

Current Experience and Perspective of the Refugee Crisis in Western Slovakia in the Light of World Events in 2022

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Abstract:

Population migration within the global context is part of a group of various processes that result in significant changes in social, demographic, and economic structures. Currently and in the recent past, global migration flows have been mainly influenced by reasons such as armed conflicts, whether in Ukraine or in third-world countries. The presented contribution provides an overview of statistics on both legal and illegal migration of third-country nationals worldwide and within the European Union (referred to as the „EU“), as well as at the national level. Additionally, we offer a glimpse into our own experience in providing social assistance to Syrian citizens through the Crisis Intervention Center in Skalica in October 2023.

Author Bargerova (2016) considers migration as a process in which citizens of a certain country move, regardless of the reason. It involves the act of leaving one's country of origin. The author also addresses, among other categorizations, the distinction and definition of legal and illegal migration. Legal migration is defined as the crossing of borders of a specific state with valid travel documents or other documents that authorize a person to reside in that country. On the other hand, illegal migration is characterized by the unauthorized crossing of a state's borders, meaning the crossing without valid travel documents or documents permitting residence in that country.

As a fundamental definition, we consider the definition provided by the International Organization for Migration (IOM), which states that migration is understood as: „*The movement of individuals or groups of individuals within a geographic and social space associated with temporary or permanent changes in their place of residence. Migration can be categorized as follows:*

Foreign migration - the movement of individuals across the borders of sovereign states associated with a permanent or temporary change of residence;

Internal migration - the movement of individuals within one state associated with a permanent or temporary change of residence;

Voluntary migration - the free movement of individuals or groups, for example, for employment, family reunification, education, and the like;

Forced migration - involuntary departure from one's country of origin due to political and social problems, armed conflicts, natural disasters, severe livelihood and economic issues, or other long-lasting crisis situations;

Legal migration - crossing a country's border with a valid travel document, and possibly with valid visas and permits, if required for entry into the country;

Illegal migration - unauthorized crossing of a country's border without valid travel documents, visas, or residence permits, or staying in the country's territory without authorization after the expiration of documents, visas, or residence permits;

Long-term migration - the movement of peo-

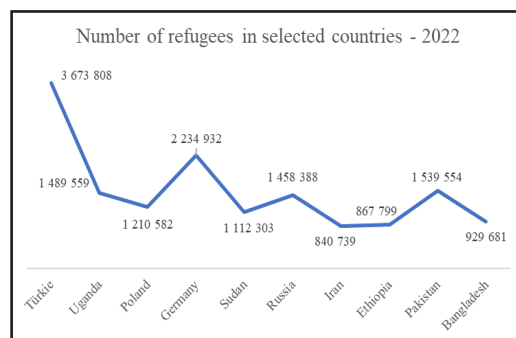
ple who change their usual country of residence for a period of at least one year;

Short-term migration - the movement of people who change their usual country of residence for a period longer than three months but shorter than one year, with the exception of cases related to vacations, visits to friends or relatives, business trips, medical treatment, or religious pilgrimages.“ (<https://www.iom.sk/sk/pre-media/zakladne-pojmy-o-migracii.html#migrant>)

Migration issues in the world and the European Union

According to the International Organization for Migration (IOM), more people currently live outside their country of origin than at any other time in history. This information is mentioned in the IOM World Migration Report for 2022. In 2021, the total number of international migrants was nearly 281 million, accounting for 3.6% of global migration, which represents an increase of 9 million compared to 2020. The report also provides another interesting statistic, indicating that more than seven out of ten refugees originate from countries such as Syria, Venezuela, Ukraine, Afghanistan, and South Sudan. When viewed from the opposite perspective, the countries that received the most refugees were Turkey, followed by Colombia, Germany, Pakistan, and Uganda. (<https://worldmigrationreport.iom.int/wmr-2022-interactive/>).

