



# VIETNAMESE ORGANISED CRIME IN THE CZECH REPUBLIC: IDENTIFICATION OF CURRENT THREATS AND RISK ASSESSMENT

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**ABSTRACT:** *The issue of Vietnamese organised crime represents a current, adaptive, and challenging security threat in the Czech context. Based on a review of scholarly literature and employing analytical–synthetic and descriptive methods, this paper briefly examines the Vietnamese ethnic group within the structures of organised crime in the Czech Republic. It offers a working definition of Vietnamese organised crime and, in its core section, presents the results of an expert investigation. This investigation focused on identifying current security threats posed by Vietnamese organised crime in the Czech Republic and assessing their associated risks. The findings indicate that Vietnamese organised crime is primarily oriented towards economic crime and drug-related offences, with the highest-risk security threats falling within these areas. The paper also emphasises the need for continuous analysis, systematic identification of security threats, and ongoing risk assessment to support the development and implementation of appropriate preventive and repressive measures.*

**KEYWORDS:** *Security threat. Vietnamese. Gangs. Organised crime. Criminal activities.*

## INTRODUCTION

Ensuring the security of citizens and society is one of the fundamental duties of a democratic state governed by the rule of law. The Czech Republic, like other nations, must be adequately prepared to confront current and constantly evolving security threats. One such threat is the notoriously pervasive organised crime. In its contemporary form, organised crime, through its complex network of personal and business connections, often transcends national borders. Coupled with its engagement in illegal activities, it poses a risk to specific values that are inherently meant to be safeguarded against such threats. These values include, for instance, democratic foundations, economic interests, and the rights and legitimate claims of both individuals and legal entities. This issue is also highlighted in the Security Strategy of the Czech Republic (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Czech Republic, 2023), which has long identified organised crime as a priority security threat necessitating continuous preventive measures and effective counteraction. Consequently, organised crime represents not only a societal challenge but also a systemic issue.

The threat posed by serious and organised crime to the European Union (EU) and its member states is also highlighted in Europol's 2025 analytical report (Europol, 2025), which states that this threat is ubiquitous, dangerous, and undergoing significant transformation. Key changes are identified in the fundamental tools, modes of operation, and structures of criminal networks, which are noted for their destructive and destabilising impact on internal security, the economy, and the rule of law. Furthermore, the report emphasises the crucial importance of threat-oriented analysis concerning the impact of serious and organised crime on the EU's internal security. This analysis serves as a foundation for setting EU priorities in combating such crime and for directing law enforcement agencies towards the most serious challenges within the extensive criminal landscape.

The author's contribution is specifically focused on Vietnamese organised crime, considering the long-standing and significant presence of individuals of Vietnamese nationality within organised criminal groups in the Czech Republic. Despite a certain foundational level of research, Vietnamese organised crime in the Czech Republic remains under-explored, and the results published so far suggest an inadequate reflection of current trends (such as developments in modes of operation). This situation is significantly influenced by objective factors such as community closedness, language barriers, and high latency, which make acquiring relevant and comprehensive information about such groups considerably challenging (Martinek & Kratina, 2025).

The aim of this contribution is to briefly and fundamentally introduce the Vietnamese ethnic group's involvement in organised crime structures in the Czech Republic using a literature review,

analytical-synthetic methods, and descriptive methods. It seeks to define Vietnamese organised crime for practical purposes and, using the research technique of expert inquiry conducted through the "round-table" method, to conduct an exploratory pilot study aimed at identifying current security threats posed by Vietnamese organised crime in the Czech Republic and to assess their risks.

## 1. VIETNAMESE ETHNICITY AND ORGANISED CRIME IN THE CZECH REPUBLIC

Within the international criminal landscape, the EU, or Europe from a geographical perspective, occupies a pivotal position. Its close connections with other continents render it a source, transit, and destination area for various forms of illegal trade and the provision of illicit services. Criminal networks operating within the EU have demonstrable reach into more than 150 countries across continents, including regions in Asia, Africa, the Americas, and the southern Pacific. The transnational nature of their operations is significantly reflected in the ethnic and national heterogeneity of organised criminal groups. Typically, such groups are composed either of individuals from neighbouring states or foreign nationals with significant diasporic representation in the affected countries, where regional specifics influence not only the functioning of criminal groups but also efforts to combat them (Europol, 2025).

