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The Securitization Cycle: Vietnamese Migration in The Czech Republic

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ABSTRACT

This article examines how securitized governmentality shapes Czech migration policy, particularly for Vietnamese migrants. Grounded in a humanizing approach and drawing upon the Paris School securitization theory and governmentality, this research explores how security-driven logics become embedded in institutional practices, shaping migration governance and restricting legal pathways. Through interviews with migration professionals from the Czech Ministry of the Interior, municipalities, integration centres, and NGOs, this study reveals contrasting institutional perspectives. The Ministry of the Interior frames Vietnamese migration as a security risk, linking it to illicit brokerage networks and justifying restrictive policies. Treating integration as secondary, it prioritizes control measures; NGOs and local actors highlight how exclusionary policies push migrants toward informal community structures for support. This dynamic creates a self-reinforcing cycle of securitization, rooted in the interaction between securitized institutional logics and community dynamics. This study demonstrates how these interactions shape migration governance, reinforce exclusion, and deepen migrant vulnerability.

1 | Introduction

Migration governance in the European Union (EU) has been increasingly shaped by the securitization of mobility and the imposition of restrictive controls, framing migrants as security risks (Huysmans 2006). This emphasis on national security and border control prioritizes surveillance over social cohesion and integration (d'Appollonia 2015; Huysmans 2000). Such tensions can be found in Czech Republic, where migration policies have tightened since the mid-2010s. This has been driven by the 2008 economic crisis, which institutionalized exclusionary approaches to migration (Stojarová 2018), as well as by the 2015 European migration crisis, which fuelled moral panic and securitized public discourse (Bureš and Stojanov 2022).

Within this securitized governance context, the Vietnamese community in Czech Republic offers a compelling case study of the paradoxes within securitized migration governance. As the largest non-European immigrant group, the Vietnamese enjoy

favourable public perceptions, with 71% of Czechs reporting feeling comfortable having Vietnamese neighbours (STEM 2023). This positive image stems from historical ties to the socialist era, when Vietnamese migrants were largely viewed as industrious workers (Alamgir 2017). At the same time, like Vietnamese diasporas in other destination countries such as Germany, the UK, and the United States, the community in Czech Republic is characterised by strong transnational ties, dense co-ethnic networks, and intra-community support systems (see Nguyen Quoc et al. 2023; Bankston III and Zhou 2021; Martínková 2008).

While these networks foster resilience and economic participation, they may also contribute to forms of social closure, internal stratification along lines of migration cohort, class or social capital (Barber 2018; Su 2017; Kušniráková et al. 2013) and access to private, hierarchized brokerage (Le 2022). In the case of Czech Republic, existing research further suggests that social closure and private brokerage systems, features specific to the Vietnamese community, are not merely cultural but also shaped

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by structural constraints (Drbohlav and Dzurova 2007), limited institutional access, and the design of the Czech migration and integration policy framework (Pham 2022; Kušniráková 2014; Martínková 2011). Despite favourable public perceptions, the restrictive orientation of Czech institutional actors extends to the Vietnamese community, emphasizing risks of organized crime and semi-legal brokerage practices (Nožina and Kraus 2020) and leading to targeted restrictions such as labour visa quotas. This dynamic unfolds across institutional fields: while security-oriented actors prioritize control, Czech NGOs and integration professionals have repeatedly criticized securitized approaches and highlighted persistent tensions between migration control and integration objectives (Kušniráková and Čížinský 2011; Kušniráková 2014). Despite extensive scholarship on migration securitization (Balzacq et al. 2016; Bigo 2002; Huysmans 2006; Lazaridis and Wadia 2015) and a rich body of research on Czech migration governance and the Vietnamese community in Czech Republic (Kušniráková and Čížinský 2011; Kušniráková 2014; Pham 2022), two interrelated gaps remain.

First, while securitization studies have convincingly demonstrated how security logics shape migration policy and public discourse, far less attention has been paid to how securitized governmentality influences the internal social dynamics of migrant communities (d'Appollonia 2015; Lazaridis and Wadia 2015). In the Czech case, Vietnamese social closure, internal hierarchies, and reliance on co-ethnic networks have been well documented, yet these dynamics are typically analysed separately from institutional practices, while only mentioning the influence of restrictive state policies (Kušniráková 2014; Martínková 2011; Pham 2022). What remains underexplored is how such community structures are produced, interpreted, and reinforced through everyday governance—often by actors tasked with balancing security and integration objectives.

Second, only two studies have directly investigated Czech experts' securitized views on their own practices: Bureš and Stojanov (2022) on the nature of securitization among Czech experts following the 2015 migration crisis, and Stojanov et al. (2024) on the (in)coherence between Czech migration and development policies. However, the routine practices through which institutional actors operationalize security concerns—and the ways these practices shape migrant vulnerability and reliance on community-based coping strategies—remain insufficiently studied. As a result, the link between securitized governance and processes of social closure within migrant communities is often treated as implicit.

