Research Article

The Inter-Factor Zone: A Transitional Phase Between Push and Pull Factors in Post-1968 Migration from Czechoslovakia to Switzerland

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This article introduces the concept of an inter-factor zone, a transitional phase of migration that extends beyond the traditional push and pull factor framework. By integrating the dynamics of uncertainty and the influence of contingent events, this study provides a novel perspective on migrant decision-making. Using the case of political emigration from Czechoslovakia to Switzerland following the 1968 Warsaw Pact invasion, this study examines how structural factors, institutional support, and unforeseen circumstances shaped migrants' choices during this transitional phase.

Data were collected using the biographical narrative technique and semi-structured interviews. Based on an analysis of 35 semi-structured interviews and historical documents, key factors influencing migrant decision-making were identified. The research revealed that a portion of political migrants from Czechoslovakia found themselves in the inter-factor zone, a transitional phase of the migration process in which push factors lose their immediate influence while pull factors have not yet fully developed. Migrants experiencing this phase were highly sensitive to minor stimuli such as information from refugee aid organizations, chance encounters, and asylum policies of respective states. These factors significantly influenced migrants' decisions on whether to stay, continue their journey, or return to their country of origin.

By conceptualizing migration as a non-linear, dynamic process, this study enhances the understanding of migration complexity, offers a new perspective on the significance of the inter-factor zone, and provides valuable insights for contemporary migration policies focused on refugee integration.

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1. Introduction

Migration is a critical phenomenon reflecting not only personal choices of individuals, but also broader political, economic, and social forces. Political migration, driven by repressive regimes, offers a unique opportunity to examine the interplay between structural factors and individual decision-making. One of the most significant migratory movements during the Cold War was emigration from Czechoslovakia following the Warsaw Pact invasion in August 1968, during which approximately 100,000 to 130,000 people left the country within a single year[1][2]. Switzerland, which received over 11,000 Czechoslovak refugees[3], emerged as one of the primary destinations. The migrants' decision-making process was influenced by both structural factors and unexpected, seemingly minor events.

This article introduces the novel concept of *the inter-factor zone*, a phase within the migration process in which push factors lose their immediate influence, while pull factors have not yet fully developed. During this phase of uncertainty and openness, even minor stimuli – such as a letter from home, a leaflet from a humanitarian organisation, or a conversation in a transit country – prompt migrants to make immediate and critical decisions: to stay, continue, or return. This dynamic process demonstrates that migration is not merely a rational response to structural factors but is also shaped by unpredictable events, contingency, and institutional support. This study integrates theoretical and empirical approaches to migration and extends traditional push and pull factor theories by offering a fresh perspective on the complexity of decision-making processes. The findings of this analysis provide deeper insights into post-1968 emigration and valuable contributions to contemporary discussions on managing migration flows and refugee integration.

Based on a qualitative analysis of 35 biographical narratives and historical documents, this study expands the push and pull factor framework to include the dynamics of the inter-factor zone and its reliance on contingent factors. It offers a novel perspective on the complexity of political migration and presents insights for contemporary debates on refugee integration and the formulation of effective migration policies.

The primary research question is as follows: How does the concept of the inter-factor zone extend the traditional push and pull factor theory, as illustrated by the migration of Czechoslovaks to Switzerland after 1968?

The sub-questions include:

- What unforeseen events and contingencies influenced migrants' decision-making in transit countries?
- How did transit countries shape migratory trajectories?
- What roles did humanitarian organisations and volunteer networks play in the inter-factor zone?
- How did the inter-factor zone affect migrants' decisions to remain, remigrate, or return?

Historical Context

The phenomenon of migration has been present in the Czech lands for centuries, with significant migratory waves in the 20th century closely tied to wartime conflicts and political transformations. Following World War II, migration was largely organised and linked to post-war territorial adjustments, such as the population exchange between Czechoslovakia and Hungary or the expulsion of the German population[4]. In contrast, emigration following February 1948 and August 1968 was characterised by individual decision-making and often dramatic circumstances.

