:	32 per cent
Men:	20 per cent
Elderly: (over 65 years)	4 per cent

However, the distribution is changing as more men are now coming.

Positive achievements highlighted by the Deputy Minister included:

- swift response of Czech authorities,
- the adoption of *Lex Ukraine* as normal legislative tools could not be used,
- the provision of emergency accommodation (in hotels, hostels and dormitories),
- and the spontaneous offer of accommodation by Czech households.

The Deputy Minister also noted that the Czech Republic has the lowest level of unemployment in the EU (3.5 per cent). About 100,000 refugees from Ukraine are active on the labour market. However, most are working in low-skilled jobs.

The Ministry manages a number of allowances, benefits in relation to refugees from Ukraine:

- Czech households hosting refugees are entitled to a solidarity housing allowance.
- Ukrainian refugees can also get a humanitarian allowance to refugees. However, this can only be received online, so cooperation with NGOs was needed to facilitate the payment of this allowance to refugees from Ukraine.
- Refugees who earn below a certain amount get additional support. This is necessary in the manual professions where 70 per cent of refugees have a monthly income below CZK 20,000 (€840) and 34 per cent have a monthly income below CZK 15,000 (€630).
- CZK 2.4 bln have been earmarked for social services, of which only 400 million have been used so far. The Czech Republic also has a bilateral agreement with Ukraine regarding social security.
- Other benefits/allowances are paid out for those with a permanent residence permit.

³⁹https://ec.europa.eu/migrant-integration/library-document/czech-republic-determination-strategic-priorities-government-czech-republic-deal_en

Looking towards 2023, the Ministry is planning to change the rules regarding payment of the humanitarian allowance and accommodation support in order to incentivise refugees from Ukraine to move into more traditional housing, with support being allocated to legal entities.

➤ Challenges/areas for improvement:

- The Deputy Minister underlined language barriers as being especially problematic for doctors seeking employment in the Czech Republic.
- Identification of disabilities so that the Ministry can provide greater support. The Czech system for recognition of disabilities is too complex, dependent upon certification by doctors, etc. It should be simplified, e.g. through recognition of certificates/assessments issued by Ukrainian authorities. The Czech Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs has met with the Ukrainian Ministry of Social Policy and have agreed to data exchange.
- Need to offer jobs which accommodate various needs. E.g. some refugees want jobs with low levels of responsibility.

During the *discussion*, the Deputy Minister was asked about the online system for applying for social benefits and why Ukrainian applicants were better at navigating the system. She explained that this was due to the fact that the system has been simplified for Ukrainian applicants, whereas Czech applicants need to submit more documentation. Furthermore, Ukrainian applicants tend to be younger and more IT literate. Participants also discussed how Ukrainians could be encouraged to get their own apartments. Finally, a suggestion was made to offer Czech language training and programmes to minors approaching 18 years who have finished online education but cannot go to university yet.

6. National Coordinator / Government Commissioner for Human Rights

The delegation briefly exchanged with Mgr. Klára Šimáčková Laurenčíková, Government Commissioner for Human Rights and National Coordinator, on the issue of the human rights of integration of refugees from Ukraine. The Government Commissioner emphasized the need to focus on vulnerable refugees, in particular elderly people, persons with disabilities, unaccompanied minors, women with children, as well as refugees with a Roma background who may have difficulties integrating the labour market due to lack of qualifications.

The Commissioner also highlighted the need to provide psychological help to refugees.

She also expressed concern about the one third of young refugees who are following online education and risk social isolation and outlined plans to involve them in leisure activities.

Prevention of trafficking in human beings is another area of focus where, together with the Ombudsman and NGOs, the Commissioner is working to raise awareness.

7. The Perspective of Prague Municipal Authorities

The Mayor of Prague Zdeněk Hřib presented his perspective from the standpoint of the city hosting the largest share of Ukrainian refugees per capita after Warsaw. The main challenge for authorities, in his view, was to switch from an emergency response to addressing all the needs of refugees. A new centre was therefore being built in Prague to provide support to refugees during their stay.