This article addresses these gaps by shifting the analytical focus from political securitization in public discourse, previously examined in the Czech context in relation to the European migration crisis (Krčál and Naxera 2018; Krotký 2019; Stojarová 2018), to the everyday governance practices of institutional actors responsible for managing migration and integration. Drawing upon Didier Bigo's (2002) concept of the 'management of unease' and Michel Foucault's (2004) notion of governmentality, this study explores how security rationales become embedded in institutional practices, bureaucratic routines, and professional knowledge production, influencing how migration professionals categorize and manage Vietnamese migrants. We argue that securitization is not a monolithic process, but differs according

to institutional mandates, professional logics and resource allocation.

The article shows how securitized governmentality varies across institutional contexts, and how these variations interact with community dynamics. In the Czech case, securitized governance simultaneously constructs Vietnamese migrants as a potential risk while indirectly reinforcing the very forms of social closure and self-organization that emerge as adaptive responses to restrictive and fragmented policies. By doing so, the article demonstrates that social closure should be understood not only as a migrant strategy, but also as an unintended outcome of securitized governance.

In this context, this article asks: How does securitized governmentality influence migration professionals' practices and the construction of Vietnamese migration in Czech Republic?

To address this question, this study draws on expert interviews with migration professionals from various sectors, including the Ministry of the Interior (MOI), municipalities, integration centres (ICs), and non-governmental organisations (NGOs). Rather than aiming for representativeness, the analysis adopts a 'humanising' and interpretive perspective (Fresnoza-Flot 2024), focusing on how institutional actors themselves make sense of migration, risk, and integration in their daily work. This approach allows us to trace how securitization is enacted, negotiated, and sometimes contested in practice, and how these interpretations intersect with migrants' reliance on community networks as strategies for navigating structural constraints.

1.1 | Theoretical Background: Securitization and Governmentality in Migration Policy

Recent literature has argued that securitization is embedded in institutions through routine practices (Balzacq et al. 2016; Huysmans 2023). Drawing on Foucault's (2004) concept of governmentality, this article employs the lens of securitized governmentality, highlighting how security concerns become embedded in governance and shape population management (Balzacq et al. 2016). While the Paris School highlights the role of administrative mechanisms in embedding security logics, securitized governmentality extends this analysis by examining how these logics become institutionalized across different levels of governance and various actors beyond the state (Balzacq 2011; Bigo 2007). Additionally, the Paris School considers discursive practices, meaning how security threats are constructed, and non-discursive practices, such as bureaucratic procedures that put these ideas into action (Balzacq et al. 2016). Together, these elements create a regime of security, where migration control is shaped by state policies, expert knowledge, professional routines, and regulatory practices that reinforce security-driven approaches (ibid.). This perspective challenges the view of securitization as a crisis response, showing how it becomes an embedded and routine feature of governance (Innes 2024).

According to Balzacq et al. (2016), securitized governmentality operates through several mechanisms. First, how security risks are perceived and made visible shapes how migrants are categorized. Second, expert assessments from social and

behavioural sciences influence risk categorizations and decision making. Third, specific methods are used to implement security policies, reinforce security-driven narratives, and shape institutional responses. Finally, the distinctive ways in which subjects are formed contribute to the construction of migrant identities. These mechanisms shape both migration policy and the approach of migration professionals, ultimately affecting the everyday experiences and the integration of migrants (Balzacq et al. 2016; Banai and Kreide 2017; Innes 2024; Scheel 2022).

Within the securitized framework, even well-perceived and long-established migrant groups, including the Vietnamese community in Czech Republic, are labelled as 'risky' (Nožina and Kraus 2020). This suspicion shapes not only policy design but also the everyday practices of migration professionals, influencing how migrants are monitored, managed, and integrated. Beyond regulation, these practices shape the perceptions and treatment of migrants, painting Vietnamese migrants as both subjects of control and security risks. This raises key challenges for migrant integration, particularly in relation to insecurity, exclusion, and institutional fragmentation:

First, securitization fosters suspicion and insecurity. Migrants face constant monitoring and ambiguous risk assessments, creating uncertainty around their legal status and rights. As such, security measures paradoxically generate insecurity rather than reducing it (Scheel 2022).

Second, prioritizing security over integration limits opportunities for social, humanitarian, and economic inclusion (d'Appollonia 2015; Huysmans 2006). Framing migration as a security risk shifts focus to containment and surveillance over social cohesion. As Huysmans (2000, p.765) argued, even integration policies can sometimes position migrants as outsiders who must conform to dominant cultural norms, reinforcing the idea that their presence disrupts an otherwise homogeneous society (Çilingir 2020). Building on these critiques, we recognize that 'integration' itself remains a contested concept, criticized as a normative and state-centred framework that reproduces national boundaries and negative views of migrants (Schinkel 2018; Dahinden 2016; Anthias 2013). Rather than approaching integration as a neutral or measurable condition of migrant incorporation, we understand integration as an institutional practice (Schinkel 2018; Dahinden 2016). In Czech Republic, integration is placed under migration management within the MOI, which gives it a centralized and security-oriented framing at the national level. At the same time, responsibility for integration support is delegated to municipalities, ICs and NGOs, making the field more varied in practice. This shows that integration practices are shaped both by anchoring integration in security governance and by the way it is implemented in different local settings.

