

The Immigrants and Ethnic Minorities in the Czech Republic

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As one of the Peer Review countries in this Peer Review meeting in El Escorial the 20th and 21st October 2008, we are pleased to contribute to the discussion and we would like to thank the Commission, ÖSB and our Spanish hosts for the invitation.

Introduction

According to the Czech Statistical Office¹ there were 410 094 foreigners living in the Czech Republic by mid 2008 (May 31st, 2008). This represents 3.93 percent of the total population of the country. From the total number there were 31% Ukrainian citizens, 18% are Slovak citizens and 13% are the citizens from Vietnam. The citizens of the EU constitute 31% of all citizens. No official data on number of illegal immigrants are available. Neither CSO, nor the police or government publishes any such data. Independent experts estimate the number of illegal immigrants around tens of thousands².

The number of foreigners in the Czech Republic indicates steady growth during the last decade. Since the year 1994 the overall number of foreigners has risen 4 times. The speed of increase has been higher in the first half of the nineties. In the second half the nineties the immigration pace has somewhat decelerated and between the years 1999 and 2000 it has even dropped by app. 12%. Since the beginning of this century the immigration pace has started to rise steadily. In the year 2007 the number of new immigrants has almost doubled compared to previous years (2004 – 50 804; 2005 -58 576; 2006 – 66 125; 2007 - 102 511). One of the driving forces behind the increasing number of foreigners is also the very low unemployment rate and steady growth of salaries seen over the several last years.

The situation of foreigners still remains in general a politically indifferent issue. No substantial political discourse has occurred on the problems of foreigners for quite a long time. Just recently the situation has started to change. The governmental initiative to introduce so called green cards has received some media coverage and political discussion. The plan has been introduced in October 2007 and the amendment to the law on employment has just been signed by the president. The act will become operational from January 2009. The act has been on one hand appreciated for significantly shortening the current work and residence permit system, on the other hand it has been criticised for not allowing foreigners who are currently in the Czech Republic illegally to legalise their residence within some time period and therefore forcing many of them into illegal way of life and into illegal employments.

As described above, the immigration issue is attracting little attention. On the contrary the ethnic issue, specifically the problems of the Roma minority is often dealt with. Politically it has become

¹ Czech Statistical Office data are available on <http://www.czso.cz/csu/cizinci.nsf/kapitola/uvod> (in Czech).

² Vladislav Günter - Cizinci v ČR (Foreigners in the Czech Republic): <http://www.caat.cz/publikace/prehledove-studie/44-prehledove-studie/150-cizinci-v-r> (in Czech).

part of the governmental coalition deal. Different governmental policies and strategies and policies are being developed and new agency is being implemented. This agency is described later in the document.

In the last census in 2001 only 11 746 people described themselves as being of Roma nationality. These official data are utterly unreliable and lead us to a complicated question how to identify the Roma. According to most estimates there may be approximately 200 000 – 300 000 Roma in the Czech Republic. The most notable problem of Roma is multifaceted social exclusion. In 2005 and 2006 the GAC Company carried out Analysis of socially excluded Roma localities in the Czech Republic and absorption capacity of entities involved in this field³. This analysis identified 310 socially excluded localities in 167 towns/villages with approximately 60 -80 000 thousand inhabitants. The overall unemployment rate of the economically active inhabitants is 90 – 100%. It is also notable that 90% of the analysed localities have either appeared during the last ten years or have dramatically changed – usually expanded – due to migration.

The governmental policy

The key purpose of the state administration sector in integrating immigrants is primarily to set up a conceptual framework for the integration, aimed at supporting their inclusion into the society in the Czech Republic. At present, this particular conceptual framework is formed by the **updated Policy for the Integration of Immigrants**⁴, approved by the Czech Government in February 2006 and covering the period 2006 - 2008. The policy focuses mainly on third country nationals staying in the Czech Republic legally and on a long-term basis. Persons who have been granted international protection fall into the target group of the concept only marginally; their integration and the implementation of the State Integration Programme, just as the administration of the European Refugee Fund, are under the charges of the Ministry of Interior. The policy does not deal with EU citizens and applicants for granting international protection.

The key priorities of the policy include the implementation of measures focused on the four key areas, namely: **command of the Czech language, economic self-sufficiency of the immigrants, the orientation in society, and the relations with members of the majority society**. As far as *command of the Czech language* is concerned, conditions have been set with a view to creating a system of Czech language training and testing for immigrants as one of the preconditions for granting permanent residence permits. Language testing has become one of the conditions for granting a permanent residence permit, was incorporated in 2007 into an amendment to the country's Immigrants Act (effective as of January 1, 2009). Many Czech language courses for foreigners have been organised to date by non-governmental non-profit organisations with the financial support from the government budget and EU funds.