The mayor expanded on the challenges which Prague was facing, noting that accommodation could still be provided e.g. in gyms but this was not the level of dignity which they aim for. Strains are also being felt in the field of education.

The need to create incentives for a redistribution of refugees to all regions of the country was emphasized. Prague can still manage a slight increase in numbers but if there is a significant influx then this will be unsustainable.

NGOs are increasingly being involved in the response. The municipal authorities rely to a great extent on NGOs and volunteers, with the Czech Red Cross acting as an umbrella organization. Translators are now paid by Prague municipality through the Czech Red Cross.

The mayor highlighted the need to focus on social work together with NGOs. In turn, an expert of Prague municipality presented an overview of efforts to focus on long-term integration and adaptation, in cooperation with NGOs, highlighting the need for a more comprehensive approach. Areas covered by the municipal authority include: accommodation, social affairs, health insurance and education. The municipal authorities are carrying out extensive research to ascertain the needs of refugees.

The importance of having good data on numbers of refugees as a basis for a good level of services was also underlined.

The difficulties in assessing the skills of refugees was also discussed, with interlocutors noting that job centres had been overwhelmed by the task of managing subsidies to the detriment of other functions. This is compounded by the complicated process of recognition of qualifications from Ukraine.

It is hoped that when beneficiaries of TP have to reapply, they will have to fill out a form indicating their occupation, qualifications and disabilities.

The benefits of international cooperation between cities, e.g. between Prague and other cities hosting large numbers of refugees, such as Warsaw, was noted.

8. In-Situ visit to the Prague Regional Assistance Centre (KACPU)

The delegation was provided with a tour of the Prague Regional Assistance Centre (KACPU) by Brig. Gen. Ing. Luděk Prudil, Director of the Fire Rescue Service of the Capital City of Prague, as well as representatives of the Ministry of the Interior's Department for Asylum and Migration Policy and the Police of the Czech Republic.

The KACPU is currently open 5 days a week and has 70 staff. It receives about 100-200 applicants per day.

This is the third location for the Prague KACPU: the original centre at the municipal library could only handle 200-400 refugees a day, it was therefore moved to Prague's Congress Centre with a capacity to receive up to 3,600 refugees/day, 350 staff per shift and operating 24 hours a day and providing 10,000 meals every day. The current centre is due to be demolished once a new, more modern facility next door is finalized.

A total of 117,000 refugees have been served in total by all three regional assistance centres in Prague since 1 March 2022.

During the tour, members of the delegation were able to follow a typical registration process for newcomers from Ukraine, during which they can apply for Temporary Protection and are also set up to receive social assistance and access health care. SIM cards are also available. Bank accounts can now be opened directly at the bank. There is no longer a consular desk of the Ukrainian embassy either.

The main challenge mentioned was the fact that all beneficiaries of TP want to stay in Prague. Language is also an important barrier in the provision of psychological services.

9. Briefing with representatives of IGOs/NGOs

During the visit to the Prague KACPU, the delegation was briefed by a representative of the Czech Red Cross, which is present at the Prague KACPU. A separate meeting with representatives of UNHCR and a local NGO “Organization for Aid to Refugees” (*Organizace pro pomoc uprchlíkům* - OPU) was also arranged there.

The UNHCR representative praised the response of Czech authorities and high levels of solidarity. The following positive aspects were also mentioned:

- early reaction: authorities started to issue protection visas even before the EU’s Temporary Protection Directive was activated;
- a well-functioning national system;
- efficient crisis management, professional fire rescue service staff;
- the setting up of a network of regional assistance centres;
- “one stop shop” approach enabling efficient registration at the assistance centre (this takes one hour only).
- This is the only country in the Ukraine Regional Response Plan where UNHCR is not involved in distributing cash assistance – this is taken care of by Czech authorities; UNHCR only provides core relief assistance.
- The lowering of qualifications for teachers has enabled hiring of more teachers.