Third, fragmented migration governance leads to inconsistent policies. Security measures frequently outweigh integration, with responsibilities split among national governments, international organizations, NGOs, and private actors, each operating with distinct mandates yet limited coordination (Balzacq 2011; Bigo 2002; Scheel 2022). This disjointed approach hinders meaningful integration (Bigo 2007; Scheel 2022).

Engaging with securitization aids in understanding how migration governance positions particular groups as security threats and reveals tensions between security-driven policies and integration. In Czech Republic, this process extends beyond emergency measures, becoming embedded in bureaucratic routines, professional discourse, and institutional decision making, fostering a culture of suspicion and stricter controls (Nožina and Kraus 2020; Scheel 2022). This governance approach leads to institutional fragmentation, in which security-focused and integration-oriented actors work with varying purposes, producing contradictory policies and administrative barriers (Balzacq 2011; Bigo 2002).

This article contributes to debates on securitization, de-securitization, and migrant integration by examining how security logics become embedded in everyday institutional practices. Focusing on migration professionals as both implementers and interpreters of security policies, this study highlights securitization as a dispersed process shaped by bureaucratic routines, expert knowledge, and regulatory mechanisms (Balzacq et al. 2016). Moreover, we engage with the securitization-insecurity paradox, demonstrating how restrictive policies aimed at enhancing security can instead generate insecurity, fuelling uncertainty, reliance on informal networks, and structural barriers to integration (Scheel 2022).

2 | Methodology

This article is grounded in the 'humanizing' framework of an AspirE project that examines the decision making of aspiring (re)migrants in 11 Asian and European countries. To explore the influences of securitized governmentality, we conducted ten semi-structured interviews during the second half of 2023. We selected experts from different sectors; this differential positionality proved essential for our findings. We spoke with two IC representatives at different levels, three municipal representatives, two policy-makers from the MOI who are responsible for immigration/integration, and three representatives of NGOs at the local, national, and international levels.

These interviews were transcribed and pseudonymized following the ethical guidelines of the AspirE project. Respondents were informed that participation in the research was voluntary and anonymous. Each respondent signed an informed consent form agreeing to their involvement in the research and the processing of their personal data. We employed grounded theory methodology (Strauss and Corbin 1998) to inductively create three key categories: policy and institutional infrastructures, construction of Vietnamese migrants, and dynamics of the Vietnamese community. Each key category encompassed a range of sub-categories, revealing various dimensions of the data. In total, we identified 52 categories, together representing over 1000 individual codes.

Following the coding process, we divided the respondents into four categories based on their position in the institutional structure: the MOI, NGOs, ICs, and municipalities. Using NVivo software, we created a matrix linking these categories to the positionality of the respondents, allowing us to analyse how perspectives and insights varied across different institutional

contexts. This approach provided structure for examining the nuances of how each actor viewed the dynamics of migration and the Vietnamese community. We acknowledge that the small sample size of this study may limit our conclusions as the findings may not be generalized. However, our aim was in accordance with answering our research questions by reconstructing the standpoints of experts and their corresponding institutions. We aimed to understand the institutional perspectives through conducting in-depth interviews and a subsequent detailed analysis. To contextualize the interview material, we also consulted core policy texts (see Novotná and Vybíralová 2024). While not a full document analysis, this triangulation anchors expert narratives in the formal legal-administrative framework.

2.1 | Czech Vietnamese Migration and Czech Migration Policy

The Vietnamese community is one of the most long-established migrant groups in Czech Republic, with migration ties dating back to the Communist era. From the 1950s onwards, the Czech communist government fostered strong bilateral relations with Vietnam, primarily through the import of Vietnamese workers and through study and vocational training exchanges (Alamgir 2017; Martínková 2008). Rather than curtailing this flow, the Velvet Revolution of 1989 triggered further waves of migration (Drbohlav and Janská 2008). As permanent Vietnamese communities began to form, the need for internal support systems emerged. A service infrastructure developed within the community to assist new arrivals with navigating Czech bureaucracy (Martínková 2008). This included help with housing, interpretation in medical settings, and interactions with public authorities. In this study, we conceptualize this internal reliance and limited institutional engagement as a form of ‘social closure’.

