

Reinventing the Refuge

Protection of Refugees in Post-Communist Countries

Exploratory workshop

Warsaw, February 3-4, 2025

Organised by ERC Consolidator project Unlikely Refuge? Refugees and Citizens in East-Central Europe in the 20th Century, Masaryk Institute and Archives of the Czech Academy of Sciences, in cooperation with the Institute of Philosophy and Sociology of the Polish Academy of Sciences.

The interdisciplinary workshop aims to bring together scholars interested in refugees and refugee policies in the context of post-Communist transformations. Against the dominant focus on emigration, we emphasise refugee reception (or refusal) in countries and places undergoing significant political, social, economic and cultural changes.

Economists, social scientists and historians paid much attention to the ideas behind the changes after the demise of state socialist regimes. Numerous works engage with the negative economic and social cost of the transformation and the critique of neoliberal dictates over political and social systems searching for alternatives to state socialism. Migration remained on the margins of this discussion and was often conceptualised as outmigration from the empowerished East, the “brain drain”, or examined as moral panics based on exaggerated images of masses of Eastern Europeans moving to the West.

Yet, the political re-opening and softening of borders made these countries into spaces of refuge. Reacting to people searching for protection, post-Communist countries integrated into international networks and organizations and adopted the 1951 Refugee Convention on the one hand and built national laws and institutions on the other hand. This history, however, was never systematically and comparatively analyzed, apart from isolated incidents such as those that contributed to the fall of the “Iron Curtain” (for instance the escape of East Germans to the West in 1989). The development of refugee policies in the context of post-Communist transformation still remains insufficiently researched.

The workshop aims to facilitate an exchange of ideas about these themes, discuss the first results, and identify questions, methods and research avenues. It advances a critical and multifaceted perspective and treats refugees not only as subjects of processes of transformation but also as active players within. Contributions can reflect on, but are not restricted to, the following subject areas:

- Institutions, legislation and political transformation, and relations to citizenship regimes
- Civil society, humanitarian and other non-governmental organizations
- Welfare, health care, the lens of “care”
- Media and public opinion (including approaches based on corpus linguistics)

- Internationalisation versus nationalisation in refugee policies
- Securitization, spatial management of refugees and refugee camps
- Links between labour migration and refugees and refugee status
- Refugee agency, entrepreneurship and contribution to social transformations
- Knowledge production, accessibility of sources and possible gaps in historical research

While starting from research on post-Communist transformation, we also invite comparison to changes of refugee policies in other parts of the world and other comparative cases of a declared transformation to democracy, or to discussion of longer term (dis)continuities.

We invite short papers and presentations of research projects which we will combine into panels around shared themes and questions and allow ample space for discussion. We welcome work-in-progress contributions.

The workshop will also offer an opportunity to discuss the first results of the efforts of the ERC Consolidator project *Unlikely Refuge? Refugees and Citizens in East-Central Europe in the 20th Century* to research and analyse refugee policies in the “long 1990s”. This will include the presentation of findings of an oral historical project during which some key actors of refugee policies and aid in Czechoslovakia and the Czech Republic, Hungary and Poland were interviewed.

Paper/presentation proposals (max. 250 words) and short bios (max. 200 words), as well as any questions, should be directed to unref-public@mua.cas.cz.

Submission deadline: October 31, 2024

The decision on acceptance will be communicated by November 30, 2024. The organizers will provide financial support for travel and accommodation.



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