

THE BIRTH OF A COUNTRY OF IMMIGRATION: THE CASE OF THE CZECH REPUBLIC

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Czechia has traditionally been a country of emigration rather than immigration and for decades had almost no foreign population (from the end of World War II until the beginning of the 1990s), but it is currently by far the most attractive country for long-term and permanent immigrants in the Central European post-communist region (*Drbohlav – Seidlová, 2016*). Immigrants make up about 5.1% of the population of Czechia (based on citizenship), with Ukrainians the most numerous group, followed by Slovaks, Vietnamese and Russians.

In this paper, we will present both the history of migration flows in the country in the aftermaths of World War II and during the communist regime (1945–1989) as well as the current situation and the implications of both regimes and their specific economic and demographic situation for the country's migration policy. Due to the nature of the chosen subject, the main question is what caused the changes in the migration flows and in the nature of migration policy, and the only method that can be used to determine this, especially for the historical part, is an analysis of secondary sources. However, even given its rather descriptive character, this article could be very useful for readers abroad, and especially for those in countries of the Western world, where immigration has been an everyday matter in the life of society since at least the 1960s.

THE IMMIGRATION SITUATION IN CZECHIA BEFORE 1989

In the years between the end of World War II (1945) and the fall of the communist regime (1989), two main periods can be distinguished in Czechia: one directly reflecting the consequences of the war and its end (1945–1948), and the one that followed and began with Communist Party seizing power and ending with the fall of the communist regime (1948–1989).

1945–1948

The fact that politics is the decisive factor in international migration can be shown through the example of the new geopolitical situation that arose in the aftermath of the Second World War (*Černík, 2004*). The massive movements of the population during this period affected the whole of Europe, including Czechoslovakia.²⁾ Although no exact data are known, it can be estimated that in Czechoslovakia alone 5 million people were displaced, of which about 4 million were in the Czech Lands (*Horáková, 2000*).

Between 1945 and 1947, about 2.8 million Germans were expelled from Czechoslovakia and displaced, mostly from the border regions of the Czech lands (see Table 1). Approximately 90,000 Hungarians returned from the southern regions of Slovakia to Hungary, and around 50,000 people were moved from Czechoslovakia to Ukraine and other parts of the Soviet Union (*Horáková, 2000*). The departure of ethnic Germans was the biggest factor that contributed to the national homogenisation of the

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2) In 1993, former Czechoslovakia split into independent Czechia and Slovakia. Czechoslovakia, which united those two countries in a kind of federation, had existed since 1918.

Table 1: International migration in what is now Czechia, 1945–1947 (thousands)

Year	Immigration	Emigration	Migration balance
1945	35.0	1,177.0	-1,142.0
1946	45.0	1,630.0	-1,585.0
1947	51.1	1.3	49.8
Total	131.1	2,808.3	-2,677.2

Note: Estimates.

Source: Andrlé, 1993 in Horáková, 2000.

country (in 2001, 94% of the population declared themselves to be of Czech nationality – CSU, 2003).

The depopulated border areas of the Czech lands were progressively settled both by the Czech population and by compatriots and migrants from abroad. Between 1945 and 1949, some 130,000 re-emigrants came to the Czech lands. The largest group were 33,000 Czechs from Volyně (Ukraine) (*Janská – Drbohlav*, 1999). More than 21,000 people, mostly Slovaks from Transylvania, were relocated from Romania. Between 1946 and 1947, about 12,000 Bulgarian farmers moved in, followed by another group of 4,000 Bulgarians in 1954 (*Horáková*, 2000).

Strong migratory flows to the abandoned border regions also arrived from Slovakia. In addition to Slovaks, this group included Slovak Roma and Hungarians. It is estimated that 16,700 Roma from Slovakia migrated to the Czech Lands in 1947 alone (mainly to the borderlands) (*Pavelčíková*, 2004).

A specific group of migrants consisted of political refugees from Greece who had left their country as a result of the ongoing civil war between 1946 and 1949 and who were granted asylum in Czechoslovakia. A total of at least 14,000 of these refugees arrived in Czechoslovakia and most of them settled in northern Moravia (*Otčenášek*, 2003).

AFTER 1948

After 1948, the migratory situation in the country developed in a very specific political, economic and demographic context. The nature of the economic situation was significantly influenced by the political situation. The full expropriation of production and services has been completed and the collectivisation of agriculture had taken place. After overcoming the troublesome post-war situation, economic growth in the second half of the 1950s was about 5% per

annum of GDP growth per capita. Later, however, it decreased and from the mid-1970s there was minimal GDP growth, which mostly remained around 1% (*Maddison*, 2009).