Issue areas to focus on highlighted by the representatives included:

- importance of providing targeted information and assistance to certain categories of refugees, such as elderly people, marginalized people, addicts, persons with disabilities as well as parents with young children.
- need to focus on unaccompanied and separated children who could be an easy target for traffickers. According to the Czech Red Cross, there may be as many as 30,000.
- strong police presence at the Prague KACPU might be a deterrent for victims of trafficking who may wish to come forth.
- need to also provide assistance to persons who don’t qualify for temporary protection.
- new procedures at the Prague KACPU where accommodation is no longer provided to new arrivals. Instead, they are referred to another KACPU outside of Prague. This can be an issue as TP visas are only issued to persons who have secured accommodation.
- Need to address strains on infrastructure, especially in the areas of accommodation, health care and education. Since the Czech authorities are against mandatory relocation of refugees, additional resources need to be hired to increase capacity.
- sustainability of the response; need to focus on adaptation and integration;

- screening and exclusion of specific groups from temporary protection, notably Roma with dual (Hungarian) citizenship who are told to seek protection in Hungary;
- need to make sure that TP is also granted to those who were already automatically granted TP in another country, e.g., Poland, to avoid separation of families.

10. Post-Visit Update

The Strategic Group is developing a new strategic plan for submission to Parliament. This marks the move from crisis management to a focus on adaptation and integration of persons who have been granted temporary protection in the Czech Republic. At the same time, the crisis team is reportedly on standby should the situation evolve.

From 1 April 2023, the Interior Ministry will take over the management of the Regional Assistance Centres from regional authorities. New arrivals will still be able to apply for temporary protection in all regions. In cases where those seeking protection do not have accommodation, they will turn to the locations allocated for that purpose. The Ministry of Interior has stated that it will provide nonstop operations in three locations where people without accommodation will be able to sleep and wait for the standard workplaces to open. The list of standard offices which will handle applications for temporary protection and assist with finding accommodation starting in April is due to be published in March.

IV. Observations of the Chair

Following the visit of a delegation of the OSCE PA Ad Hoc Committee on Migration to Prague from 14-16 December 2022 and extensive discussions and briefings, the following observations and recommendations have been prepared on behalf of the Chair of the Committee, Vice-President Mark Pritchard.

The Czech Republic's response to the large and unexpected influx of refugees from Ukraine has been remarkable. Czech citizens reacted with amazing levels of solidarity and generosity, taking refugees into their homes or donating clothes and other items. The authorities reacted swiftly and efficiently, putting into place the necessary legislative framework (*Lex Ukraine*) and infrastructure to register them promptly and grant them access to accommodation, health care, education, and the labour market.

As arrivals have stabilized, the Czech Republic is moving from a crisis management phase to an adaptation and integration phase with a focus on enhancing the sustainability of its response. It is therefore hoped that this report, which has sought to highlight positive achievements and examples of best practice, can serve as inspiration to other countries seeking to offer protection and to integrate persons fleeing the war in Ukraine.

At the same time, a number of areas for further attention were identified during the discussions, a few of which are mentioned below.

1. Provide TP to all persons fleeing Ukraine who qualify under the Temporary Protection Directive and *Lex Ukraine* without discrimination on the basis of ethnicity or national origin.
2. Consider reversing the decision not to offer TP to persons who were granted TP automatically in another country to prevent the separation of families.
3. Facilitate the granting of TP to persons who have not secured accommodation.
4. There is a need to obtain a more accurate picture of the overall numbers of beneficiaries of TP living in the Czech Republic as well as their location in the country in order to better assess the needs and demands on infrastructure and services. Better information exchange between national, regional and local authorities can contribute to this process.
5. Ensure a more even distribution of beneficiaries of TP throughout the country in order to alleviate the strain on infrastructure on Prague and larger cities, and to ensure a more efficient use of resources as well as better opportunities for access to quality accommodation, education, and employment. Redistribution could be achieved by means of an incentive system listing available accommodation and kindergarten/school places as well as through a more proactive matching of qualifications of job seekers and positions to be filled.
6. Strive to effectively assess and disseminate qualifications of new arrivals so that their skills are better utilized. This could be done through increasing the capacity of job centres which have had to take on additional administrative burdens linked to payment of allowances and benefits to beneficiaries of TP. The information on skills and qualifications which will be gathered as part of registration process for extension of TP for a further year should also be communicated to potential employers.
7. Facilitate the recognition of degrees issued in Ukraine, especially in critical areas where additional capacity is needed (teachers and teachers' assistants, doctors and other medical staff, psychologists, etc).