The events of August 1968 and the subsequent period of normalisation caused profound disillusionment among many Czechoslovak citizens, along with fear of an increasingly repressive regime. Emigration became not only a means of escaping political persecution but also a search for freedom and better living conditions. Immediately after the invasion, temporary relaxation of border controls allowed many citizens to leave the country relatively easily[5]. However, this period was short-lived, as border restrictions were tightened again by 1969, making legal departure nearly impossible without special permission (Vyhláška ministerstva vnitra a ministerstva zahraničních věcí, 1969).

Migrants often chose transit countries such as Austria and Yugoslavia, where they encountered humanitarian organisations providing basic assistance and information on asylum opportunities. One of the key destinations was Switzerland, whose humanitarian policies and the active role of organisations such as the International Red Cross facilitated the integration of Czechoslovak refugees[3]. The number of accepted refugees is recorded in a government document: *"By 31 December 1969, asylum had been granted to 11,108 Czechoslovak refugees out of a total of 13,000 who had arrived after August 1968"*[3].

The political and societal impacts of emigration were long-lasting. Act No. 140/1961 Coll., which outlawed leaving the republic without authorisation, had been enacted in socialist Czechoslovakia in 1961, well before mass emigration following August 1968. This law reflected the regime's broader

efforts to control the movement of citizens across borders and prevent "ideological diversion" through Western influence. After the Warsaw Pact invasion in 1968, the law took on particular significance, enabling the regime to systematically criminalise emigrants.

The convictions had serious consequences not only for the refugees themselves, who were prohibited from returning legally, but also for their families, who remained in Czechoslovakia. Their relatives often faced persecution, job loss, or restricted access to education for their children. Such measures not only reinforced the isolation of emigrants from their original communities but also aimed to deter other potential migrants from following a similar path[6].

The fall of the communist regime in 1989 opened new avenues to study this period. Previously inaccessible archival materials enabled historians, sociologists, and anthropologists to analyse the phenomenon of emigration in greater detail. Particular attention has been given not only to the political and economic causes of migration but also to its social consequences, including the divide between emigrants and those who remained in Czechoslovakia[7].

Review of the Existing Research

The theory of push and pull factors, which explains migration processes, has its roots in the mid-20th century. Sociologist and demographer Donald Bogue[8] was among the first to identify economic and social influences on migrants' decision-making. Building on his work, Jansen[9] formalised the concept and emphasised the importance of social conditions and individual decisions within broader structural influences. A key contribution in this field came from Lee[10], who categorised migration factors into four domains: factors in the country of origin, factors in the destination country, obstacles along the route, and personal factors. Lee's classification highlights that migration results from the interplay between positive and negative influences across these categories.

The theory of push and pull factors has since evolved and expanded to include new concepts reflecting the complexity of migration processes. Van Hear et al.[11] proposed the *Push and Pull Plus* framework, which incorporates mediating factors such as transport infrastructure, migration networks, and cultural values. It also accounts for proximal factors, such as conflicts and environmental stress, which can profoundly impact migration. This approach underscores that migration is not driven by a single force but rather by a dynamic set of factors that vary over time and space.

Empirical applications of the push and pull factor theory further illustrate how these factors operate in specific migratory contexts. Urbanski (2022) examined migration between Poland and Romania, where political stability and economic opportunities served as key pull factors. Bernini et al. [12] investigated the role of corruption in migration, finding that corruption in the country of origin exacerbates economic uncertainty, whereas corruption in the destination country diminishes the appeal of migration. Stojšin et al.[13] focused on migration from Serbia to Slovakia, where push factors included low wages and an unstable political situation, while pull factors consisted of higher living standards and better working conditions.

Another example of expanding traditional models is the *push out-push back* concept introduced by Klaus and Pachocka[14]. This approach highlights the active role of destination countries in deterring forced migration. Push out encompasses threats to life and safety in origin countries, whereas push back includes measures by destination countries, such as physical barriers, deportations, and anti-immigration rhetoric.

Recently, researchers have shifted their attention to unplanned events and the role of contingency in migration processes. Dahinden[15] emphasised that unpredictable factors, such as logistical obstacles or changes in migration policies, can significantly alter migrants' trajectories. Gladkova and Mazzucato[16] identified two migrant approaches to contingency: active "hustlers," who exploit chance events, and passive "pawns," who respond cautiously. These studies have demonstrated that contingency is a critical element, particularly in the transit phases of migration.