The Czech economy thus lagged considerably behind the speed of development in Western European states, but it maintained a leading position within the socialist block. Central planning mainly supported the development of heavy industry and mining, while the services sector was left behind. Due to inefficient employment, there was almost no unemployment. On the contrary, throughout this period, the expanding economy was struggling with a labour shortage, and both the migration and the population policy of the state responded to this (*Drbohlav et al.*, 2010).

International migration at that time was for the most part reduced in form to illegal emigration to the Western world, which was relatively substantial, but it is difficult to determine its size. The highest estimates are that the population lost around 550,000 inhabitants through migration for the period 1948–1989 (*Srb*, 2004). So in this period the Czech lands retained its emigration character.

During this period there was no explicitly formulated immigration policy, except for an asylum policy, which was adopted into socialist legislation in 1960 (*Baršová – Barša*, 2005). The migration of Czechoslovak citizens was subject to the so-called visa policy of the state, which allowed only a very limited number of citizens to travel to non-socialist countries. Leaving the state without an official permit was illegal, and illegal immigrants automatically lost Czechoslovakian/Czech citizenship and were sentenced to prison for several years (*Drbohlav et al.*, 2010).

Between 1948 and 1989, there were two major waves of emigration that responded to political events. The first was linked to the Communist Party's entry into power in 1948 and the second to the occupation

Table 2: Population lost due to migration in what is now Czechia, 1948–1990 (thousands)

Period	Legal migration balance	Illegal emigration	Total
1948–1949	3.9	-250.0	-246.1
1950–1960	-2.4	-32.5	-34.9
1961–1970	-47.7	-116.8	-164.5
1971–1980	-7.8	-43.2	-51.1
1981–1990	-13.7	-40.0	-53.7
Total	-67.7	-482.5	-550.3

Note: Estimates.

Source: Andrlé, 1993 in Horáková, 2000.

of Czechoslovakia by Warsaw Pact troops in 1968. Available data on emigration in the 1948–1949 period (or 1948–1953) are very different. While the figures based on demographic balance data (Srb, 2004, Paukertová, 2000) report about 250,000 emigrants (see Table 2), other estimates are lower and range from 40,000 to 60,000 emigrants (Tigríd, 1990, Vaculík, 2002).

Political reasons for emigration have often been linked to economic circumstances and to efforts to find a place with better living conditions. Most emigrants were young people, with an average age of 35 years, and many travelled with their families. The emigrants were economically active persons and the majority of them were employed in qualified professions (Drbohlav, 1994). The main target countries for emigration were Austria, Germany, the United States, and Canada.

Nevertheless, there was also a regulated and not very significant amount of immigration. The most important part of these immigrants were ethnic Czechs or Slovaks from Central and Eastern Europe coming back for family reasons (Černík, 2004).

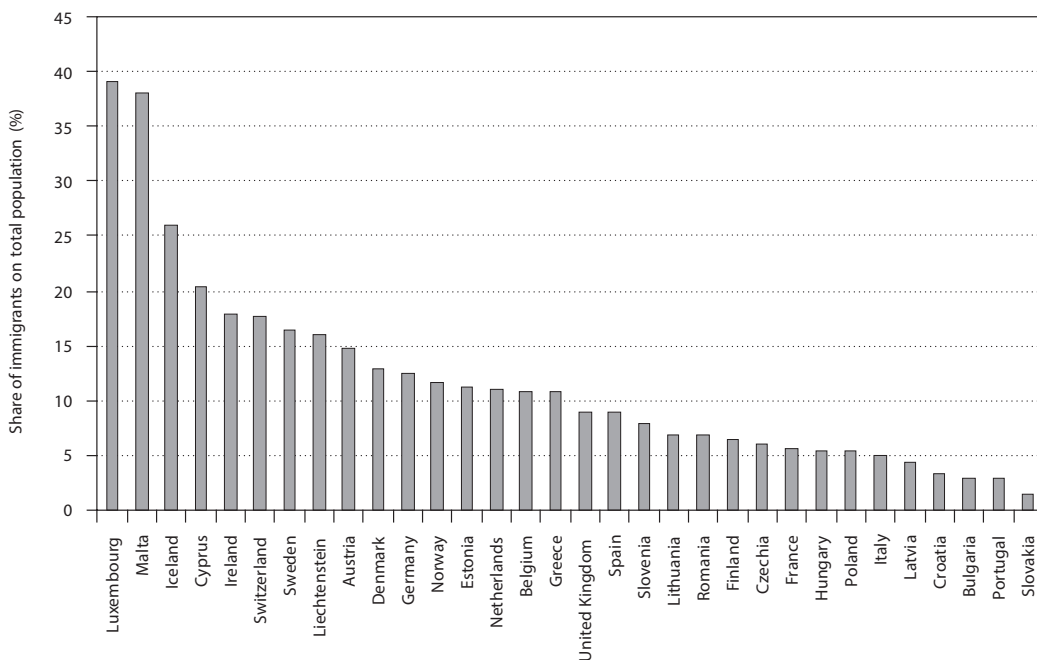
In the mid-1970s, a discussion of labour shortages started in the Czechoslovak Parliament, which led to reflections on the enforcement of a more active immigration policy. The development of industry in Prague in particular was unthinkable without the labour generated by internal and external migration. An important role was played by the temporary immigration of workers and apprentices from other socialist countries. Within the framework of intergovernmental agreements with other socialist countries under so-called international assistance workers came mainly from Poland, Vietnam, and Cuba, but also from Yugoslavia, Hungary, Angola, Mongolia, and North Korea (Boušková, 1998).