Chart 1 Number of refugees in selected countries – 2022



Source: https://commission.europa.eu/strategy-and-policy/priorities-2019-2024_sk

The graph above provides an overview of the numbers of refugees in selected countries

within the global context, according to UNHCR. Turkey has the highest number of refugees as a percentage of its population, with up to 4.3%, followed by Uganda at 3.5% and Poland at 3.2%. When assessing the total population of the European Union (EU), the number of refugees constitutes 1.5%.

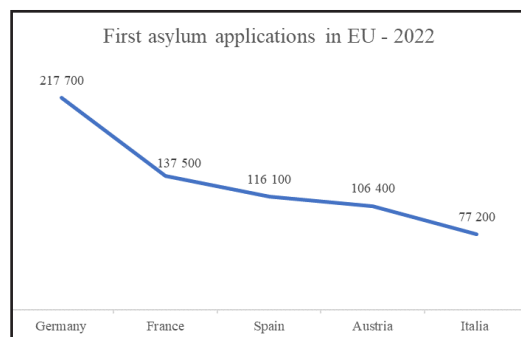
At this point, it is essential to highlight the difference between terms such as migrant and refugee, as they are often misinterpreted or confused. We will rely on the definition provided by UNHCR, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. Its primary goal is the protection of the rights and safety of refugees. UNHCR also strives to ensure that the rights of all refugees are upheld without discrimination. This includes the opportunity to seek asylum or find safe refuge in the country they find themselves in, as well as providing assistance with integration and offering support in the event a refugee decides to return to their country of origin or relocate to another third country.

According to UNHCR, it is also important to distinguish between these terms. We consider a refugee to be „*a person fleeing from armed conflict or persecution. Their situation is often so dangerous and intolerable that they cross national borders in search of safety in neighboring countries and thus become internationally recognized ‚refugees‘ with access to assistance from states, UNHCR, and other organizations. They are recognized precisely because returning home is too dangerous for them, and they need refuge elsewhere. Refusing to provide asylum to these individuals can have potentially lethal consequences.*“ On the other hand, a migrant is considered to be a person „*who has not decided to move due to a direct threat of persecution or death but primarily to improve their life, find work, or, in some cases, for education, family reunification, or other reasons. Unlike refugees, migrants do not face these obstacles in returning home. If they choose to return home, they can still enjoy the protection of their government.*“ (<https://unis.unvienna.org/unis/sk/pressrels/2015/unisinf513.html>).

If we look at the situation of migration from a European perspective within the EU, according to UNHCR data, by the end of the year, less than 10% of all global refugees lived within the

EU. Due to the war event in Ukraine, this figure increased to 20% in the middle of 2020. In 2022, asylum seekers within EU countries came from a total of 140 countries. In that year, 962,200 applications were issued, with as many as 881,200 of these being first-time applications. This data signifies a 52% increase in applications compared to 2021. An important statistic is that up to 239,500 of these asylum applications were from individuals under the age of 18. According to UNHCR statistics, approximately every sixth person, totaling 39,500 individuals, was an unaccompanied minor. (https://commission.europa.eu/strategy-and-policy/priorities-2019-2024/promoting-our-european-way-life/statistics-migration-europe_sk#utecenci-v-europe)

Chart 2 First asylum applications in EU – 2022



Source: https://commission.europa.eu/strategy-and-policy/priorities-2019-2024_sk

From the above, we can observe that the highest number of first-time asylum applications were submitted in EU countries such as Germany, France, Spain, Austria, and Italy. If we look at the numbers, the highest recorded number of applications in 2022 was in Germany, with a total of 217,700 applications by December 31, 2022, and Italy concluded the group of the most numerous EU countries with a total of 77,200 asylum applications.

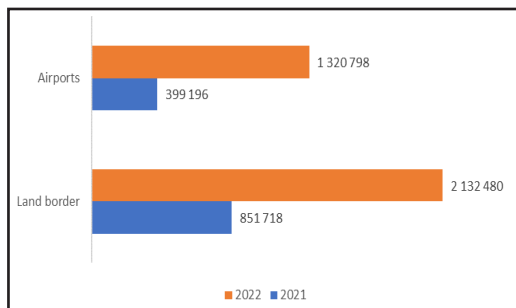
Migration situation in the Slovak Republic

Our aim in this contribution is to shed light on the situation regarding both legal and illegal migration in the Slovak Republic. Slovakia is not exempt from migration trends and has played a significant role in the case of refugees follow-

ing the outbreak of the conflict in Ukraine. We also encounter constant migration of third-country nationals.

