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Evolution in Czech Public Attitudes towards War Refugees from Ukraine²

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Summary

- In the wake of Russia's military assault on Ukraine at the end of February 2022, an atmosphere of solidarity prevailed in the Czech Republic and most of the Czech population supported the country's intake of war refugees. By the end of November 2022, that support had fallen by approximately one quarter. Czechs' perceptions of how well integrated Ukrainians were into Czech society worsened similarly.
- This change in Czech public attitudes over time did not, however, stem primarily from personal or first hand experience of welcoming refugees; rather, it was related to a gradual decrease in public interest in the conflict after the initial shock of it first beginning. Although several aspects of Ukrainian refugees' integration improved in real terms in the second half of 2022, for example in relation to schools and to the labour market, this progress was not reflected in Czech public opinion.
- There continue to be very large differences in the extent to which different groups of the Czech public support the acceptance of Ukrainian refugees. Refugee rejection often stems from a lack of knowledge and from fears that the arrival of refugees could worsen people's own situations: negative attitudes to refugees are more often expressed by people who do not follow the news

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or who find themselves in difficult circumstances. People who have had first hand contact with Ukrainians living in the Czech Republic, on the other hand, usually express greater solidarity and are more often supportive of welcoming refugees.

- People's subjective interpretations of the geopolitical events are also a key factor: respondents who are convinced that the war was caused by unprovoked Russian aggression are far more accommodating towards Ukrainians, agree with refugee intake more often, and perceive those already in their country as better integrated. Media depictions of war-related topics and the types of news sources the respondents follow also play a key role here.
- Although the Czechs are wary of foreigners coming into the Czech Republic and tend to perceive them as a threat, their first hand experience of interaction with foreigners is predominantly positive.