However, the immigrants were often segregated and were not visible in society at that time. Their lives were mostly enclosed within the manufacturing plants they worked in and the localities they lived in, where they resided in dormitories (collective accommodation) (Drbohlav, 2004). In the case of Vietnamese, the immigration in the socialist era became an important foundation for ‘new’ immigration flows from that country after 1990.

AFTER 1989

The main factor behind the radical change in (not only) migration patterns in Czechia was the ‘Velvet Revolution’ in 1989, which ushered in a new political, economic, and social regime based on a free democratic society and a free-market economy. Since the very beginning of the 1990s, the deep-reaching transformation and globalisation of society (along with the milestones of the establishment of an independent Czechia by the separation from Slovakia in 1993, and joining NATO in 1999, the European Union in 2004, and the Schengen area in 2007) was accompanied by changes in migration flows. Hence, over time Czechia became first a transit country to Western Europe and then an immigration country (with positive net migration). A unique combination of pull factors, such as the speed of the economic and political transformation, particular migration policies (or non-policies), and a good economic performance and demand in the labour market (especially between 1993 and 1997 and then 2004 and 2008) have drawn immigrants to this country (Seidlová, 2015; Drbohlav – Seidlová, 2016), even though the share of immigrants in the total

Figure 1: Share of immigrants out of the total population of selected European countries (2016)



Source: Eurostat, 2018a.

population still remains rather low in comparison with other European countries (see Figure 1).

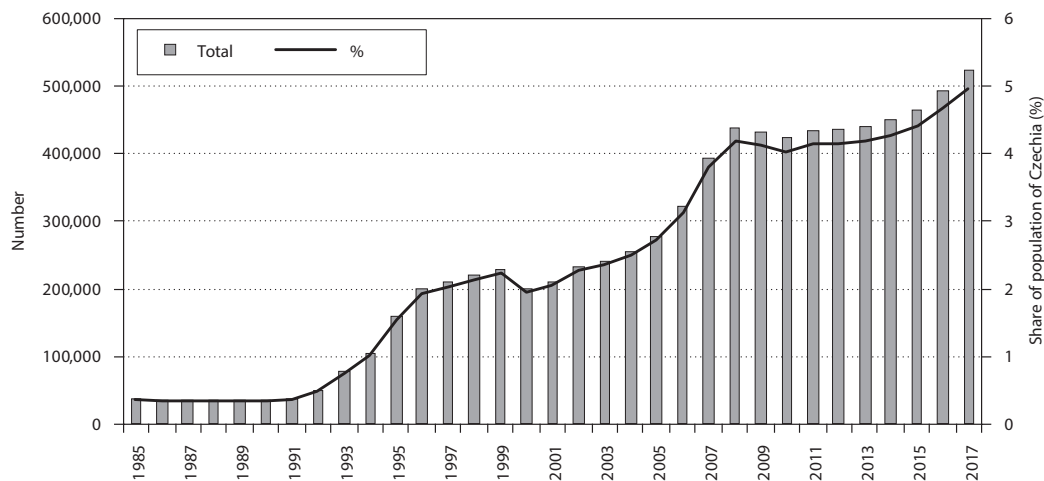
The change in migration flows and dependence on adopted policy become clear when we simply look at the number of immigrants. In 1993 only 78,000 foreign nationals lived in Czechia and they represented 0.8% of the population. One year later, in 1994, there were already about 104,343 foreign nationals living in Czechia, most of them from Poland (20,021 persons; 19.2% of all foreign nationals), Slovakia (16,778 persons; 16.1%), Ukraine (14,230 persons; 13.6%), Vietnam (9,633 persons; 9.2%) and Germany (4,195 persons; 4.0%) (CSU, 2018a; MVCR, 2018a). At the end of March 2018 (last available data), there were a total of 535,970 foreign nationals living in Czechia, representing 5.1% of the total population (based on citizenship) (see Figure 2).