Significant Vietnamese diasporas have established themselves in various countries worldwide, with estimates suggesting that the Vietnamese community abroad numbers approximately four million individuals (Nožina & Kraus, 2020). Prominent and often socially isolated communities exist, for example, in the United States, Canada, Australia, and several European countries, including the Netherlands, France, Germany, Poland, and the Czech Republic. The largest and longest-established Vietnamese diaspora in Europe is in France, estimated to number over 350,000 people as of 2017 (Le Petit Journal, 2017). A substantial representation of Vietnamese nationals is also found in Germany, where, according to official statistics from 2022 (Statistisches Bundesamt, n.d.), there are 120,535 residents. In the Czech Republic, Vietnamese consistently form the third-largest group of foreigners, with an upward trend. For instance, in 2021, there were 64,808 individuals living in the Czech Republic with proper residence permits, and by 2023, this number had increased to 67,783 (Czech Statistical Office, n.d.).

Due to extensive emigration from Vietnam, Vietnamese organised crime groups represent the most influential actors among criminal organisations from Southeast Asia. These groups are inherently diverse and exhibit a variable nature with significant differences in their activity preferences and scope, size and geographic reach, as well as in their internal organisation. Based on current knowledge, it can be stated that their structure and operational mechanisms at least partially reflect elements of all three general models of organised crime—hierarchical, local-cultural, and business (United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, n.d.) — and that they have gradually evolved into flexible, highly adaptable criminal networks (Le, 2012). Through these networks, they are capable of effectively operating and expanding their criminal activities on a transnational level.

In the context of the Czech Republic, the Vietnamese ethnic group is identified as one of the key actors in the realm of organised crime. Regular expert surveys conducted by the Institute for Criminology and Social Prevention (IKSP) reveal that Vietnamese individuals have consistently ranked prominently within the structures of organised crime in the Czech Republic. This fact is illustrated by Figure 1, compiled based on published results of such expert surveys (Marešová et al., 2000; Marešová et al., 2002; Marešová et al., 2003; Marešová et al., 2005; Marešová et al., 2006; Marešová et al., 2008; Marešová et al., 2009; Marešová et al., 2010; Marešová et al., 2012; Marešová et al., 2013; Marešová et al., 2014; Diblíková et al., 2018; Scheinost et al., 2018; Scheinost et al., 2021; Scheinost et al., 2022; Scheinost et al., 2023). It shows development trends over selected years. The data presented clearly indicate that individuals of Vietnamese ethnicity have consistently ranked among the top ten since 1999, occupying the first position predominantly from 2009 to 2022, with the exception of 2019 and 2022, when they dropped to second place in the overall ranking.

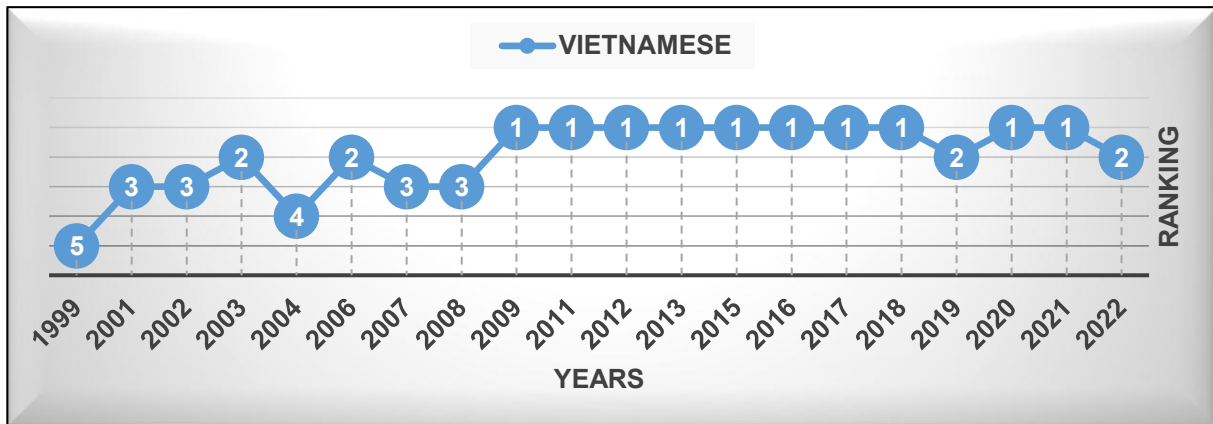


Figure 1 Development of the Representation Rate of Vietnamese in Organised Crime Structures within the Czech Republic Based on Expert Estimates for Selected Years

The significant position of Vietnamese organised crime groups in the Czech Republic began to form in connection with migration waves prior to 1989, which in some cases also brought manifestations of criminal activity. Currently, these groups are characterised by a high degree of adaptability, allowing them to prefer various forms of illegal activities or expand them, depending on current demand in the illegal market, presence of competition, societal changes, or the economic profitability of specific criminal activities (Martinek, 2024).