Our study builds on these insights by introducing the concept of an *inter-factor zone,* which describes the intermediate phase of the migration process. During this phase, push factors lose their immediate influence, while pull factors in the destination country are not yet fully developed. This phase is characterised by uncertainty, heightened sensitivity to minor stimuli, such as information from humanitarian organisations or logistical opportunities, and the significant influence of contingency. Unlike previous studies, our concept systematically integrates the role of contingency into a broader theoretical framework that encompasses the interplay of structural factors, institutions, and social networks.

The concept of the inter-factor zone contributes to a deeper understanding of the dynamics of migration processes, bridging traditional push and pull factor theories with empirical insights into

transit phases. This approach offers a novel tool for analysing migratory trajectories, with relevance not only for academic discourse but also for the development of migration policies.

2. Methods

This research is based on 15 semi-structured interviews conducted with Czechoslovak emigrants residing in Switzerland between 10 and 24 July 2019. An additional 20 interviews were conducted via online video calls, which some participants preferred due to the sensitivity of the topic and practical constraints. Additional data were supplemented from official documents available in Swiss online archives, ensuring source triangulation and enhancing the validity of the findings.

The interviews employed the biographical narrative technique, allowing the capture of narrators' subjective perspectives and personal experiences, spanning from childhood to the present. This method yielded rich narrative material encompassing key events within their migratory trajectories. The interviews were further supported by targeted questions addressing the research sub-questions, such as motivations for emigration, choice of destination, role of institutions, and influence of migration policies. Participants were recruited using a combination of methods, including social media outreach, snowball sampling, and collaboration with expatriate organisations, such as Sokol-Curych, Beseda Svatopluk Čech Curych, and Beseda Slovan Ženeva. This approach ensured a diverse sample of narrators in terms of age, gender, professional background, and duration of residence in Switzerland, thereby capturing a broad spectrum of migratory experiences.

This research was conducted in compliance with the ethical research standards of the Ethical Code of the Czech Association for Social Anthropology and the 1964 Helsinki Declaration and its subsequent amendments. All participants provided informed consent before participating in the study, and their anonymity and confidentiality were strictly maintained. The study adhered to ethical principles for qualitative research, ensuring that the participants' narratives were handled with respect and integrity.

The interviews, lasting between 60 and 120 minutes, were recorded and subsequently transcribed using the Beey software to ensure accurate and systematic transcription.

The data analysis followed the principles of grounded theory[17][18] and was conducted in several stages. Initially, open coding was performed, during which the interview texts were divided into smaller segments reflecting key themes and patterns. This was followed by focused coding, in which

individual codes were linked and grouped into broader analytical categories aligned with the study's theoretical framework. In the final stage, theoretical coding integrates the focused codes into an overarching analytical framework, connecting the data to the concept of the inter-factor zone. This process was further supported by memo writing, which facilitated ongoing reflection on analytical questions and linkage of individual codes to the theoretical framework. Memo writing played a pivotal role in identifying patterns and key themes that emerged from the data.

The analysis was conducted using the specialised software platform Atlas.ti, which allows for systematic organisation of codes and efficient handling of extensive textual data. In addition to the interviews, questionnaire data were utilised as a secondary source to complement and expand the analysis of the identified key themes. This methodological approach enabled a comprehensive analysis, systematically linking qualitative data with the conceptual framework and contributing to a deeper understanding of the migration process dynamics.

Our study has several limitations that should be considered when interpreting the results. First, the use of the snowball sampling method for selecting narrators may have led to selection bias, as participants were often recruited based on recommendations from other migrants. This could have affected the representativeness of the sample, particularly concerning different social and professional groups. Second, while biographical interviews provide deep insights into migrants' subjective experiences, they are susceptible to selective memory and reinterpretation of past events. This subjectivity should be considered when generalizing our findings. Data triangulation using historical documents and archival materials has helped mitigate these limitations and enhance the validity of our conclusions.