8. There is a need for a more systematic identification of persons with vulnerabilities, especially those which are hidden, in order to better ensure their protection and meet their needs, such as elderly people, persons with disabilities, children with special needs, victims of trafficking, victims of gender based violence.
9. Put into place an effective system to identify, register and monitor unaccompanied and separated children in the country in order to mitigate risks of trafficking and abuse and to ensure the best of interests of the child. There should be a particular focus on awareness raising and outreach programmes targeted at children aged 16-18 years old who are allowed to travel out of Ukraine unaccompanied and who tend to follow online education provided by Ukraine rather than attend local schools.
10. Promote the further integration of children in schools through enhancing capacity of schools, including through the hiring of additional Ukrainian teachers and Ukrainian teaching assistants, and further support for adaptation groups which facilitate the transition of Ukrainian children into mainstream schooling.
11. Further pursue outreach programmes using social media targeted at children who are not in school. Also consider expanding the use of mediators to facilitate communication with parents as well as teachers specialising in special needs.
12. Enhance provision of psychosocial support, especially to children for whom trauma and other mental issues can act as a barrier to school attendance. This could be achieved by facilitating the recognition of qualifications of psychologists from Ukraine and the use of online platforms.
13. Consider how to relieve the considerable burden for children attending Czech schools and online schooling in Ukraine simultaneously.
14. Develop targeted programmes for minors approaching 18 years who have finished online education to help them prepare for university in the Czech Republic.
15. Consider more long-term planning and financial support for NGOs who provide essential support, in order to make the response more sustainable.

ANNEX I – Final Programme and Members of the Delegation

Ad Hoc Committee on Migration

Field Visit to the Czech Republic (14-16 December 2022)

Final Programme

Wednesday, 14 December

15:15-16:45 *Overview of the strategic priorities of the Czech government regarding the reception of refugees from Ukraine* – Lt. Gen. Ing. **Vladimír Vlček**, PHD. MBA, Head of the Strategic Group; General Director of the Fire Rescue Service of the Czech Republic

With the participation of the following Members of the Strategic Group:

- Mgr. Jakub Dvořáček, MHA, LL.M., Deputy Minister, Ministry of Health
- Mgr. Pavla Katzová, Deputy Minister, Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports
- Ms. Magda Kociánová, LL.M., Head of Unit for International Programmes, Asylum and Migration Policy Department, Ministry of the Interior
- Mgr. Martin Koňářík, Head of Unit for Security Threats and Crisis Management, Security Policies Department, Ministry of the Interior

as well as:

- Brig. gen. Ing. Petr Ošlejšek, Ph.D., Deputy Director of the Fire Rescue Service of the Czech Republic, Ministry of the Interior
- Plk. Ing. Miroslav Lukeš, Head of the Department for protection of the population and crisis management, Fire Rescue Service
- Plk. Mgr. Libuše Chvojková, Head of the Organizational Department, Fire Rescue Service
- Mgr. Ing. David Schön, Head of the Unit for International Cooperation, Fire Rescue Service

18:30-19:15 Meeting with **PhDr. Olga Richterová**, PhD., Vice-President of the Chamber of Deputies of the Czech Parliament

19:30-21:00 **Working Dinner hosted by the Chamber of Deputies of the Czech Parliament** with the participation of:

- **Mgr. Lucie Potůčková**, Member of the Czech OSCE PA Delegation; Vice-Chair of the Committee on European Affairs; Member of the Committee on Constitutional and Legal Affairs; Member of the Mandate and Immunity Committee;
- **Mgr. Jana Pastuchová**, Member of the Czech OSCE PA Delegation; Vice-Chair of the Committee on Social Policy; Member of the Committee on Health Care;
- **Mgr. Tomáš Helebrant**, MBA, Chair of the Sub-Committee on Migration of the Committee on European Affairs of the Chamber of Deputies

