

MEETING ABSTRACTS

CIVILIAN HEROES IN A SECURITY CRISIS? REFUGEE ASSISTANCE AND MORAL ALIGNMENT IN THE CZECH REPUBLIC

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This paper delves into the experiences of volunteers (N = 12) engaged with migrants in the Czechia. It evaluates their roles during two different refugee ‘crises’ which touched this country in 2015/2016 and in 2022. Starting point for the study was completely different attitude of public towards the newcomers in these two similar but different situations. While negative perceptions were evident during the 2015/2016 refugee crisis – characterized by scepticism and resistance toward volunteerism – the response to the Ukrainian refugee influx showcased a more supportive environment, potentially influenced by institutional aid efforts and a greater sense of solidarity with Ukrainian refugees. We conducted semi-structured qualitative interviews with volunteers engaged in both events. The study brings in understanding of individual roles played by volunteers (evolution of the scope and of the responsibilities of various ad hoc actors), as well as the shifts in the milieu in which volunteers operate (from a spontaneous one towards institutionalised). Alongside with the changes in public opinion towards the volunteer efforts the policy landscape also changed. The disparities perceived by volunteers in these two distinct situations are the key point of our findings. Last part of the paper formulates the lessons learned and shows the limitations of this study.

Keywords: volunteering; migration; refugees; attitudes; Czechia

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