Two-thirds of the current immigrant population (65.8%) came from 5 countries (when comparing 1994 to 2016, the only change is that Russia replaced

Poland among the top 5), whilst almost one-quarter came from just one country – Ukraine (120,431 persons; 22.5%). Ukrainians are thus currently the most numerous group of immigrants, and have been well established in Czechia for more than 20 years. The second biggest group comprises Slovaks (113,177 persons; 21.1%), the third Vietnamese (60,296 persons; 11.2%), the fourth Russians (37,201 persons; 6.9%), and the fifth Germans (21,315 persons; 4.0%) (MVCR, 2018a). In other words, nearly half of all foreigners (40.7%) are citizens of three countries outside the EU (Ukraine, Vietnam and Russia), one-quarter (25.1%) are citizens of two neighbouring EU member states (Slovakia and Germany), and about a third (34.2%) is made up of citizens of all other countries in the world (see Table 3).

In terms of their spatial distribution, most immigrants are concentrated in large cities, especially in Prague and in the surrounding Central Bohemia Region, and a little less also

Figure 2: Rising number of immigrants in Czechia (1985-2017)



Source: CSU, 2018a.

in two other big cities, Brno and Ostrava. Relatively more immigrants (especially Vietnamese and Russians) also live in the border areas with Germany (see Figure 3).

Most economically active immigrants are employed (about 380,000), only a minority has a trade licence (86,000) (see Figure 4).

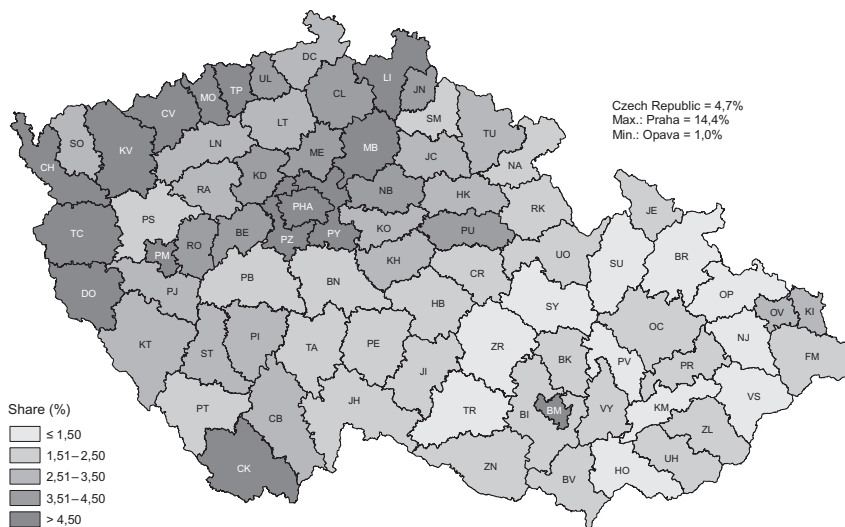
About 2,000 persons have applied for Czech citizenship each year over the past decade, and a significant increase in the number of applications (by two to three times) has been recorded since 2014 as a result of a change in legislation that newly allows dual citizenship, i.e. it is only from 2014 that people can acquire Czech citizenship without having to give

Table 3: Foreign nationals living with a valid residence permit in Czechia (31 March 2018)

Citizenship		31 March 2018	
		Number	Share of foreign nationals (%)
1	Ukraine	120,431	22.5
2	Slovakia	113,177	21.1
3	Vietnam	60,296	11.2
4	Russia	37,201	6.9
5	Germany	21,315	4.0
6	Poland	20,831	3.9
7	Bulgaria	14,312	2.7
8	Romania	13,119	2.4
9	United States	9,039	1.7
10	Mongolia	8,357	1.6
	Other	117,892	22.0
Total		535,970	100.0
The three most numerous groups (i.e. 1 + 2 + 3)		293,904	54.8