Czech migration policy only began to take shape after 1989, as the country lacked a comprehensive migration framework. A more structured regime emerged in the late 1990s with the introduction of the Alien Act (Act No. 326/1999 Coll.), which continues to underpin migration law in Czech Republic today. Following Stojanová (2019), we understand migration policy broadly, as encompassing both immigration and integration. The Alien Act introduced both aspects: stricter visa/residence permit rules as well as rules for permanent settlement as a part of Czech Republic’s EU accession preparations (Drbohlav and Janská 2008). In the early years after EU accession in 2004, economic growth and low unemployment stimulated demand for migrant labour. In the case of the Vietnamese community, this led to a surge in migration facilitated by recruitment agencies—often operating in legally ambiguous ways (Krebs and Pechová 2009).

The global economic crisis of 2008 prompted the Czech government to introduce measures aimed at limiting foreign labour access and safeguarding the domestic labour force. The number of work permits issued to third-country nationals significantly decreased in the following years (Burianová and Votradovcová 2018). Vietnamese migrants were hit particularly hard, as their visa applications were temporarily suspended amid concerns over security and consular corruption—concerns that

reinforced the perception of them as a security threat (Bureš and Stojanov 2022; Nožina and Kraus 2020).

Subsequently, migration policy emerged as a salient political topic and became increasingly securitized. It was relatively easy to settle and integrate into Czech society before 2015; the European migration crisis mainstreamed the securitisation narrative and enabled the tightening of migration controls (Bureš and Stojanov 2022). Vietnamese migrants, already under suspicion, became further scrutinized. In 2017, the VISAPPOINT at the Vietnamese embassy was cancelled following reports of manipulation by migration intermediaries (Nožina and Kraus 2020).

Currently, the Czech migration regime displays a preference for high-skilled migrants from non-risk countries (Stojanov et al. 2022). In 2019, caps on mid-skilled workers were introduced for 27 countries (Czech Government 2019); other countries typically remain eligible for both mid-skilled and high-skilled categories. For Vietnamese nationals, however, the restrictions are significantly tighter: the Czech government capped entries at 200 key scientific workers annually, effectively restricting mid- and low-skilled labour migration from the country (Czech Government 2019). Nevertheless, the Vietnamese community has continued to grow modestly, primarily through family reunification, reaching approximately 68,000 in 2023—making it the largest non-European immigrant community in Czech Republic (for a full overview, see Novotná and Vybíralová 2024).

Several factors underpinned the Czech government’s restrictive approach. First, the 2008 global financial crisis led to the introduction of return programmes and a reduction in labour permits for third-country nationals (Burianová and Votradovcová 2018). Second, the 2015–2016 migration crisis shifted public discourse toward framing migration as a security threat, prompting the centralization of migration matters under the MOI, which oversees both immigration and integration (Bureš and Stojanov 2022). Third, despite targeted efforts to attract high-skilled migrants, the Czech migration system remains plagued by administrative complexity, lack of policy coordination, and limited political will to pursue structural reform (Drbohlav 2003).

2.2 | Institutional Structure of the Czech Migration Regime

The Czech migration regime is centralized under the MOI, which oversees migration control (Ministry of the Interior 2024) and coordinates integration programmes (Czech Government 2016, for overview on Czech integration governance see Dohnalová 2021). The MOI is responsible for legislation, policy development, analysis, and implementation, as well as managing state administration in this area. The MOI issues decisions regarding the entry, stay, and naturalization of foreigners, working closely with other government bodies such as the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs (Ministry of the Interior 2024).

The MOI plays a key role in migration policy; it also oversees the overall coordination of integration. Integration programmes are primarily carried out by regional ICs. In ten regions, the ICs’ founding authority is the Ministry’s Refugee Facilities

Administration; in one region, the ICs are founded by regional authorities, and in three regions by NGOs (Integration Centres 2024).

The ICs are responsible for delivering integration services such as language education, adaptation courses, and legal and social counselling for foreign nationals. Municipalities manage local integration efforts but often rely on NGO partnerships for crucial services such as housing, education, and social support. NGOs act as intermediaries between migrant communities and local authorities, offering grassroots solutions to integration challenges. In the Czech context, NGOs play a particularly central role in integration policy, as a substantial share of the measures outlined in the national integration strategy is implemented through NGO-led projects (Dohnalová 2021).

3 | Results

3.1 | Social Closure, Interdependence and Brokerage: Construction of the Vietnamese Community

Despite varying degrees of securitization in migration discourse, experts agreed on the fundamental dynamics of Vietnamese migration in Czech Republic. Two key themes emerged: social closure and interdependence. Experts across all institutions highlighted the Vietnamese community's limited interaction with formal institutions and the majority population, often describing it as socially "closed". This closure stems from reliance on internal networks for essential services, including legal aid, medical care, and employment support, reducing engagement with majority institutions, state services, and NGOs. This self-sufficiency, specifically among first-generation migrants with limited Czech proficiency, restricts their ability to access public services directly, reinforcing reliance on community-based intermediaries.

One major integration problem with the Vietnamese community, which essentially persists to this day and is very specific to the Vietnamese community, is the community's pronounced (social) closure.