3. Results

3.1. Motivation for Emigration

The decision to emigrate was a pivotal moment, influenced by a range of push factors that often overlapped, reflecting the individual experiences and subjective perceptions of the narrators. In the case of Czechoslovak emigrants to Switzerland during the period 1948–1989, the dominant factor was the invasion of Warsaw Pact troops in 1968, which triggered fear for the future and uncertainty. However, this decisive factor, along with other motivations, cannot be fully understood through the

classic push and pull factor theory alone. Our analysis revealed that decisions were often shaped by unplanned events and chance encounters, which significantly influenced the migration trajectory.

The push factors can be divided into two main categories. The first and most significant was the fear for the future, spurred by the invasion. Many narrators stated that their presence outside Czechoslovakia at the time of the August events contributed to their decision to leave, such as vacations, study trips, and visits to relatives. Information from foreign media, whether incomplete or distorted, further amplified feelings of insecurity: *"My mother panicked because Romanian radio reported how there was a war in Czechoslovakia (Filip, Basilej),"* one narrator recalled.

Secondary factors included poor work and study opportunities in Czechoslovakia, often resulting from negative political assessments. These were linked to previous family persecution or earlier waves of emigration. Such assessments severely restricted professional and educational opportunities, thus prompting the decision to emigrate.

Another significant factor was religious identity, particularly among narrators of Jewish descent. Events surrounding the so-called Prague Spring (a period of political liberalisation, particularly in 1968) and the subsequent shift toward stricter policy revived fears of persecution, deeply rooted in the wartime experiences of the Holocaust survivors.

3.2. The Role of Transit Countries

Transit countries played an indispensable role in the decision-making processes of migrants. Austria was the most important transit point, serving as a bridge between Czechoslovakia and the destinations chosen by migrants for recreation or other temporary stays in August 1968. Czechoslovaks returning from Italy and Yugoslavia often crossed the Austrian border in the hope of being granted asylum, temporary residence, or access to more information about the situation in their home country. Vienna, Austria's capital, became a central hub where migrants often obtained their first information about possible onward journeys, including details about asylum policies in destination countries. Up to 90% of Czechs and Slovaks who needed temporary refuge in Austria stayed in Vienna[19].

An important location during this transit phase was the refugee camp in Traiskirchen, located approximately 20 km from Vienna. This camp, established after the 1956 Hungarian refugee wave[20], played a key role in accommodating migrants. According to records, by 15 August 1968, approximately 61,000 refugees and tourists had been recorded in refugee camps in Austria[19]. Swiss diplomatic

documents indicate that the Austrian government funded transportation to reception camps near the Swiss border[21].

In these camps, the Red Cross and local volunteers provided care for migrants, often offering temporary housing. The camps also facilitated connections between migrants and other Czechoslovak refugees, providing critical psychological support. As such, transit was not merely a geographical phase of the migration journey, but also a crucial social and informational network that shaped migrants' decision-making processes.

3.3. The Role of the Inter-factor zone in Migration Trajectories

The inter-factor zone represents a critical phase in the migration process, during which push factors lose their immediate influence, while pull factors in the destination country are not yet fully active. In this state of uncertainty, migrants often find themselves "in between" two decisions: whether to return to their country of origin or proceed to a new destination. During this phase, they are highly susceptible to external influences, making the inter-factor zone a decisive point in shaping their migratory trajectories. This migration process is illustrated in Figure 1.

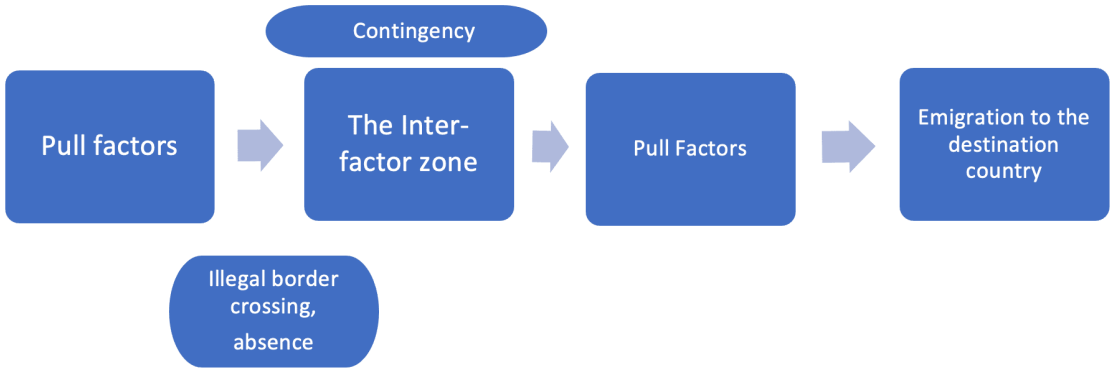

Figure 1.