As for *economic self-sufficiency*, progress has been made, namely in the pending amendment to the country's Employment Act (its anticipated effectiveness as of January 1st, 2009), which comprises several changes that are expected substantially to simplify administrative demands placed on the employment of immigrants. These changes are now commonly referred to as the "green cards". The green card system will bring the issuance of a work permit and a residence

³ See: http://www.gac.cz/documents/nase_prace_vystupy/GAC_MAPA_Socially_Excluded_Roma_Localities_in_the_CR_en.pdf

⁴ For abridged English version of the policy see: http://www.cizinci.cz/files/clanky/329/Concept_of_II.pdf

permit under a single procedure and reduce many of the delays that migrants currently face. The green card will be valid for three years.

As regards *the orientation in the society*, for instance the Czech Government Ministries published in 2007 several information manuals for immigrants, complete with their translations into the language most frequently spoken by third country nationals coming to the Czech Republic. In the implementation of measures in the field of *the relations with members of the majority society*, training courses on intercultural communication were held for selected employees of the country's labour offices plus other educational projects, such as lectures and seminars on the work of the Police in a multicultural society or anti-discrimination training courses for Czech police officers.

It is the Czech Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs, which closely cooperates with other departments (especially with the Interior Ministry, Ministry of Education, Youth and Physical Training, Ministry of Culture, Ministry of Health etc.) that has a coordinating role to play in the integration of immigrants. In its capacity of a coordinator of the policy for the integration of immigrants, the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs is known to cooperate - in addition to state administration authorities - also with many other subjects. An indispensable part of the conception is implemented through *cooperation with non-governmental non-profit organisations (NGOs)*. Working in conjunction with or using financial co-participation of the state administration sector, the NGOs carry out a number of practical integration measures (e.g. providing counselling services, assistance in dealing with the authorities, organising Czech language courses, taking measures geared to promote relations between communities etc.), measures which the state is unable to perform efficiently. Furthermore, for the state administration sector the NGOs constitute an essential source of information on the actual status of the immigrants in the Czech Republic and on the problems immigrants have to cope with during their integration into the society. The state administration sector reflects this kind of practical experience in its conceptual work and in devising integration policies, including the process of defining grant programmes for the NGOs earmarked for the integration of immigrants. The NGOs are independent subjects in their own right; they are locally or regionally anchored, maintaining direct contacts with the given target group, and - in optimum cases - with the regional and local self-government sector as well.

Funding

The activities facilitating integration of immigrants are funded from different ministries of the central government, from county governments and during the last few years also from the structural funds.

The funding from the central government during the last 4 years varied from 12 to 25 million CZK. The gross amounts of funding from the state budget were as follows:

Year	Total amount
2004	20 million CZK
2005	12 million CZK
2006	25 million CZK
2007	25 million CZK
2008	25 million CZK

The breakdown according to individual ministries in 2008 is as follows:

Institution	Total amount
Ministry of Labour and Social	10.8 million CZK
Ministry of the Internal Affairs	5 million CZK
Ministry of Health	3 million CZK
Ministry of Culture	2.5 million CZK
Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports	2 million CZK
Ministry Industry and Trade	600 thousand CZK
Ministry for Regional Development	600 thousand CZK
Czech Statistical Office	500 thousand CZK

During the previous structural funds programming period the following *EU financial sources* were used for the purpose of integrating immigrants in this country. These include primarily the Programme Community Initiative EQUAL, Operating Programme Human Resources Development, Unified Programming Document for Objective 3 of the region NUTS 2 - capital city of Prague, the European Refugee Fund, Programme INTI - Pilot Project on integration of third country nationals, and Phare 2003 RLZ. For its part, the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs is involved in the implementation of selected projects submitted within the framework of the above-stated programmes.

In the current programming period, there are two key operational programmes that may fund the activities towards the integration of foreigners: Operational Programme Human Resources and Employment (OP HRE), Operational Programme Education for Competitiveness (OP EC).

Operational Programme Human Resources and Employment

The global objective of the OP Human Resources and Employment is to increase employment and employability of people in the CR to the level of the 15 best EU countries average. This objective will be achieved via increasing of adaptability of employees and employers, among others by means of further education, improvement of access to employment and prevention of unemployment, strengthening integration of persons endangered by social exclusion or socially excluded, strengthening institutional capacity and efficiency of public administration and public services, and intensification of international cooperation in the area of human resources and employment.

The programme focuses apart from other aspects on Active Labour Market Policies (Axis 2a, 2b) and on Social Integration and Equal Opportunities (Axis 3). Both of these axis focus on person endangered by social exclusion and include immigrants as one of the target groups. However, no programme or activity is focused directly on immigrants. On the other hand there is one area of support (3.2) that focuses directly on the inhabitants of the socially excluded Roma localities. The total allocation for the priority axis 3 for 2007 – 2013 is €468 948 318.