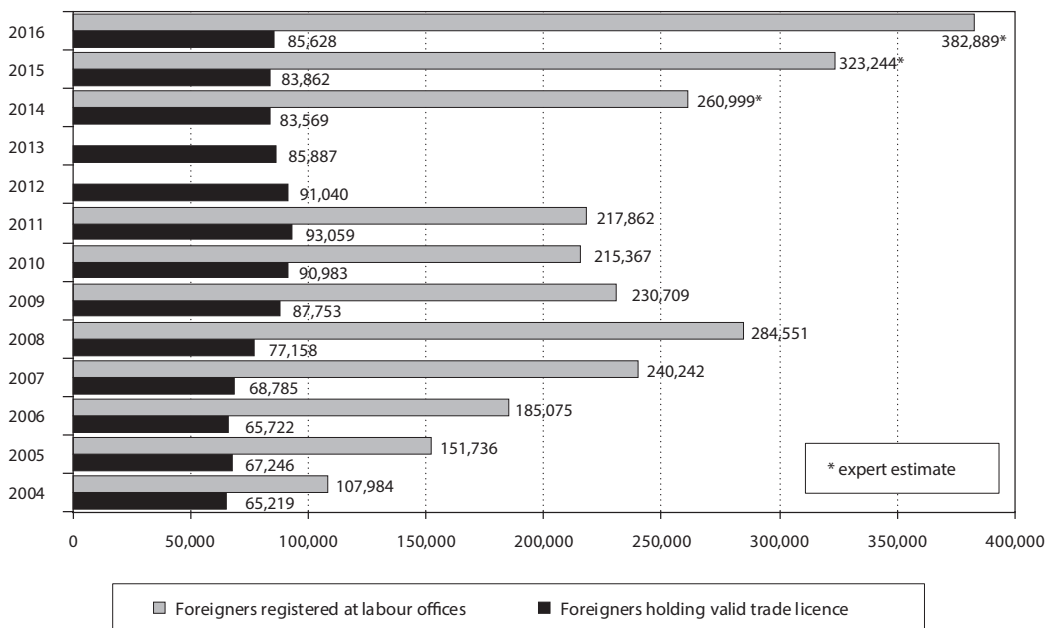
Source: MVCR, 2018a.

Figure 3: Share of foreign nationals in the population of the districts in Czechia (as at 31 December 2016)



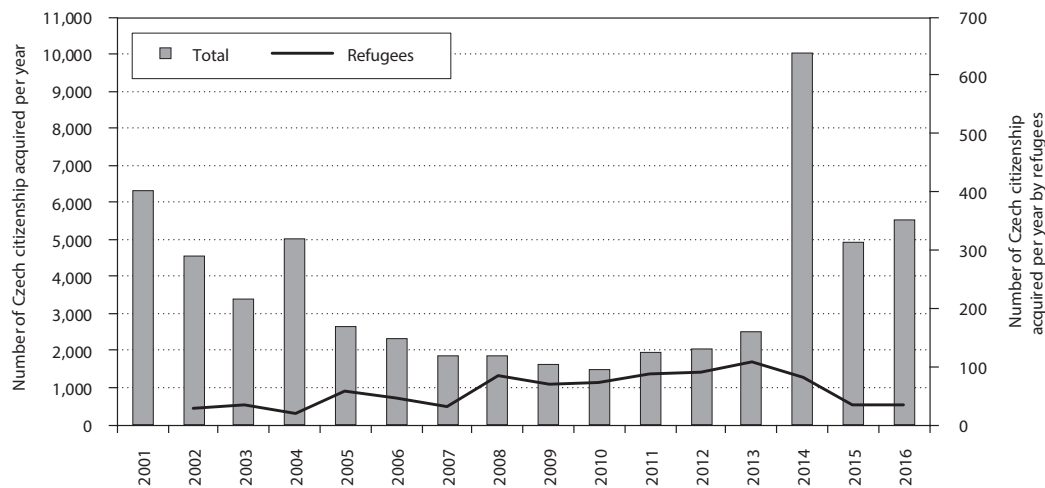
Source: CSU, 2018b.

Figure 4: Immigrants on the Czech labour market (2004–2016)



Source: CSU, 2018b.

Figure 5: Acquisition of Czech citizenship (2001–2016)



Source: CSU, 2018b.

up their original citizenship, which is very appealing to foreign nationals (see Figure 5).