MOI representative 2

There's a problem, simply they (the Vietnamese migrants) are not informed (about available services) (...) they don't access these services because they don't know about them. (...) they might not even be aware that these services exist.

NGO representative 3

By emphasizing the community's 'pronounced (social) closure' and suggesting that their lack of engagement with services stems from unawareness or isolation, respondents construct the Vietnamese community as primarily responsible for their limited integration into broader society. This perspective positions the community as an outlier resistant to integration, implying that the responsibility for this lack of integration lies within the community itself. Similar narratives surfaced

across interviews, with frequent references to the Vietnamese community as a 'problem', reinforcing the notion that integration issues stem from cultural or behavioural traits. The extent to which actors considered external barriers or systemic factors varied and closely tied to their institutional roles. Notably, in the case of the MOI, respondents rarely examined how external influences or structural barriers might shape the dynamics of social closure.

The reliance on intermediaries, though serving as a form of community resilience, was also described as reinforcing social closure and stunting integration. This interdependence was described as operating through dense, close-knit social networks in which 'everyone knows each other' (IC representative 2). A key mechanism within this interdependence was brokerage, with established community figures, often long-term residents or influential leaders who arrived during or before the 1990s and possessed solid proficiency in Czech, acting as intermediaries for newcomers.

Brokerage, as described by experts, takes on two key forms: smaller, family-based brokerage networks and larger, commercially driven, profit-oriented brokerage systems. These operate at two levels: locally, mediating between the Vietnamese community and the majority population, and trans-locally, linking Vietnam and Czech Republic. Locally, brokers leverage social capital to assist long-term residents and aid newcomers in navigating bureaucracy, such as securing residence permits and employment. However, the interviews also revealed how brokerage may create structural dependency by controlling access to essential services and information, perpetuating a cycle of social closure. This was particularly evident in migration facilitation, with brokers sometimes operating in legally ambiguous ways. This highlights the transnational impact of the brokerage system, as it operates across borders and can involve complex, oftentimes questionable practices.

Today, there are things like (...) fake marriages to allow people to enter the country. It's often under the pretext of family reunification, but there's also payment involved for the intermediary, who arranges some documents for a company, showing that they work there. It's really no longer so simple, and now various other evasive methods are being devised to get here.

IC representative 2

Experts further identified how social closure and brokerage influence Vietnamese migration patterns under restrictive, securitized policies, particularly chain migration. Migration to Czech Republic was often described as contingent on pre-existing social ties, with a reliance on the diaspora for logistical and financial support. Business networks, familial relationships, and longstanding social connections were seen as key drivers of this migration pattern. This interconnectedness was framed not only as a coping mechanism for navigating restrictive migration policies but also as a structural feature of Vietnamese migration flows. The reliance on internal networks facilitates the movement of new migrants and perpetuates dependency on

brokerage systems, concentrated within the community's social hierarchies.

3.2 | Diverging Perceptions: Cultural Difference or Threat?

Institutional actors agreed on Vietnamese migration dynamics but interpreted them differently, reflecting varying levels of securitization. A contrast emerged between the securitized perspective of MOI representatives and the more humanizing approach adopted by NGOs. Municipalities and ICs adopted a mixed approach, addressing security concerns and integration challenges, emphasizing different aspects of the community's structure with diverging policy implications.

MOI representatives highlighted security challenges at the national level, interpreting the Vietnamese community's reliance on intermediaries and the brokerage system as key indicators of broader threats. This system, as described by the MOI, functions as a hierarchical structure controlled by elites, wielding both legal and illicit resources, posing a threat to state security. In their view, these power networks have significant overlaps with organized crime and are deeply embedded within the community. MOI officials depicted the community as a parallel state, governed by its own rules and institutions, with power concentrated in the hands of those who control the community brokerage.

The Vietnamese community is quite tied to its internal system, and that system is highly hierarchical and closely connected to illegal activities. (...) So, Vietnamese migration is happening, but I think every state has the legitimate right to decide on the structure, volume, and origin of the labour migration it allows. And currently, the Czech state has set it up so that, due to certain reasons and risks, Vietnam is not included.

MOI representative 1

From this securitized perspective, community leaders and brokers are seen as figures with the resources and influence necessary to bypass strict migration laws, using illicit means to facilitate the entry of Vietnamese nationals into Czech Republic. This added another layer of criminality to the issue, with the MOI suggesting that the networks controlling the community dynamics were also involved in smuggling operations, fraud, and other illegal activities. While MOI representatives acknowledged that such systems might facilitate entry, they noted that these semi-legal arrangements reinforced the community's dependency on opaque power structures, heightening vulnerability to exploitation.

Unfortunately, it wasn't possible to ensure the decent treatment of Vietnamese workers brought here for employment. In the best case, they end up with huge debts and become entirely dependent on the organized crime system. In the worst case,

they're locked in a house somewhere, growing marijuana.