In the interviews, narrators frequently highlighted feelings of disorientation and uncertainty experienced in transit countries. This state was exacerbated by random events and latent pull factors, such as concerns for family or fear of failure in the destination country. Central to the inter-factor zone was the influence of institutions and organisations, which often motivated migrants to either remain in transit or continue their journey.

The role of contingency is a distinct dimension that transcends traditional pull factors. In the narratives, contingency often emerged as a decisive element during the transit phase, when migrants were in an uncertain state of being "in between"—having left Czechoslovakia but not yet firmly decided on their final destination. In this context, contingency encompassed unplanned events that were not part of the migrants' intended trajectory, but directly shaped the direction and choice of their destination. Based on interviews with narrators, contingency factors can be categorised into several key themes. Narrators described encounters with Red Cross workers, embassy staff, and volunteers in transit countries, who provided critical information about Switzerland's asylum policies. Leaflets distributed by volunteers reassured migrants that Switzerland would grant asylum to all Czechoslovak refugees, without requiring permanent residency. For many, these actors were pivotal in their decision-making process, as they offered practical assistance, such as food and temporary shelters, and facilitated border crossings into Switzerland. One narrator shared: *"I didn't want to leave Europe, and I wasn't sure what to do - whether to stay in Austria or go back. Then I heard Switzerland was taking in Czechoslovak refugees (Miroslav, Fribourg)."*

A key contingency factor was the three-month grace period offered by Switzerland, during which migrants could legally remain in the country without applying for asylum. This period allowed migrants the necessary time to deliberate on their next steps, particularly in the chaotic aftermath of the invasion, as they awaited development in Czechoslovakia and weighed the pros and cons of emigration. Even those who did not initially apply for asylum were quickly employed or enrolled in education under government regulations, which ultimately encouraged the majority to seek asylum. Geographical proximity also played a significant role in decision-making. As one narrator recalled: *"I emigrated with my parents. Our first stop was Vienna. They didn't choose Switzerland. It was simply the first country that accepted them (Petr, Lucern)."* Many narrators noted that Switzerland's relative proximity to transit locations such as Vienna, coupled with the availability of rail connections, made it a natural destination. For migrants without private transport, special trains were organised to take them to border crossings, further facilitating their movement.

Another significant category of contingency was unplanned events that occurred during vacations abroad at the time of the Warsaw Pact invasion. Many Czechoslovaks were on organised tours in Yugoslavia, Italy, or other countries in August 1968, and their return routes often led through Austria. In these cases, Austria became the site of critical change in plans. Some tours disbanded in Vienna,

leaving participants without immediate means to return to Czechoslovakia. This sudden situation forced them to consider remaining abroad, leading to decisions made under significant time pressure.

The various situations described in this section illustrate how migrants' decision-making occurred within the inter-factor zone – a phase during which push factors had lost their influence and pull factors in destination countries were not yet fully developed. This phase was characterised by migrants' heightened sensitivity to available opportunities and contingent events, which could significantly alter the trajectory of their decisions. The role of the inter-factor zone thus underscores the importance of transit phases in migration, where individuals found themselves in conditions of uncertainty and openness to external influences.

3.4. Switzerland as a Destination Country

The choice of Switzerland as the destination country for Czechoslovak emigrants was shaped by specific factors that combined personal connections, institutional support, and practical accessibility. The most significant pull factor was the presence of relatives and acquaintances who could provide initial support and information regarding integration opportunities. The role of Swiss cantonal authorities, which issued temporary residence permits during the crisis and allowed migrants to remain in the country, represented a crucial institutional support mechanism during a period of uncertainty.

In addition to these primary influences, secondary factors also played a role in decision-making. These included knowledge of German among some migrants, which facilitated adaptation in German-speaking cantons, and the relative accessibility of Switzerland from transit locations such as Vienna. This section analyses these factors and their specific impact on the decision-making and integration processes of Czechoslovak emigrants.