THE POPULATION OF ASYLUM SEEKERS AND OF REFUGEES

In addition to economic immigrants, there are those who are seeking international protection (asylum or subsidiary protection).³⁾

As the overall figures for the last 30 years suggest (see Figure 6), Czechia has never been an important target for asylum-seekers. However, one can notice that there was a significant increase in requests for asylum in 2001, but this was caused by a change in legislation (see below), which introduced new rules and caused considerable difficulties for foreign nationals. Applying for asylum became a very popular strategy as it allowed to foreign nationals to stay and work until the decision about asylum was made (*Drbohlav – Seidlová, 2016*).

As well as the low number of requests, Czechia has also traditionally applied rather a very restrictive policy in terms of granting asylum. Of 86,128 persons who applied for this status between 1997 and 2017, only

2,571 (i.e. 2.99%) received it. And this has remained the trend: in the year 2017, of the 1,450 persons who applied for protection, only 29 persons (i.e. 2.0%) were granted asylum (MVCR, 2018b).

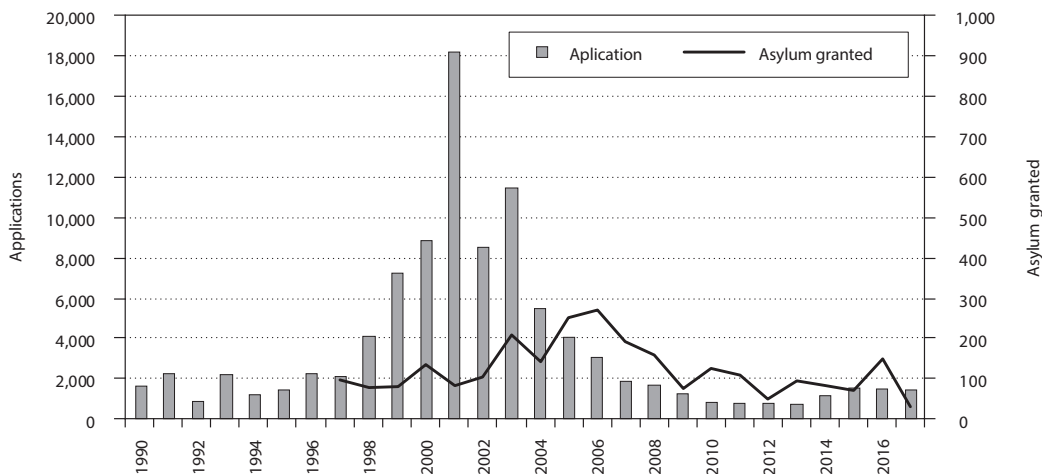
As concerns the countries of origin, a traditionally large share (about 50%) of asylum-seekers are citizens of Ukraine. The other countries that rank among the 'top 10' change over time and reflect current political (and other) events in all countries of the world, and reflect even Czech policy on asylum-seekers (as, for example, the decision in 2016 to grant asylum to 20 Christian Iraqi families).

In 2017, a total of 1,450 persons have claimed international protection in Czechia. Out of them, more than one-third were Ukrainians (435 persons – 30.0%). The second and third most represented groups were citizens of Armenia and Georgia (129 persons i.e. 8.9% each group) and the fourth one was made up of citizens of Azerbaijan (127 persons – 8.8%). As these figures indicate, Czechia is still not one of the main targets of asylum-seekers coming to Europe, even though its neighbouring country is Germany, which had 222,560 applications for international protection in 2017,⁴⁾

3) Persons seeking international protection, asylum, or subsidiary protection – in short, 'asylum-seekers'.

4) In 2016, these figures accounted even for 745,155 in the case of Germany (and for Italy it was 122,960 and for France 84,270) (Eurostat, 2018b).

Figure 6: Asylum seekers in Czechia (1990-2017)



Source: CSU, 2018b; MVCR, 2018b.

and it is also well behind Italy (128,850 applications in 2017) or even France (99,330 applications in 2017), the three main targets within the European Union in 2016 (Eurostat, 2018b).

EVOLUTION OF CZECH MIGRATION POLICY

In the preceding paragraphs we saw what the attitude of the state was towards migrants from the end of World War II to 1989 and the very specific politic, economic, and demographic conditions for the development of international migration in this era. We then explained very briefly the key elements of the transition and looked at the current situation with respect to international migrants in Czechia. To complete the picture, we have to add also how migration policy itself has developed over the past 30 years. In general, we can distinguish the following main periods:

1990–1996

The new situation in society led to a total change in migratory legislation based on principles of a free and democratic society. However, migration policy and

international migration in general were not at the forefront of state interest. Foreign nationals only had to register and nothing else was essentially required of them. On the other hand, they could not obtain a permanent residence permit or citizenship. If they wanted to stay in the country, their only option was to marry a citizen of the Czech Republic. The application for different types of residence permits, introduced for the first time in the legislation, could be submitted directly on the territory of the Czech Republic (now it can almost only be done at the embassies) (Barša – Baršová, 2006; Drbohlav et al., 2010).