MOI representative 2

In contrast, NGO representatives emphasized structural barriers such as language difficulties, cultural differences, and a lack of trust in formal institutions as central to the social closure of the Vietnamese community. They highlighted how these barriers hinder access to public services, fostering isolation and reliance on internal networks. Thus, their interpretation of 'security' and 'risks' is more focused on the vulnerable position of Vietnamese migrants. A recurring concern for NGOs was the community's dependence on brokers, both for mediating contact with formal institutions and for facilitating migration processes. While acknowledging that these intermediaries can assist new migrants in navigating complex bureaucratic systems, NGOs highlighted the risks of over-reliance on informal actors, emphasizing how it can leave vulnerable community members susceptible to exploitation and misinformation:

They often have to go through someone, like an agency, or get help because it's too hard to do it on their own. And that's where the risk arises, they could fall into the hands of unethical companies and become even more vulnerable than they already are.

NGO representative 3

NGO representatives were critical of the role of the state in supporting the illegal practices of (prospective) Vietnamese migrants. They described inadequate legal pathways forcing migrants to rely on intermediaries, creating a cycle of dependency on the informal networks. This system traps migrants in exploitative structures, in both Vietnam and Czech Republic, from which escape is nearly impossible.

The biggest issue remains visa policies and quotas for Vietnam. If there are no quotas, they will find ways to come here anyway (...) Someone had to pay just to access the embassy, becoming tied to a structure from the start. Although the Czech Republic claims such practices don't exist and implemented a Czech Point reservation system requiring personal details like name and birthdate, the process is still bypassed. People must pay intermediaries to reach the embassy, and those intermediaries maintain control, passing the migrants on to local structures in the Czech Republic. Breaking free from these systems becomes nearly impossible once entangled.

NGO representative 2

Municipality and IC representatives recognized hierarchy and informal brokerage while emphasizing integration over security. They noted how key brokers controlled access to internal resources and formal institutions. Similar to the MOI representatives, they described existing parallel structures within the Vietnamese community that operated like informal institutions.

He (informal community leader) essentially monopolizes communication with the outside world. That's what we're talking about. The Vietnamese in the community (...) take it even further. They unofficially have their own courts, where disputes are resolved behind closed doors with a kind of unofficial Vietnamese judge.

Municipal representative 1

Municipal and IC actors also acknowledged the existence of parallel service systems in which community-run institutions, such as Vietnamese doctors and legal advisors, limit the need for external engagement with state services. These actors framed the dynamics of parallel service systems as adaptations to structural barriers rather than inherent threats, although they were also seen as a barrier to effective integration. The representatives also noted how certain brokers and community leaders, particularly those controlling migration channels, could perpetuate dependency relationships by dominating access to resources and opportunities, mirroring some of the MOI representatives' concerns but without an overt securitization narrative.

There's quite a strong sense of business dominance in the community. The successful entrepreneurs who have a lot of money are like informal leaders. They control who gets to run a business and where information is exchanged.

Municipal representative 2

The MOI and NGO representatives offered contrasting perspectives on risk, security, and vulnerability within the Vietnamese migrant community, shaped by their institutional roles and priorities. These diverging views highlight how institutional positioning influences not only how the Vietnamese community is perceived, but further, how policy issues are defined and addressed. The MOI representatives adopted a securitized perspective, viewing reliance on brokerage systems as a risk linked to organized crime and irregular migration, reinforcing narratives that essentialize ethnic group characteristics to justify restrictive policies. Conversely, the NGO representatives perceived the risk as structural, stemming from systemic gaps that perpetuate social closure and increase vulnerability. Their focus on direct service provision emphasized how systemic shortcomings isolate migrants and hinder their ability to access equitable opportunities. By addressing these structural barriers, NGOs aim to reduce vulnerability and facilitate integration, sharply contrasting with securitized approaches that attribute risk to the inherent characteristics of specific ethnic groups. The municipality and IC representatives recognized both the integrative challenges posed by social closure and the risks of internal hierarchies, though without the MOI representatives' heightened focus on criminality.

3.3 | Securing Borders, Neglecting Integration

While all actors agreed on the Vietnamese community's social closure, they differed in their interpretation of social problems and their according policy solutions. Their views fragmented

across two seemingly irreconcilable principles: security and integration. These two principles were not equally represented across the Czech institutional framework; rather, they were entrenched in their distinct (and disconnected) layers to varying degrees.

The MOI, responsible for migration management, was dominated by securitization, shaping its core mandates and priorities. The MOI experts described the Czech migration regime as strict and security focused, regulating who enters and resides in the country. Securitization was perceived as essential for state stability and security, as evident in the MOI's emphasis on security vetting, which involves clearance from Czech Intelligence Services (BIS) before residency is granted:

From a security perspective, it's probably not entirely wrong that every single foreigner (...) absolutely every foreigner who wants to come here is checked by BIS.