Operational Programme Education for Competitiveness

The global objective of the OP Education for Competitiveness is the development of an open, flexible and cohesive society and strengthening competitiveness of the CR economy through partner cooperation, resulting in improving quality and modernisation of the educational system in the complex framework of lifelong learning, and in improvement of conditions in the area of

research and development. This OP is conceived as multi-objective. Axis 1 of the programme focuses on initial education and priority area 1.2. focuses on Equal opportunities for school pupils. The total allocation for priority axis 1 is €720 091 457 for 2007 – 2013.

Operational Programme Prague – Competitiveness

For the Regional Competitiveness and Employment objective of the NUTS II region, the Capital City of Prague (financed from ERDF). The global objective of the OP Prague – Competitiveness is to increase the competitiveness of Prague as a dynamic metropolis of an EU Member State, by means of eliminating development barriers and weaknesses of the region, enhancing quality of urban environment, improving accessibility of transport and telecommunication services and evolving the innovative potential of the city. The priority Axis 2 – Support to the entry to the labour market that includes also the immigrants as one of the target groups has overall allocation €37 188 301 for 2007 – 2013.

Integrated Operational Programme

The global objective of the Integrated Operational Programme is the modernisation and streamlining of activities and processes in the area of public administration, public services and management of territorial development by means of modernising the technical background, as a prerequisite for the development of modern civil society and increased competitiveness of regions and the CR as a whole.

The Priority Axis 5 – National support for territorial development includes activities for development of deprived suburbs and the area of support 5.2.c focuses mainly on Socially Excluded Roma Localities. The overall allocation for priority axis 5 is € 495 136 341 for 2007 – 2013.

It should be mentioned that although the overall allocations are high, none of the operational programme or specific call for grant applications includes immigrants as the primary target group. Therefore it is currently impossible to deduce the amount of funding for immigration activities from the structural funds and the exact amount should be subject to future analysis and evaluation.

Agency for Social Inclusion in the Roma Localities

The Government Resolution No. 85 from January 23, 2008 on the establishment of the **Agency for Social Inclusion in the Roma Localities** (hereinafter only the Agency) has approved a draft pilot project for the setting up of the Agency, and the Minister in charge of human rights and national minorities has been commissioned to review, by December 31, 2009, the efficiency of the pilot project for the Agency, and - depending on the results of the project - to propose further procedures, including the Agency's institutional provision with a specific corporate personality.

The Agency launched its activity in January 2008, its ultimate aim being a transformation of the Roma "ghettos", conducive either to their elimination or at least to a substantial improvement in the quality of life in those localities where a considerable part of the local inhabitants would get access to education, begin work and obtain better housing. Since January 2008, the Agency has been gradually in operation in 12 selected municipalities where, working in conjunction with the local self-government authorities, it will be implementing a programme aimed at comprehensively

solving the situation in the excluded localities. Together with other partners (non-state non-profit organisations, schools, labour offices, local employers, the Roma community), the municipalities will be carrying out projects in support of employment, education and in upgrading the quality of housing, focused on citizens in the socially excluded Roma localities.

The aim of the Agency is to make use of the unique opportunity offered by the new programming period for drawing finances from the EU Structural Funds in the years 2007 - 2013 and create a necessary personnel and institutional background to implement the programmes and projects improving access to education, on the labour market and facilitating access to better housing. The Agency will help local self-governing authorities in obtaining funding, primarily from the EU funds, to solve these problems.

The process of selecting the above-mentioned localities got under way in August 2007. Its accent was laid on the previous efforts evolved by each municipality to integrate the socially excluded Roma, its currently elaborated and implemented integration strategies and, last but not least, willingness of its local self-governing authorities to cooperate with the Agency in enforcing these strategies. As many as 32 towns and villages were selected in October 2007. These localities were typologically divided, and localities of diverse types have been selected urban and rural localities, large and small localities with a well-developed network of providers of social services and non-profit organisations and, on the other hand, localities where such services are missing, localities with a high as well as low overall unemployment rate, with a large as well as a small degree of spatial segregation etc.

Conclusions

The breakdown of governmental funding as well as brief overview of the EU funds suggest that although the Czech Republic does have a comprehensive policy for integration of immigrants that covers the most important areas, the funding procedures are fragmented and complicated. Some experts hold the opinion that even the overall policy is unclear and that it lacks direction to steer, coordinate and fulfil its objectives. For the European Funds it should also be noted that although the current programming period started in 2007, the first calls for grant applications came with a substantial delay of app. 12 – 18 months. Concerning the fact that the immigrant flow has almost doubled in the last year we believe that the Spanish model could bring interesting inspiration. On the other hand we expect, that the above described newly established agency will prove an efficient tool for coordination of different national, regional and local policies on social integration and that the model will be transferable geographically as well thematically.