

Why Do Refugees Stir Up Our Emotions?

Migration Narratives in the Czech Society and a Glance Beyond Them

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The aim of this research¹ was to better understand how the migration/refugee issue is understood in the Czech context as a first step towards paths that would take us to a more open, rational and constructive discussion. It appears that the Czech “anxious middle” – people who do not outright reject migration or do not support it unconditionally, but are conflicted and possibly worried about some of its impacts (Katwala and Somerville, 2016) – present an opportunity for a shift in the public, and consequently policy, debate. That is why we decided to map the main narratives related to the refugee/migration issue (to describe them and the links between them in more depth) and place them in the context of the overall Czech public opinion. During the research it became apparent that under the surface of the migration discourse linger larger issues and concerns, some of which are more or less implicitly present in the identified narratives themselves.

Main findings

- The five identified narratives (see below) highlight the **main aspects of migration** as perceived by the respondents, including more or less immediate concerns and fears that migration/refugee issue arouses. What has framed the current migration/refugee debate is a notion of the **unprecedented nature** of the current migration situation as one that has gotten out of control and escalated to a true “crisis”. A **common denominator of much of the anti-migration/refugee debate is Islam**, which serves as a symbol for a great number of images (and fears) people associate with the refugee/migrant other.
- In April 2016, 23 % of respondents agreed to accept refugees, while 25 % of people did not agree with accepting refugees under any of the proposed conditions. It can be therefore estimated that about **half the population is not strictly pro- or anti-refugee** – and that public opinion is not as polarized as it is generally assumed. Those in support of accepting refugees who at the same time consider the topic very important are mostly recruited from middle-aged, university-educated people with monthly income over EUR 1,500. On the other hand, those against accepting refugees who consider the issue important are found among older people with lower income and education. However, from this demographic group are also mostly recruited those who have mixed attitudes or do not consider the issue as very important.
- It may be concluded that people generally **do not perceive migration in simplistic, black and white terms**. They are generally aware of the wider context of the migration debate and important related issues - and are suspicious of simple solutions. When proposed certain economic, security, or other conditions, the rate of

¹ The research combined original qualitative research with secondary analysis of quantitative data. The main narratives were identified based on analysis of data gathered through inter-generational family interviews, deep individual and small-group interviews and from TV programmes of a sensationalist nature. To illustrate the larger context, we conducted secondary analysis of representative data gained through opinion polls.

acceptance increased to from 23 % (no condition) to 44-64 % (one condition). The two conditions that increased the rate of refugee acceptance the most was the assurance that refugees would be deported in case of violent behavior or a criminal act (64% acceptance) and the assurance that someone from the family would work (62% acceptance). Yet communication partners often mention that they know “very little” about the issue, or “only what they tell us”. It seems that **a more concrete discussion about specific policies and measures** would calm down fears, deescalate divisions and benefit the refugee/migration debate overall.

- To lighten the debate, its language needs to change as well. Currently, it is heavily influenced by the dominant security perspective and metaphors that draw a picture of an unmanaged and unmanagable crisis. Jargon, abstract concepts and general ideological statements need to give way to a discussion of concrete steps stated in a **clearer, more neutral and understandable language**. Face to face debates seem to support less aggression and more openness than debates in the media (especially social media).
- What arises through the migration/refugee debate are other, deeper concerns not necessarily directly related to migration (such as uncertainties, high speed of change, frustrations etc.). What underlines them is a narrative about “incompetent institutions and alienated elites” that tells a story of **a lack of trust in the state, its institutions and elites that are incompetent or even uninterested** to solve the problems of ordinary citizens and out of touch with their reality. These **deeper problems seem to mark the real frontiers** of people's solidarity and openness and willingness to occupy themselves with more complex matters generally.
- It is essential to gain a **better understanding of these deeper issues** that influence opinions on issues such as migration/refugees. As traditional socioeconomic categories cannot always reliably explain these newly surfaced divisions and cleavages, new (e.g. psychocultural) factors (hypotheses) need to be explored. Better understanding, supported by explicitly naming and clearly demonstrating ways of solving these issues could be a path towards **calming down the “anxious middle”** and reducing the current political and social polarization.