MOI representative 1

There was a notable absence of integration concerns in this discourse, despite the MOI's responsibility for coordinating integration policy and practice. Among the representatives, only one respondent explicitly referenced integration in highlighting concerns about the insufficient investment in integration infrastructure:

What I consider the biggest shortcoming of what we do is that not enough emphasis is placed on integration. And I don't mean integration as in dances or multicultural festivals, if I generalize a bit. I mean funding for real infrastructure. (...) If there isn't enough infrastructure built, it can lead to unnecessary problems in the future.

MOI representative 2

Integration was relegated to field levels, ICs and municipalities, which engaged directly with communities. While these actors justified the securitized nature of the Czech migration regime and acknowledge security concerns over migration, they also criticized how securitization had become embedded in policy design and decision making at the national level. The dominance of securitization within the institutional logic of the MOI was reflected by two key themes: the disconnection between the aims of migration governance and migration policy, and the absence of guidance and coordination from the MOI.

According to the IC and municipal representatives, migration policy undermines integration by imposing excessive administrative requirements and procedures. Excessive bureaucracy and the complexity of the Czech regime place significant demands on migrants in their integration efforts and on the capacities of local authorities to effectively administer integration policies.

I don't really understand (...) how the local regional OAMP (Department for Asylum and Migration

Policy) departments are managed, but we all know that it's a disadvantage for foreigners and it is bureaucratic harassment.

Municipal representative 2

NGO representatives also described the Czech migration regime as overly restrictive and counterproductive. They argued that the regime prioritizes control over facilitating regularized migration pathways, creating a disconnect between migration policy objectives and labour market demands. Restrictive entry policies and complex bureaucratic processes hinder legal migration, which is particularly troubling given the country's growing reliance on migrant labour.

I think the Czech migration policy is built in such a way that they don't really want any kind of uncontrolled state migration. It's about not letting people into the country.

NGO representative 1

From the perspectives of the representatives of NGOs, ICs, and municipalities, this securitized institutional logic leads to the sidelining of other key migration objectives. The MOI prioritizes safeguarding against potential risks over goals such as the development of regularized migration pathways and integration. For Vietnamese migrants, the stringent administrative requirements increase their dependence on brokerage networks, leaving them more vulnerable to exploitation within Czech Republic, remaining undetected within the closed Vietnamese community and increasing the influence of brokerage structures.

ICs and municipal representatives described national integration strategies as weak and ineffective. Municipal actors and NGOs emphasized the importance of multilevel cooperation, yet criticized the limited coordination between national, regional, and municipal levels. Further, experts highlighted how fragmented governance and poor communication between institutions create administrative bottlenecks that obstruct legal migration pathways. Municipal actors pointed to insufficient guidance and inadequate resource allocation from the MOI in the case of integration. The securitized institutional framework leaves local actors to bridge the gaps in integration policy with limited resources and support.

In terms of integration (...) That's a weak tool. The law doesn't actually oblige anyone to integrate. (...) there has always been little money for it. (...) the Ministry of the Interior gives you money only if (...) (you) don't speak out against how the integration or migration policy is set up.

Municipal representative 2

Our findings reveal divergent perspectives among Czech migration actors regarding the Vietnamese community, shaped by their institutional roles within the migration regime. While all the actors recognized characteristics such as social closure and reliance on brokerage networks, they differed in how they interpreted and responded to these dynamics. The Ministry of the Interior (MOI), as the central migration authority, framed

the community primarily through a security lens—linking it to organized crime and illicit networks—which legitimized restrictive policies and portrayed social closure as an inherent trait requiring control rather than inclusion. In contrast, NGOs and municipalities stressed the structural roots of social closure, including language barriers and limited access to formal support. They argued that securitized national policies exacerbated migrant vulnerability by reinforcing dependence on informal community networks. This fragmentation revealed a broader governance divide between integration and securitization-oriented approaches.

4 | Discussion

According to the Paris School perspective, securitization narratives frame issues as risks and consolidate control over budgets and decision making (Balzacq 2011; Bigo 2002). In the Czech context, the MOI's dominance as the key coordinating actor steers migration governance toward securitized objectives, sidelining integration as the priority. The institutional structure is based on an asymmetrical distribution of resources, with integration relegated to localized actors lacking sufficient national coordination, support or guidance. The resulting governance landscape is fragmented, with integration shifted to the margins of migration policy. The prevalence of securitization over integration in the Czech migration governance aligns with scholarly perspectives that critique how securitization suppresses humanitarian views of migration (Bigo 2002; Scheel 2022) and exacerbates tensions between integration and security (Çilingir 2020; d'Appollonia 2015).

For the Vietnamese community in Czech Republic, these tensions are not merely institutional but discursive, shaping how experts interpret phenomena related to the group. From a securitized perspective, attention is directed mainly to the outcomes of social closure—such as the emergence of informal power networks, brokerage systems, and semi-legal/illegal practices—while its structural causes remain overlooked. This framing foregrounds risks and internal power structures while neglecting the vulnerabilities of individual migrants, particularly those with precarious legal status, inadequate language skills and limited other resources. These issues are more frequently highlighted by NGOs and local organizations working directly with migrants, who stress the absence of legal pathways for Vietnamese nationals and the Czech system's limited commitment to integration support.