Swiss Migration Policy and the Reception of Refugees

Switzerland's positive migration policy undoubtedly played a significant role in attracting emigrants. The information circulating in transit countries about Switzerland's three-month window for asylum applications and its high acceptance rate of refugees from Czechoslovakia increased the country's appeal. Following the decision of the Federal Council on 23 August 1968, all Czechoslovak nationals present in Switzerland during the events of 21 August were instructed to remain in their current locations. This measure aimed to prevent the concentration of refugees in major cities[21]. The Swiss

Red Cross established reception centres at two border crossings, Buchs and St. Margrethen, which became operational on 1 September 1968. From these centres, migrants were distributed across Swiss cantons, ensuring an even geographical distribution to avoid concentrations in specific areas. This process, designed for efficiency, typically lasted no more than 48 hours[21].

The role of institutions in this process was pivotal. Cantonal social departments were tasked with assisting migrants from the very day of the invasion, especially given the presence of approximately 1,000 Czechoslovak tourists in Switzerland at the time, many of whom had limited financial resources. The Federal Council granted migrants the freedom to decide whether to apply for asylum or remain in the country temporarily[22]. By October 1968, municipal social offices were instructed to assist refugees in securing appropriate housing and employment. Given the scarcity of affordable housing, this support was crucial, as refugees often arrived with only the clothes they were wearing. Aid extended beyond immediate necessities, encompassing housing, food, medical care, and clothing, with a focus on facilitating integration into Swiss society.

Narrators consistently praised Switzerland's migration policy, highlighting the solidarity demonstrated not only by the long-established Czech and Slovak communities, but also by Swiss authorities, who responded promptly to the events of 21 August. The combination of social and humanitarian aid ensured a smooth integration process for refugees.

Motivations for the Selection of Cantons and Cities

Migrants who decided to settle in Switzerland without prior connections or relatives had little knowledge of specific cantons or cities. Their decision-making was directly influenced by state policies and institutions striving to integrate migrants swiftly, regardless of their asylum status or whether they were within the three-month window for application. The choice of destination often depended on factors such as the presence of relatives, employment opportunities, or locations offering language courses for Czechoslovak students.

By 31 December 1968, the most popular cantons for Czech and Slovak refugees included Zurich (2,236), Bern (1,119), St. Gallen (615), Vaud (538), Basel-Stadt (537), Aargau (520), and Solothurn (313). Other cantons, such as Geneva (308), Basel-Landschaft (300), Lucerne (261), and Thurgau (194) also received significant numbers. In contrast, only 32 individuals settled in the Italian-speaking canton of Ticino[23]. The majority of migrants chose German-speaking cantons such as Zurich and Bern.

The Federal Council sought to distribute migrants evenly to prevent the formation of ghettos. For those without relatives or acquaintances in Switzerland, authorities proposed cantons where they were subsequently relocated from border crossings. Responsibility for their welfare was then transferred to the respective municipality. It is important to note that several thousand Czechoslovak migrants were not included in official statistics, as they had not yet applied for asylum.

This decentralised approach underscores Switzerland's commitment to manage migration efficiently and ensure refugees could integrate into society without overburdening specific regions.

Employment as a Key Pull Factor in the Selection of Cities

Employment opportunities emerged as the most significant pull factor influencing the choice of specific cities among Czechoslovak migrants. This trend is closely linked to Switzerland's economic growth during the study period. In the 1960s, Switzerland experienced a period of economic prosperity, with the state aiming to minimise unemployment. Migrants from Czechoslovakia were predominantly of working age and highly educated. The largest demographic group among these migrants consisted of young individuals aged 21–30 years (45.6%), with another 30% being under 40 years (Kosová, 2000). An impressive 43% of these exiles held university degrees, primarily from medical and philosophical faculties, while an additional 49.3% had completed secondary education (Kosová, 2000).

This high level of education and employability facilitated the Swiss government's efforts to integrate migrants into the labour market swiftly. A decree issued on 23 August 1968 mandated the immediate employment of Czechoslovaks regardless of their asylum status. Those who did not apply for asylum were granted provisional work permits. Switzerland's prior positive experience with Hungarian refugees in 1956 had already shaped its migration and integration policies, ensuring that migrants could be employed as quickly and efficiently as possible[22].