Narratives Describing Refugees/Migrants and Their Characteristics

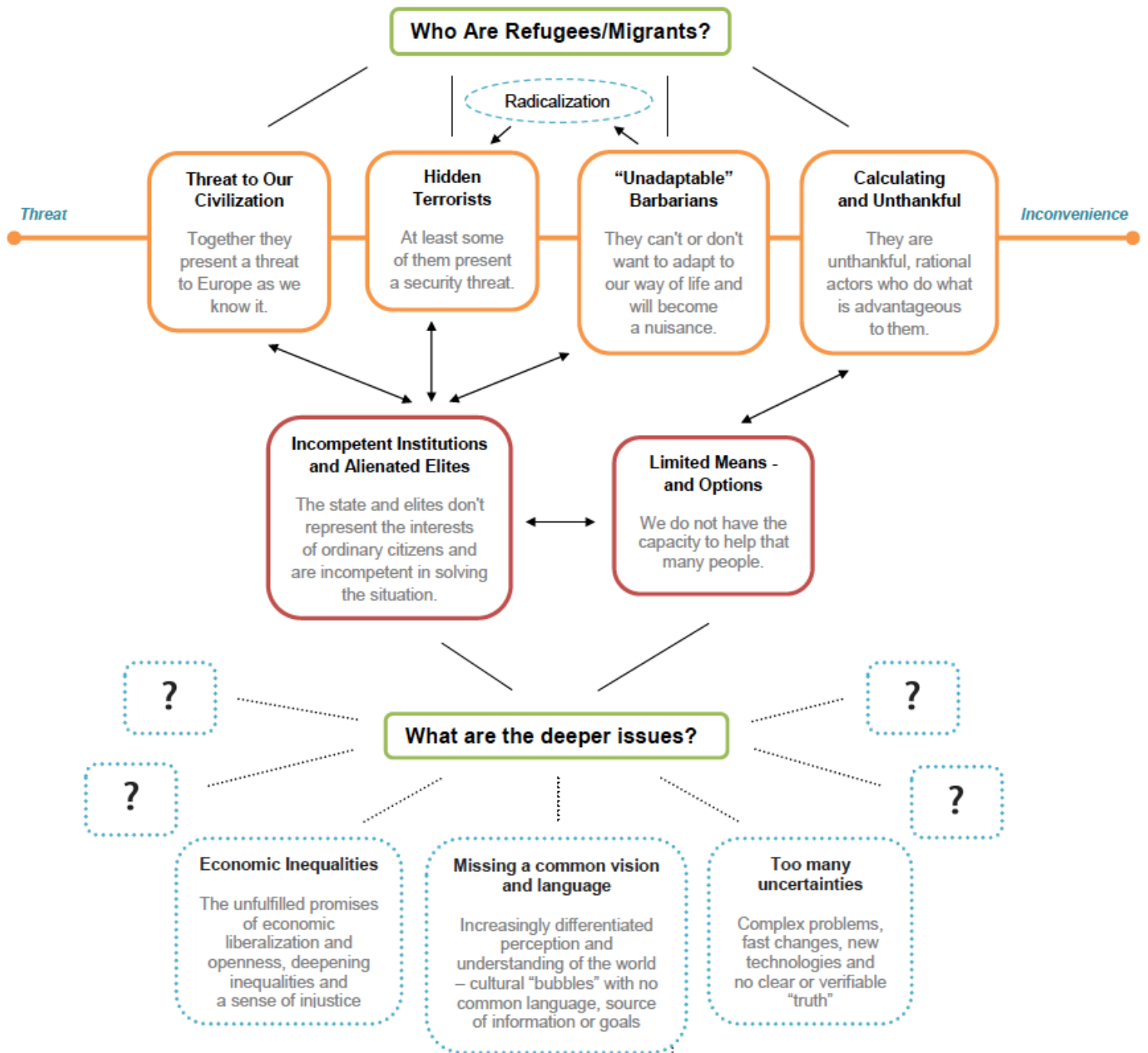
Narrative	Sub-Naratives	Dystopian Future	Source of Concern
<i>Hidden Terrorists</i>	Uncontrollable spread of terrorists coming with the migration wave	Terrorist attacks commonplace in Europe	Threat to our security (from the inside)
<i>Threat to Our Civilization</i>	Muslim invasion to Europe Europe's demographic transformation	Clash of civilizations that will destroy “us” Islam dominating Europe (demographically and politically)	End of Europe as we know it - as such (threat from the outside)

<p><i>“Unadaptable” Barbarians</i></p>	<p>Anachronistic culture (incl. its relationship to women) Failed integration Closed communities and high criminality</p>	<p>More ghettos and “no-go zones” Undesired cultural transformation of our society Day-to-day conflicts and troubles</p>	<p>Cultural differences and “unadaptability” of immigrants</p>
<p><i>Calculating and Unthankful</i></p>	<p>Unrealistic ideas about Europe Asylum-shopping and secondary movement Refugees as unthankful and undeserving of our help</p>	<p>Overburdened social systems</p>	<p>Economic concerns</p>

Narratives Describing “the System” to Which Refugees/Migrants Are Coming

Narrative	Sub-Narratives	Dystopian Future	Source of Concern
<p><i>Incompetent Institutions and Alienated Elites</i></p>	<p>Elites' alienation from the life of ordinary citizens Bureaucratization of the EU Incompetence to solve the situation and protect European citizens Positive discrimination Certain groups benefitting from this situation Distrust of the media</p>	<p>Negative consequences for ordinary citizens, the decay of our societies, anarchy, the “law of the jungle” (concerns related to narratives 1-3)</p>	<p>Institutional concerns (our institutions incapable of dealing with the current crisis) Interests of elites not intersecting with interests of ordinary citizens Uncertainty stemming from the impossibility to find or verify the “truth”</p>
<p><i>Limited Means – and Options</i></p>	<p>Excessive numbers of refugees Accepting only “culturally alike” refugees Resources lacking elsewhere in the society Those responsible and benefiting from the inflows should bear the consequences</p>	<p>Overburdened social systems</p>	<p>Economic concerns regarding the unsustainability of the situation</p>

The Main Identified Narratives, Their Relations and Deeper Influences





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