In the following section, we will present the results of statistics from the border and foreign police concerning migration issues in our country. The graph below provides an overview of the number of individuals who legally crossed the external border of the Slovak Republic during the years 2021 and 2022. It's important to take into account the increase in numbers in 2022, primarily due to the Ukrainian conflict.

Chart 3 Legal migration to Slovak Republic, 2021, 2022



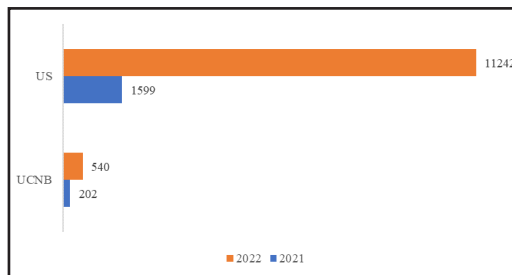
Source: https://www.minv.sk/swift_data/source/policia/hranicna_a_cudzinecka_policia/rocenky/rok_2022/2022-rocenka-UHCP-SK.pdf

The above-mentioned statistics provide an overview of overall migration in the given years. However, if we want to focus exclusively on the migration of third-country nationals within the legal statistics, in 2022, temporary residence was granted to 98,281 individuals, marking an increase of 12,995 compared to 2021. Permanent residence witnessed an increase of 2,782, with 28,794 third-country nationals being granted permanent residence in 2022. Additionally, tolerated stay was granted to 95,450 individuals, as opposed to 2021 when it was granted to only 75 individuals. (https://www.minv.sk/swift_data/source/policia/hranicna_a_cudzinecka_policia/rocenky/rok_2022/2022-rocenka-UHCP-SK.pdf).

We would like to further highlight illegal migration, which is a part of the migration flow in the Slovak Republic, as in other EU countries and on a global scale. The following statistics from border and alien policy provide an over-

view of the total numbers, of which, in the case of unauthorized border crossings, there were 195 cases in 2021 and 540 cases in 2022, where the border was crossed outside an official border crossing point. In total, we can observe a difference between the years 2021 and 2022, with an increase of 10,022 cases.

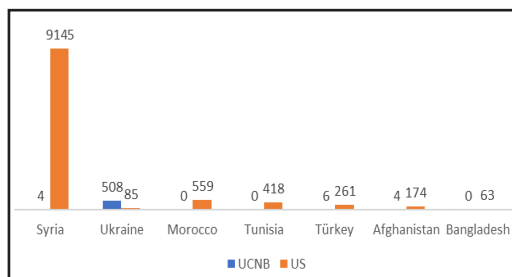
Chart 4 Illegal immigration to Slovak Republic, 2021, 2022



Source: https://www.minv.sk/swift_data/source/policia/hranicna_a_cudzinecka_policia/rocenky/rok_2022/2022-rocenka-UHCP-SK.pdf
 Explanation: UCNB - Unauthorised crossing of national borders, US - Unauthorised stay

Statistics from border and alien policy also provide an overview of illegal migration in the territory of the Slovak Republic for the calendar year 2022. In the graph below, we provide an overview of the most numerous nationalities where unauthorized border crossings or unauthorized stays in the Slovak Republic were recorded.