By 1968, refugees were granted the same rights on the labour market as Swiss citizens, and work permits were typically issued immediately upon their arrival. Notably, these migrants were not officially counted among the foreign workforce, highlighting the Swiss government's efforts to treat them as an integral part of society.

As one narrator recalled: *"What mattered most was that our whole family—apart from my brother, who went to school - had work permits within a week, and all three of us were able to start working (Jozef, Curych)."*

Employment placements were managed by cantonal social offices, and migrants were generally allowed to choose jobs that matched their qualifications and prior experience. Consequently, the cities where the interviewees resided during the interviews often corresponded to the locations where they had secured their first jobs.

Switzerland's employment policies not only ensured the economic integration of Czechoslovak migrants, but also facilitated their swift adaptation to Swiss society, further reinforcing the country's reputation as a welcoming destination during the Prague Spring refugee crisis.

Education

Czechoslovak emigrants made a significant contribution to the development of education in Switzerland through both their involvement in the academic environment and their successful integration into the Swiss educational system. The age structure of these migrants, with nearly half being under the age of 30, predisposed many to continue their studies and further their education.

One of the key challenges they faced was the lack of recognition of Czechoslovak secondary school certificates (maturita) in Switzerland. Consequently, emigrants were required to complete secondary education in accordance with Swiss standards. Preparatory courses were established to address this gap, focusing on cantonal dialects, Swiss history, and specificities of the local education system. Upon successful completion of these courses, they were eligible to advance to higher levels of education.

Many of these migrants had been excluded from university studies in Czechoslovakia due to negative political assessments by the Communist Party (kádrové posudky). In Switzerland, however, they were afforded new opportunities, as documented in government records: *"A significant group consists of students from Czechoslovakia, whose number reaches 335. These students are emigrants who left their homeland due to domestic political unrest. Under peaceful domestic conditions, only very few of them could have received education at Swiss universities"*[24].

The highest concentration of Czechoslovak students was found at universities in Zurich and Geneva, where they predominantly studied medicine and technical disciplines. These institutions not only provided them with a foundation for academic growth but also created an environment that facilitated their integration into Swiss academic society.

The dispersal of migrants across Swiss territory, a policy aimed at preventing the formation of isolated communities, serves as a quintessential example of government efforts to disperse

immigrants for more effective integration into mainstream society. While this approach may promote cultural exchange and reduce tensions between communities, some scholars highlight its potential drawbacks. For instance, Koopmans[25] argues that such policies often disregard the critical role of community cohesion, which can be vital for migrants navigating the adaptation process. Conversely, in the case of Czechoslovak emigrants, this dispersal arguably contributed to successful integration due to their individual educational backgrounds and professional ambitions, which frequently transcended ethnic community boundaries.

4. Discussion and Conclusion

Migration is a dynamic process shaped not only by structural push and pull factors but also by uncertainty, random events, and institutional interventions. Traditional migration theories often conceptualise decision-making as a direct response to adverse conditions in the country of origin or the attractive prospects of a destination country. However, our analysis reveals that this model oversimplifies the complexity of migration experiences, particularly in the context of political migration. The findings underscore the critical role of the transitional phase – *the inter-factor zone* – characterised by uncertainty and openness to external stimuli. This phase represents a pivotal moment where seemingly minor factors, such as a letter from relatives, transportation opportunities, or interactions with volunteers, can significantly influence the trajectory of migration.

Key findings include that push factors, such as the invasion of Czechoslovakia by the Warsaw Pact forces in 1968, provided a decisive impetus for emigration. This conclusion aligns with the expected correlation between major political events and migration decisions but also highlights that push factors served primarily as initiators of the emigration process. Without this dramatic event, many narrators would not have undertaken such a significant step. Narrators cited fear of repression, uncertainty about the future, and the opportunity to leave due to weakened border controls immediately following the invasion.