- **Mr. Martin Exner**, Vice-Chair of the Committee on Security; Member of the Committee on European Affairs; Member of the Sub-Committee on Migration of the Committee on European Affairs of the Chamber of Deputies

Thursday, 15 December

9:00-10:30 Meeting with **First Deputy Minister of the Interior for Internal Security JUDr. Ing. Jiří Nováček** (*reception of refugees from Ukraine, measures to prevent combatting trafficking in human beings*)

With the participation of:

- Mgr. Pavla Novotná, Director of the Asylum and Migration Policy Department, Ministry of the Interior
- JUDr. Michal Barbořík, Director of the Crime Prevention Department, Ministry of the Interior
- Plk. Libor Honeš, Head of Unit, Department of Human Trafficking and Illegal Migration, National Headquarters Against Organized Crime
- Brig. gen. Ing. Petr Ošlejšek, Ph.D., Deputy Director of the Fire Rescue Service of the Czech Republic, Ministry of the Interior

11:00-12:30 Field visit #1:

Prague Regional Assistance Centre for Ukrainian Refugees (*Krajské asistenční centrum pro uprchlíky z Ukrajiny – KACPU*)

Tour of the KACPU with the participation of:

- **Brig. Gen. Ing. Luděk Prudil**, Director of the Fire Rescue Service of the Capital City of Prague
- Representatives of the Ministry of the Interior's Department for Asylum and Migration Policy, the Police of the Czech Republic
- Representatives of the Czech Red Cross
- Representatives of UNHCR in the Czech Republic: **Ms. Petra Levrincová**, Protection Officer
- A representative of the NGO "Organization for Aid to Refugees" (OPU). **Mgr. Kristina Kavínková**, Lawyer

14:30-15:30 Meeting with **Prof. JUDr. Vladimír Balaš, CSc.**, Minister for Education, Youth and Sports of the Czech Republic, and Paed. Dr. Michal Černý, Director of the Department for Primary Education and Youth (*access to education, integration of Ukrainian children in schools*)

16:00-17:00 Meeting with **Ing. Iva Merhautová**, Deputy Minister of Labour and Social Affairs of the Czech Republic for the management of social insurance and non-insurance benefits, MBA, and **Mgr. Klára Šimáčková Laurenčíková**, Government Commissioner for Human Rights (*access to employment; policies regarding unaccompanied and separated children from Ukraine*)

Friday, 16 December

- 09:00-10:30 Field visit #2: Visit to Elementary School Tusarova in Prague 7 hosting children from Ukraine, with the participation of Principal **Mgr. Monika Nezbedová**, **Mgr. Hana Šišková**, Councillor on Education, Municipal District Authority of Prague 7, as well as teachers at the school
- 11:00-12:30 Meeting with the **Mayor of Prague MUDr. Zdeněk Hřib**
- Mgr. Michal Geisler, PhD., Head of the Department of Advisors to the Mayor, Prague City Hall
 - Mgr. Geti Mubeenová, Refugee Strategic Management Coordinator, Department of Culture and Tourism, Department of National Minorities and Foreigners, Prague City Hall

Members of the OSCE PA Delegation

Members of the Ad Hoc Committee on Migration

1. The Rt. Hon. Mark Pritchard (MP, United Kingdom), Chair of the Ad Hoc Committee on Migration, Vice-President of the OSCE PA
2. Mr. Kyriakos Hadjiyanni (MP, Cyprus), Vice-Chair of the Ad Hoc Committee on Migration
3. Mr. Georgios Varenmos (MP, Greece), Member of the Ad Hoc Committee on Migration

Other Members of the OSCE PA

4. Mr. Hayato Josef Okamura (MP, Czech Republic), Member of the Czech Delegation
5. Ms. Lucie Potůčková (MP, Czech Republic), Member of the Czech Delegation
6. Ms. Jana Pastuchová (MP, Czech Republic), Alternate Member of the Czech Delegation