1996–1999

In this period, different types of residence permits for foreign nationals in the Czech Republic were formally established: for long-term or short-term residence in the country. New legislation prepared for the future accession of the Czech Republic to the EU also gradually began to apply. At the end of this period, important laws on migration were adopted in 1999 and entered into force in 2000, namely the Asylum Act (Act No. 325/1999 Coll.) and the Act on the Entry and on the Residence of Foreigners (Act No. 326/1999 Coll.). These laws significantly

tightened the rules for the entry and residence of foreign nationals and led to a temporary decrease in the number of immigrants (and an increase in the number of asylum-seekers – see above). However, the decrease in the number of migrants was also partly due to the economic crisis and to rising unemployment (for example, the increase in unemployment rates from 3.9% in 1996 to 8.7% in 1999; CSU 2011). It became possible for foreign nationals who had been living in the country for more than 10 years (on a ‘long-term residence visa’) to obtain the status of permanent residents, which created the first step for the possibility of later gaining citizenship.

2000–2004

In the period preceding the accession of the Czech Republic to the EU, Czech migration policy became more active and began to gain a more systematic form. In 2000, the Concept for the Integration of Foreign Nationals was approved and adopted at the state level, and it is still in effect today. The government also adopted the general principles of a migration policy, but they were more in the nature of a declaration. A very specific manifestation of this policy was a government project called ‘Selection of Qualified Foreign Workers’, which raised relatively high hopes, but its real impact was at the end very minimal. This project offered foreign nationals who participated in it the possibility of obtaining permanent residence in a shorter period. In spite of the relatively high budget for promoting the project abroad, only about 3,500 people joined the project during its 7 years of life and in fact most of the participants in the project were foreign nationals who had graduated from Czech universities (or secondary schools).

2004–2007 (2008)

The accession of the Czech Republic to the European Union introduced a new distinction between foreign nationals residing in the country: EU citizens and citizens of so-called third countries. Economic growth, which generated a strong demand for foreign labour, and a low unemployment rate (below 5%; CSU, 2011) became the main pull factors for immigrants, who

came to the country in large numbers. The total number of foreign nationals in the Czech Republic in this period reached 400,000.

2008–2013

The next period, characterised by the global economic crisis, brought a significant reduction in job vacancies in the labour market and the government was therefore forced to undertake steps in order to reduce immigration. Two main tools were used for this purpose: First, the issuing of working visas (and extensions to working visas already issued) to foreign nationals from the main source countries of immigration (i.e. from Ukraine, Vietnam, and Mongolia) was suspended. Second, a so-called ‘Voluntary Returns’ project was launched: it offered immigrants who lost their jobs in the Czech Republic and did not have the means to return to their country of origin some financial assistance for this return journey in exchange for the promise that they would not work for some time in the Czech Republic. Also, this project did not fulfil all the expectations the government had placed in it, since only about 2,000 immigrants, mostly from Mongolia, took advantage of the possibility to return to their country of origin. This period was also characterised by a clear preference in the labour market for Czech labour (or possibly labour from other EU countries).

2014 – TODAY

In 2014, the Coordinating Body for Border Protection and for Migration, which was formally established as early as 2006, became more active. In July 2015, a new migration policy strategy was adopted, focusing on legal migration, illegal migration, and a return policy, along with more ‘traditional’ areas such as asylum, the integration of foreign nationals, and the free movement of persons within the EU.

The main objective of this strategy was to solve the ‘migration crisis’ at that time, even though Czechia remained almost untouched by the influx of asylum-seekers in Europe (see above) as the average annual number of persons seeking asylum hovers around 1,500 and asylum is then granted on average to only 3% of them.

Now that the economic situation has improved, the Czech government is currently more concerned with migration for economic reasons. The Czech economy needs labour from abroad, and therefore the government actively tries to attract workers – especially Ukrainian citizens, who have a long tradition of migrating to the Czech Republic for work purposes. Two special programmes for both highly qualified and lower-qualified workers were launched in November 2015 and August 2016, with an annual quota of 500 and 5,000 persons, respectively.

New laws include the one on dual citizenship (in force since 2014, see above), and a significant and extensive amendment to the Act on the Entry and on the Residence of Foreign Nationals from 1999, which has been under preparation for years. The main purpose of the second one should among other things be that courses on everyday life in Czech society would be mandatory for all applicants for any kind of long-term residence permit.