Chart 5 Illegal immigration by nationality 2022



Source: https://www.minv.sk/swift_data/source/policia/hranicna_a_cudzinecka_policia/rocenky/rok_2022/2022-rocenka-UHCP-SK.pdf
 Explanation: UCNB - Unauthorised crossing of national borders, US - Unauthorised stay

Crisis Intervention Centre Skalica

The migration situation is also complex on the western side of our country in the Záhorie region, where the Slovak Republic shares its border with the Czech Republic. This area experiences a significant flow of individuals aiming to reach Western European countries, primarily Germany and Italy. As a result of both past and recent events, in October 2023, the Crisis Intervention Center Skalica (CKIS) was established within the framework of the Memorandum of Cooperation between the College of Humanities and Social Sciences, and the Institute of Social Work and Nursing of MUDr. Pavol Blaha in Skalica (furthermore referenced as „institute“) Center for Crisis Intervention Skalica (furthermore referenced as „CKIS“).

The primary goal of CKIS is to provide crisis intervention to people in need, especially refugees, homeless individuals, disaster victims, and the like. CKIS focuses its efforts on ensuring crisis accommodation, clean water, clothing, hygiene, and, of course, basic healthcare (treating wounds, scabies, pain relief, and the like). Furthermore, CKIS is dedicated to offering psychological and spiritual support, all under the supervision of a designated individual for oversight and ethical values.

One of the recent practical experiences was the accommodation of a group of Syrian refugees. Due to the decision made by the Czech Republic, on October 13, 2023, border crossings were closed until further notice, making it difficult for refugees to cross through the usual border checkpoints. At that time, the Mayor of Skalica contacted CKIS with information that a group of Syrian refugees, including 13 minors aged 2 to 6, had been recorded by the municipal police in Skalica. In this case, CKIS was approached for the possibility of providing appropriate assistance, including shelter, hygiene, warm meals, access to clean drinking water, and other material support as required by the situation.

Subsequently, the group of refugees was relocated to the institute's premises with the participation and accompaniment of the City Police of Skalica, where they were provided with all the options for crisis intervention. In further collaboration with the Skalica Parish Charity, the refugees received warm meals and addition-

al refreshments as part of the humanitarian aid collected by the students of the Institute of Social Work and Nursing, MUDr. Pavel Blaha, in Skalica, in case of an acute situation like the one described.

Thanks to the mentioned collection, the refugees also had sleeping bags, foam mattresses, and spare clothing. As a matter of course, a general physician was called to attend to the refugee group, who at that time did not identify any infectious diseases but confirmed several short-term colds among multiple individuals and health issues related to urinary tract infections in one of the minors.

The refugees were presented with all the legislative options available to them, should they wish to remain in the Slovak Republic and apply for asylum, but they did not express an interest in staying in our country. It was also recommended that, due to the deteriorating condition of several individuals, they stay in place until the early hours. However, the mentioned group of refugees subsequently left the center in the early morning hours.

In the conclusion, we would like to quote a significant passage from the interview with „our“ refugee: *„My name is Obaid Al-Mutlaq. I am from Syria, from the Deir ez-Zor governorate. I lived in the Levant for several months and I couldn't live, provide for and help my children and family. Living there is very difficult, so I decided to leave, and I came here with the hope and vision of providing a better future for my children. I hope that with the help of God, you and other generous and kind-hearted people, we will always be able to help each other in times of need, whenever any of us may require assistance. That's important to me is that I have my children with me for which I am thankful to God. They are aged 2 to 14 years old. I have an adult daughter, who is already married in Bulgaria for which I am grateful. Most importantly, all of my children are relatively fine in terms of their health and my wife is also relatively okay despite some minor health issues.“*

Figure 1 Refugees in the premises of Crisis Intervention Centre Skalica



Conclusion

Based on various presented statistics, practical experience, and considering the development of current events worldwide, whether we are discussing the ongoing conflict in Ukraine or the current situation in Israel, it is necessary to keep in mind that the number of people fleeing from these and similar conflicts will only continue to grow. We are convinced that the vast majority of these individuals will not be interested in staying in our country. However, we also feel a sense of responsibility to take care of people in need, regardless of their race, gender, nationality, or ethnicity. Our priority should always be children and their mothers. Furthermore, we remain concerned that non-governmental organizations, in collaboration with voluntary forces, will continue to play a crucial role in these situations. Therefore, it is essential to ensure thorough preparedness.

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