The criminal activities of these groups are characterised by a high degree of latency, sophistication, and systematic organisation. According to the 2022 annual report by the National Organised Crime Agency (National Organised Crime Agency, 2023), Vietnamese criminal groups, like in previous years, primarily focus on economic crime (such as tax fraud, money laundering), drug-related crime, corruption, and illegal migration-related crime.

Many forms of crime committed by Vietnamese organised crime groups are characterised by being provided as "services" aimed at satisfying the needs not only of members of the Vietnamese community but also other entities, including criminal organisations. In these cases, such actors appear as clients, while Vietnamese organised crime groups act as intermediaries or providers. These "services" referred to in the Vietnamese community as DỊCH VỤ, can be understood as certain parallel and independent systems of legal entities. Their operation, or use, is typically associated with the collection of predetermined fees. The existence and nature of these practices are also evidenced by specific cases adjudicated by Czech courts, as illustrated by the decision of the Prague City Court on January 22, 2016, file no. 43 T 2/2010, or the decision of the Prague City Court on December 5, 2018, file no. 56 T 6/2017-14166.

## 2. WORKING DEFINITION OF VIETNAMESE ORGANISED CRIME

The central term in this contribution is organised crime. Despite being an established and widely used term that is the subject of ongoing scholarly discourse, a unified and generally accepted definition of this phenomenon has not yet been achieved within theory (Diviák, Coutinho, & Stivala, 2020). As a result, the literature and legal documents, both nationally and internationally, offer a range of definitions that can differ significantly in certain aspects. For example, criminological definitions often focus on the descriptive characteristics of organised crime, emphasising the identification of its typical features. In contrast, legal definitions primarily focus on the subject. It is also crucial to distinguish organised crime clearly from the term organised criminality, which is committed by organised groups representing a lower type of group criminal activity (Němec, 2003). In practice and some theoretical approaches, these terms are sometimes undesirably conflated.

Given these circumstances, it was necessary to define the subject of inquiry—Vietnamese organised crime—as a theoretical basis for the study, ensuring respondents have a unified and comprehensible

understanding. The working definition of Vietnamese organised crime was guided by the author's chosen legal definition of the subject of organised crime (organised criminal group), the interpretation of organised groups as subjects of organised criminality, the Vietnamese nationality of the perpetrators while considering the possible mixed composition of groups, the primary intent of organised crime groups to consistently and systematically gain financial profit (Martinek, 2019), and their potential activity not only on a national but also an international level.

An organised criminal group is defined as: "*a community of at least three criminally responsible persons with an internal organisational structure, division of roles, and allocation of activities, aimed at systematically committing intentional criminal activities*" (Criminal Code of the Czech Republic, 2009, § 129). According to the law, such a group does not require a hierarchical arrangement (Šámal, 2023), and thus groups with a looser organisation or lower degree of organisation can also be legally assessed as subjects of organised crime, provided they meet the mandatory features listed (cf. Supreme Court of the Czech Republic, 2024).

An organised group is understood as: "*an association of more than (at least three) persons, within which a certain division of tasks among individual members is carried out, and whose activity is therefore characterised by planning and coordination, increasing the likelihood of successfully committing a crime, and thus its harmfulness and severity... An internal organisational and hierarchical structure with superior-subordinate relationships is not necessary, nor is a focus on systematically committing intentional criminal activities, which characterises the qualitatively more serious organised criminal group in the sense of § 129 of the Criminal Code, which must be distinguished from an organised group not directly defined by the Criminal Code*" (Supreme Court of the Czech Republic, 2023, p. 1).

Based on the above summary, Vietnamese organised crime was conceptualised for working purposes as a higher type of group criminal activity, the subject of which is at least one organised criminal group—a community composed of at least three criminally responsible persons predominantly of Vietnamese ethnicity, with an internal organisational structure of a vertical and/or horizontal nature, a division of roles, and an allocation of activities among members, oriented towards the intentional and systematic commission of criminal activities to achieve systematic financial gain, operating on a national or international level either independently or in cooperation with other entities, particularly within criminal networks, and not to be equated with an organised group.

### **3. METHODOLOGY FOR IDENTIFYING THREATS AND ASSESSING THEIR RISKS**

To identify current security threats posed by Vietnamese organised crime in the Czech Republic and to evaluate the risks arising from them, the research technique of expert inquiry was utilised, conducted through the "round-table" method (Martinek, 2024).