Foreign nationals can apply for a permanent residence permit in the Czech Republic after 5 years of legal residence in the country (if they meet other conditions stipulated in the law, such as that they can demonstrate knowledge of the Czech language, they have not been convicted of an intentional crime, they fulfil the obligations of paying taxes, health insurance, etc.) and after 5 years of permanent residence they may apply for citizenship.

Overall, from 1990 until the present migration policy has, in a sense, moved in a full circle away from a discriminatory model to a multicultural one and then to one of civic integration, i.e. it went from viewing immigrants as a group to seeing immigrants as individuals who need to integrate into majority society at their own pace (such as managing language, acquainting themselves with Czech history and culture, etc.), while maintaining a relationship to their country of origin or the community of their compatriots.

Moreover, it is a largely reactive policy instrument with clear signs of a lack of any systematic approach: Czech migration policy is not based on detailed socio-economic analyses of current and future trends. It has been possible, however, to see over time a distinct shift from a passive to a more active and more

systematic approach to addressing migration issues both politically and practically.

In creating Czech migration policy, the role of the Ministry of the Interior, i.e. the Department of Asylum and Migration Policy, is crucial in the long term. It has recently become clear that the Ministry of the Interior is strengthening this role, which can be considered one aspect of the process of centralising decision-making on migration policy. It is also worth highlighting the strong influence of the EU on the development of Czech migration policy (the ‘Europeanisation’ of migration policy).

Another important aspect is that the Czech migration policy is not politicised – so far, the bureaucratic approach to managing migration issues has prevailed here. Change came along with the 2015 refugee crisis – migration and integration issues became a highly politicised theme that was used in pre-election campaigns, but it remains a question whether this will have a long-term effect.

CONCLUSION

In this paper, we presented an overall picture of developments in the field of international migration in Czechia from 1945 till 2018: the migrant population and its composition, the population of asylum-seekers and refugees, and the evolution of migration policy. As the current number suggests, we can predict that the migrant population will continue to have a significant place in the everyday life of Czech society, which will still present a challenge for the authorities on both the national and the local level.

The main challenge for current Czech migration policy is that it is fragmented, a problem that should be addressed as soon as possible. Another problem lies in the fact that there are insufficient financial resources to cover activities related to migration in general and to the integration of foreign nationals into the major society: the main burden is placed on non-governmental organisations, which are financed only through short-term grants. Moreover, like in other EU countries, it is almost impossible to gain funding for activities aimed at integrating EU citizens into the majority society: while they enjoy the benefits of the free movement of persons within the EU, that does

not mean that they do not face problems such as not knowing the language of the new country they have moved to. Moreover, it is important to remember that Czech is a very difficult language for most foreigners and it would be more than desirable for there to be resources that could be used to teach them Czech for free up to the B2 level. The strong role played by the Ministry of the Interior regarding these issues is by no means the best arrangement, as it is on the one hand a repressive body responsible

for border protection and the maintenance of public order, and on the other hand also the institution responsible for the integration of immigrants. Rather, in matters concerning the employment of foreign nationals, for example, the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs should be given a stronger role. In addition, we can also see a lack of any clear division of responsibilities between different ministries relating to the integration of immigrants at the local level.

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SUMMARY

From the end of World War II to the last decade of the 20th century, the Czech Republic was mostly an emigration country and also quite a homogeneous nation. Nowadays, this European country, with 535,000 legally resident foreign nationals on its territory (as of March 2018), is the most attractive migratory destination of all the former communist countries in Europe. The main factor behind this radical change was the ‘Velvet Revolution’ in 1989, which ushered in a new political, economic, and social regime based on a free democratic society and free-market economy. Since the very beginning of the 1990s onwards, the deep-reaching transformation and globalisation of society (along with the milestones of the establishment of an independent Czech Republic, after separating from Slovakia in 1993, and joining NATO in 1999, the

European Union in 2004, and the Schengen area in 2007) has been accompanied by changing migration flows to this Central European country. Over time the Czech Republic has thus become first a transit country to Western Europe and then an immigration country (reversing the migration balance). A unique combination of pull factors, such as the speed of the economic and political transformation, particular migration policies (between 1993 and 2008), and a good economic performance and a demand for labour market, have drawn immigrants to this country. In 2018, the immigrants made up about 5.1% of the whole population. Ukrainians are the largest immigrant group, followed by Slovaks and Vietnamese. The paper presents this evolution through a review of the relevant literature.