However, migration processes cannot be reduced to direct responses to structural factors. Once migrants crossed the border, their initial decisions were often reshaped by new circumstances. In transit countries, such as Austria, many found their original convictions shaken. This was not only due to fear of failure abroad or responsibilities toward relatives left behind but also because of disorientation and uncertainty about the future course. Many narrators reported that they suddenly

questioned whether their decision had been the right one, plunging them into a state we term the *inter-factor zone* .

The inter-factor zone represents a transitional phase in which push factors lose their immediate influence, while the pull factors of the destination country have yet to develop. This phase of uncertainty was marked by heightened sensitivity to external stimuli. Migrants responded to random events such as changes in transit conditions, interactions with volunteers, or logistical opportunities. For example, one narrator decided to proceed to Switzerland after a chance encounter with a volunteer who informed them about a three-month window for asylum applications: *"In the end, I heard that Switzerland was accepting Czechoslovak refugees and offering them the opportunity to stay for three months, during which they could decide whether they wanted to remain in Switzerland or not. So I thought to myself, 'This is a good opportunity (Miroslav, Fribourg)."*

Humanitarian organisations, such as the Red Cross, and institutional support in transit countries played a crucial role. These organisations provided not only material assistance but also information and emotional support, significantly shaping migrants' decision-making processes. Institutions in Switzerland, such as cantonal authorities, further facilitated rapid integration by securing housing, employment, and access to education.

This analysis demonstrates that migration is not a linear process but a complex interaction of structural factors, chance, and institutional support. The traditional push-and-pull factor model fails to capture the intricacy of migration trajectories, particularly in cases of political migration. Our study expands the traditional push and pull factor theory[10] by introducing the concept of the inter-factor zone, which highlights the role of uncertainty and random events in migration processes. This concept aligns well with the migration network theory developed by Massey et al.[26], which emphasizes the role of social ties and information flows in shaping migration decisions. The inter-factor zone can be understood as a phase in which migration networks are particularly important, as migrants are exposed to new information and opportunities that may alter their trajectories[27]. Furthermore, our concept could be linked to the migration trajectory theory developed by Collyer and King[28], which underscores the dynamic and non-linear nature of migration processes. The inter-factor zone could thus be seen as a key moment in these trajectories when migrants are most influenced by external factors[29].

The concept of the inter-factor zone offers a new perspective on the complexity of migration processes and may inform the development of more effective policy tools aimed at supporting migrants during transitional phases. Future research could explore the application of the inter-factor zone concept to other migration flows and examine its relevance in diverse geographical and political contexts, with a particular focus on institutional support and its impact on long-term integration processes.

Although our research is based on the historical case of Czechoslovak migration to Switzerland after 1968, we believe that the concept of the inter-factor zone could also be relevant to other migration contexts. For instance, in contemporary migration waves caused by wars in the Middle East, the inter-factor zone could be crucial for understanding refugees' decision-making processes in transit countries, such as Turkey and Greece. Future research could test this concept in various geographical and political contexts to assess its universality.

Switzerland has emerged as a country that combined effective migration policy with targeted support for migrant integration. The significant role of humanitarian organisations and social networks was pivotal in shaping migrants' decisions during the inter-factor zone. For instance, cantonal authorities implemented systems that facilitated migrants' access to education, employment, and social services. Organisations such as the Red Cross provided not only immediate material aid, but also crucial information, reducing migrants' uncertainty. This approach demonstrates that effective management of migration flows requires a combination of swift humanitarian support, targeted information campaigns, and long-term integration programmes.

Contemporary debates on managing migration flows and supporting refugees can draw inspiration from the Swiss model of the time, particularly in strengthening the role of transit countries. These countries could establish similar information and support networks to help migrants navigate uncertainty, while simultaneously fostering trust in the institutions of the destination country. Modern migration policies must also acknowledge that migrants are most vulnerable during transitional phases, where they are exposed to random events and a lack of information. Enhancing institutional cooperation between transit and destination countries could significantly reduce uncertainty and accelerate integration processes.

Moreover, successful integration is not merely a matter of immediate material assistance but also involves social measures, such as the engagement of local communities. In Switzerland, migrants' social networks played a crucial role, suggesting the potential for collaboration with local

organisations in other countries. This approach provides concrete guidance for contemporary policies, from supporting humanitarian networks in transit zones to implementing effective integration tools focused on social cohesion in destination countries.

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