The results of this blind spot—focusing on the outcomes of social closure rather than its causes—are policy fragmentation and, in interaction with specific community dynamics, a self-reinforcing cycle (see Figure 1). On the state side, the predominance of security logics and the absence of robust, coordinated integration infrastructures tend to normalize exclusionary practices. Securitization tends to produce restrictive migration policies aimed at controlling individual migrants. Yet in communities that rely on co-ethnic support, possess limited cultural capital, and distrust formal institutions, these policies contribute to the emergence of informal brokerage systems and internal hierarchies. Migrants with fewer resources come to depend on these internal structures, which substitute for state support.

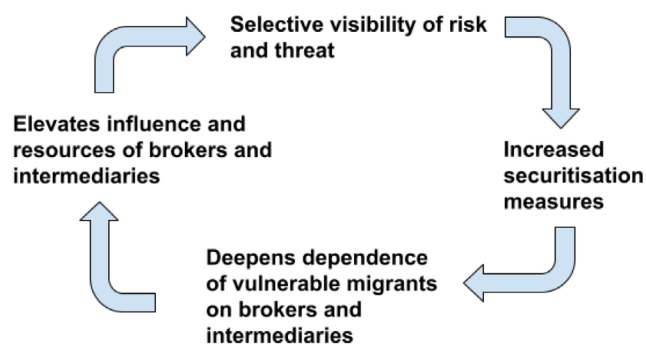


FIGURE 1 | Self-reinforcing nature of securitization.

From the perspective of institutional actors, however, the Vietnamese community appears self-reliant and contained. This perception masks migrant vulnerabilities and reduces perceived demand for integration services. Together, these dynamics form a feedback loop: restrictive policies and a lack of investment in integration foster reliance on informal mediation, while the opacity of such arrangements is then interpreted by national actors as risk, legitimizing further restriction. In this way securitization and social closure reproduce one another, empowering informal actors while deepening the marginalization of vulnerable individuals (Czaika and Hobolth 2016; Solano et al. 2022). Securitization contributes to the growth of the very structures it seeks to dismantle—by limiting alternatives and reinforcing dependency on internal infrastructures. Ultimately, the Czech case illustrates how institutionalized securitization shapes migration management and constrains the ability of institutions to respond to the lived realities of migrants.

Importantly, the dynamics are not unique to the Vietnamese community in Czech Republic. European depictions of Vietnamese as self-contained business diasporas recur in other countries, where dense co-ethnic networks and commercial practices have been interpreted through security lenses. In the United Kingdom, securitizing discourses of ‘modern slavery’ combined with restrictive migration policies have pushed Vietnamese migrants toward co-ethnic brokerage and precarious labour niches. These responses are then reinterpreted as evidence of risk, legitimizing further control (see Barber et al. 2023). Similar cycles of exclusion and informal governance have been observed in other national contexts, such as among Chinese migrants in Italy, where strong community networks and transnational brokerage are framed as criminality and ‘parallel societies’ (Ceccagno 2017). In the UK, Somali communities have been securitized through the surveillance of mosques, charities, and everyday networks under the UK’s Prevent strategy, a counter-terrorism programme that extends security logics into community life (Flynn and Olad 2015; Çilingir 2020).

However, this cycle is not universally applicable; it is the outcome of multiple factors—on the side of the state, its policies and institutional setup, and on the side of communities, their internal dynamics. For instance, since the Russian Ukrainian war, the Czech Republic has hosted over 370,000 refugees (UNHCR 2025). Ukrainians, framed as culturally close and politically deserving, shifted from a semi-legal workforce to a recognized minority (Leontiyeva 2016). Unlike other third-country

nationals, they have largely avoided securitized framings and have benefited from supportive legal and integration pathways (Jelínková et al. 2024).

5 | Conclusion

This study highlights the tensions between securitization and integration in Czech migration governance, demonstrating how security logics shape institutional practices and bureaucratic decision making. By adopting a humanizing framework, we highlight the socio-legal realities of Vietnamese migration within Czech governance. Three key limitations of securitization emerge: it narrows the scope of integration by framing community dynamics primarily as security threats; it creates a self-reinforcing cycle in which restrictive policies heighten migrants’ reliance on informal networks; and it establishes an institutional set-up centralizing resources around security priorities, thereby relegating integration efforts to under-resourced local actors. This study draws attention to securitization as confined to neither political rhetoric nor emergency measures but as embedded in routine administrative processes that shape migration management in the long term. Future research may explore how these dynamics play out in different national contexts where security concerns increasingly dictate migration policy. A deeper understanding of these processes is essential for navigating the tensions between security concerns and social inclusion, addressing the unintended consequences of securitization and creating more adaptable and responsive migration governance.

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Data Availability Statement

The data that support the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

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