Staff:

7. Ms. Silvia Andrisová, Secretary of the Czech Delegation to the OSCE PA
8. Ms. Farimah Daftary, Senior Advisor, OSCE PA International Secretariat
9. Ms. Victoria Chumenko, Research Assistant, OSCE PA International Secretariat

ANNEX II – Statement

OSCE PA’s visit to Czech Republic highlights challenges of meeting Ukrainian refugees’ needs

PRAGUE, 16 December 2022 – Members of the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly’s Ad Hoc Committee on Migration today concluded a three-day field visit to Prague, where they met a range of ministers, legislators, stakeholders and policy advocates to focus on the response to the Ukrainian refugee crisis and develop policy recommendations for the wider OSCE area. With the aim of learning more about how Ukrainian refugees have been welcomed in the Czech Republic, the committee members identified best practices that can be replicated in other countries, but also observed areas for improvement.

Developing effective and sustainable responses is especially important as the war continues and a potential new influx of Ukrainians is expected to seek refuge in Europe, the PA delegation said. In particular focus was the implementation of the European Union’s temporary protection mechanism that provides immediate and collective protection to Ukrainian citizens and others fleeing Ukraine and the Czech legal framework for meeting the challenge of hosting nearly half a million refugees from Ukraine – the largest number of Ukrainian refugees per capita in Europe.

The OSCE PA Ad Hoc Committee members met with Czech parliamentarians including the Vice-President of the lower chamber Olga Richterová as well as members of the Czech Delegation to the PA, and various parliamentary committees, officials from relevant ministries, and the Government Commissioner for Human Rights. They were hosted by the OSCE PA’s Czech Delegation and the Chamber of Deputies of the Czech Parliament.

“Czechia is doing its best to provide refuge for as many Ukrainians as possible and to make them feel welcome and safe here,” said Lucie Potůčková, Member of the OSCE PA Czech Delegation. “We are also looking into how we can provide more adapted care to those who need it, for example through innovative means of delivering psychological support.”

Ad Hoc Committee members also met with local authorities, including the Mayor of Prague Zdeněk Hřib, visited the Regional Centre for Assistance and Help to Ukraine (KACPU) in Prague and as well as an elementary school where Ukrainian children are enrolled. In meetings, the Ad Hoc Committee members focused on critical areas such as accommodation, access to education, employment, health care and social services as well as the protection of refugees in vulnerable categories, and prevention of trafficking in human beings.

“It is heartbreaking to see the hardship that Ukrainians have had to endure due to the Russian invasion, but also inspiring to see the solidarity on display in the Czech Republic,” said Rt. Hon. Mark Pritchard (United Kingdom), Chair of the Ad Hoc Committee on Migration and Vice-President of the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly. “The efforts of the authorities at all levels – from the national to the local – and the dedication of civil society have not gone unnoticed. All of our countries, including mine, could do well to learn from the Czech experience and people.”

With the onset of cold weather and the Russian military’s targeting of Ukraine’s energy infrastructure, Ad Hoc Committee members were particularly interested to learn more about preparations for a potential future wave of refugees over the winter and where national, regional and municipal help is most needed and where additional help from the international community is most required.

Committee Vice-Chair Kyriakos Hadjiyianni (Cyprus) highlighted the contribution of NGOs and volunteers: “Effective responses to managing crises such as the influx of Ukrainian Refugees into Europe are not possible without the support of civil society. I have been impressed by the professionalism and compassion displayed by Czech NGOs and volunteers in meeting these challenges. The Czech response has shown that when there is a will, there is a way.”

In addition to Pritchard, the delegation included Kyriakos Hadjiyianni (Cyprus), Vice-Chair of the Ad Hoc Committee on Migration and Special Representative on Civil Society Engagement; Georgios Varemenos (Greece), Member of the Ad Hoc Committee on Migration. Lucie Potůčková, Hayato Josef Okamura and Jana Pastuchová from the Czech PA Delegation also participated in some of the meetings.

The Committee’s observations will be published in full in early 2023.

Photos of the visit [are available on Flickr](#).