Given the specificity of the phenomenon being studied, the respondents consisted of four police specialists in the detection and documentation of Asian organised crime, who are part of the National Organised Crime Agency of the Criminal Police and Investigation Service of the Police of the Czech Republic. The selection of respondents was based on their expert competence, verified by their total length of service in the operational components of the police and the duration of their current assignment in the aforementioned field. The participating specialists were predominantly experienced, as all reported having eight or more years of practice in the operational components of the police, and two of them had nine or more years in the monitoring of Vietnamese or Asian organised crime. The remaining experts had been involved in the respective field for up to two years.

The reliability and validity of the expert responses were ensured through independent evaluation prior to the discussion and a certain level of anonymisation. Each expert first recorded their opinions individually, without influence from others and without knowing the identities of other participants in the subsequent group discussion. Timed intervals during the moderated discussion guaranteed that all participants had equal opportunities to contribute. Experts were also assured that their responses would remain publicly non-identifiable.

During the guided discussion held on January 16, 2024, the group of participants was first provided with an explanation of the understanding of the research subject, namely Vietnamese organised crime (see Chapter 2). Subsequently, the respondents were asked to state the illegal activities of Vietnamese organised crime groups that they personally perceive as security threats. Following this identification of security threats, they were to comprehensively assess the level of risk potential each threat posed to the internal security and legitimate interests of the Czech Republic, and based on this assessment, determine the specific risk level (high, medium, or low) they believe arises from each threat. They were also required to justify the assignment of the highest risk to a specific security threat.

**4. RESULTS OF THE EXPERT INQUIRY**

The results of the expert inquiry are illustrated in Figure 2 below. It is evident from the graph that the experts identified a total of twelve illegal activities currently posing security threats, perpetrated by Vietnamese organised crime groups within the Czech Republic. The list primarily highlights forms of activities of Vietnamese criminal groups in the Czech Republic considered the most prevalent according to the latest expert estimates (Scheinost et al., 2022; Scheinost et al., 2023). These include activities such as illegal production and smuggling of cigarettes and alcohol, which were predominant in the 1990s, and the less widely known yet unlawfully and extensively conducted activities of gambling and betting. Conversely, the graph does not feature activities that have significantly diminished over time, such as the previously typical distribution of pirated media or violent criminal activities, which were strongly associated with the operations of Vietnamese organised crime groups. For instance, in 1996, violence among Vietnamese gangs escalated in Germany, particularly in Berlin, Brandenburg, Saxony, and Thuringia, with 26 known murders and 15 attempted murders, resulting in 35 Vietnamese victims. This violence was largely attributed to the rivalry between different groups (Bundeskriminalamt, 1997).

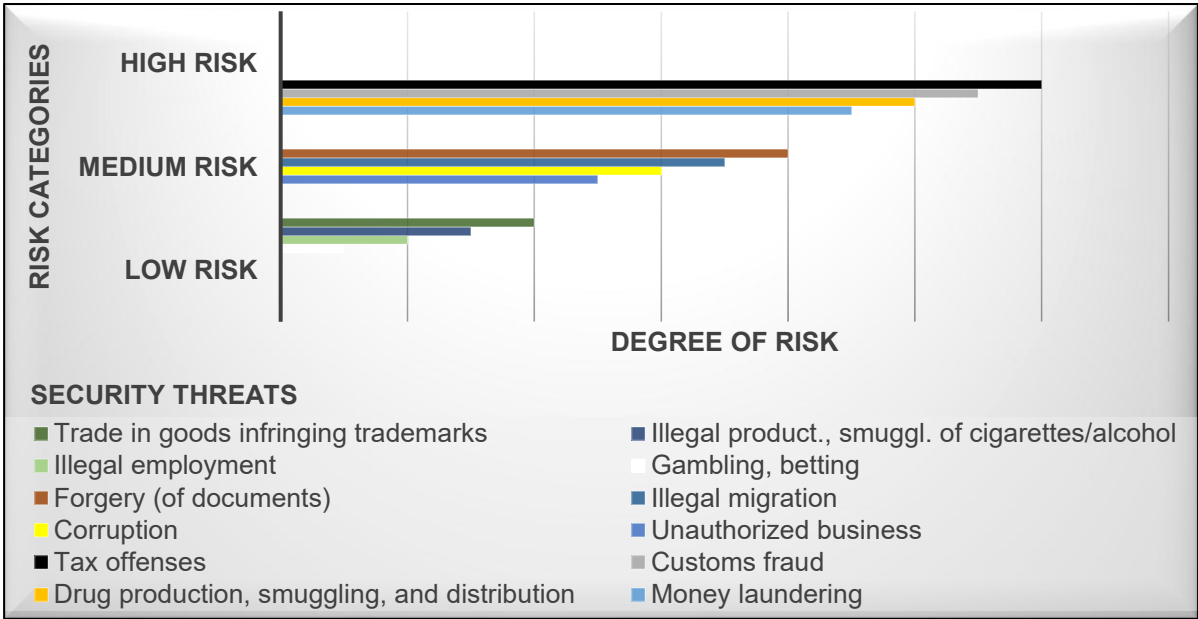


Figure 2 Identified Security Threats of Vietnamese Organised Crime and Evaluation of the Risks Arising from Them

Experts provided detailed commentary on certain activities. They unanimously agreed that violence is not currently perceived as a security threat, as Vietnamese criminal groups are now more focused on economic crime, with violent criminal acts occurring only rarely and in exceptional situations. Moreover, violence does not usually manifest in its most extreme forms, such as murder or torture, and is primarily directed within the community. Additionally, all experts mentioned that unauthorised business activities pose a security threat, particularly in connection with enterprises known as KARAOKE and intermediary services called DỊCH VỤ, emphasising the role of "money transfer

*services*". One expert noted that activities like counterfeiting and illegal migration often involve collaboration with staff from the Embassy of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam in Prague, who "assist" in document legalisation. Furthermore, two respondents expressed their views on potential future developments, predicting that Vietnamese organised crime groups in the Czech Republic might increasingly shift their activities to cyberspace (e.g., internet fraud).

The content of Figure 2 also illustrates how respondents assessed the level of risk arising from specific, previously identified illegal activities, or security threats. The specific risk level was determined based on the experts' subjective assessment, primarily grounded in their personal experiences and knowledge not only of Vietnamese organised crime but also of the legal environment and relevant court cases in the Czech Republic.

High risk was attributed by experts to tax-related crimes, customs fraud, drug production, smuggling and distribution, and money laundering. The perception of tax-related crimes as a high-risk security threat was unanimously justified by the respondents due to the Vietnamese community's basic orientation towards consumer goods sales and the related need to import goods from Asia (China, Vietnam, etc.). They added that Vietnamese criminal groups, offering "*customs services*" known as DỊCH VỤ HẢI QUAN (cf. Nožina & Kraus, 2020), play a key role in this, resulting, among other things, in tax evasion amounting to tens of billions of crowns annually. Conversely, gambling and betting pose the least risk, according to the experts, primarily occurring as illegal casino operations and betting activities.

## CONCLUSION

Vietnamese organised crime represents a significant and current security threat, challenging not only law enforcement agencies in the Czech Republic but also in other countries with substantial Vietnamese diasporas.

Findings from the exploratory pilot study indicate that Vietnamese organised crime in the Czech context is primarily focused on economic crime and drug-related offenses, with identified high-risk security threats mainly falling within these areas. However, other relevant threats with significant risk potential, such as corruption, counterfeiting, and unauthorised business activities, should not be overlooked. The primary impact of these illegal activities by Vietnamese criminal groups concerns economic interests, yet their nature can negatively affect other protected societal values. Notably, drug production, smuggling, and distribution have undeniable and severe impacts on public health (particularly for users of narcotic and psychotropic substances), the environment (inadequate disposal of toxic waste from drug production), and are sources of other drug-related crimes (e.g., crimes committed under the influence of drugs, aimed at acquiring drugs or funds for their use, or crimes against drug addicts).

Effectively managing the security threats associated with Vietnamese organised crime requires a comprehensive and coordinated approach, accounting for its dynamic development and international nature. Key elements of this approach undoubtedly include continuous analysis, timely identification of current threats, and systematic risk assessment. Equally important is the identification and monitoring of crime indicators—signals suggesting the occurrence of specific illegal activities. Examples include the sudden arrival of groups of Vietnamese migrants accommodated at the same addresses with limited freedom of movement, or small businesses with a high proportion of cash transactions, irregular accounting, rapid turnover, and frequent cash withdrawals. These activities have practical implications as they form the essential foundation for developing and implementing appropriate preventive and repressive measures aimed at reducing security risks, protecting state-protected values, and ensuring the capability of security forces to respond swiftly and effectively to new forms of criminal activity.

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