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**SOCIAL INTEGRATION OF IMMIGRANTS
IN THE CZECH REPUBLIC**

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—Abstract—

After period of social and economic transformation, the Czech Republic became a destination for migrant workers. During the period, migration policy in the Czech Republic focused on regulation of migration flows, while the issue of integration was out of policy concern. National concept of integration of foreigners was formulated only in 2000, and until now there was no success in involvement of municipalities. Ever-growing migrant populations have been therefore receiving minimal attention in the place of their settlement. Based on analysis of relevant policy documents, interviews with immigrants and with policy-makers and administrators, the paper shows how weak integration policies stimulated development of alternative strategies and mechanisms of inclusion, e.g. job-agencies using illegal and non-ethical practices. Consequently, the social system is challenged by presence of relatively numerous migrant populations, which are loosely or not at all integrated into the society and which are in extremely precarious situation.

1. INTRODUCTION

Socialist Czechoslovakia was unequivocally an emigratory country; numerically minimal, immigration was greatly regulated and negotiated through intergovernmental agreements¹. After the fall of the Iron Curtain, however, in a relatively short time the Czech Republic became the final destination for international migration flows.

In general, the period of economic transformation placed high demands on the development of modern social policy capable of reducing the negative social impacts associated with the introduction of market economy. ‘Social acceptability’ was from the very start, a core concern of political representatives that paid great attention to protecting the population against the negative impacts of transformation (Vanhuysse 2006a, 2006b). Post-1989, a social safety net was created consisting of social assistance and unemployment benefits. In addition, social insurance schemes and family-related benefits were redesigned. Interest as regards social policy, in the living conditions of immigrants and their integration into Czech society was sidelined at these stages. The response to the rapidly increasing numbers of immigrants were further efforts to regulate migration flows with regard to the situation in the labour market in the Czech Republic, while the social integration of migrants was nearly ignored. The development of integration policy, therefore, had significantly lagged behind the social reality.

The joint coexistence of immigrants and members of the domestic population may have a varied expression depending on the stance of the majority in the host society and the migrants themselves, and for both there can be different effects. There may become, for example, a permanent division of immigrants through the process of marginalization and segregation (e.g. in ethnic enclaves, ethnic communities), or their integration into peripheral, marginalized segments and subculture of the host society in the process of so-called segmented assimilation (Bosswick, Heckmann, 2006). Segregation and marginalization pose for both the host society and migrants considerable risks. For immigrants, for instance, the risk of poverty and social exclusion, including social isolation and barriers to access to institutions that in key ways affect quality of life and life opportunities (e.g. education, labour market, health care, as well as security). From the perspective of the host society and among the most debated, include the risk of mobilization and the radicalization of ethnic minorities (see, for example, Castels,

¹ For example, workers or stipend holders coming from socialist bloc countries.

Miller, 2003), accompanied by increased xenophobia and nationalist attitudes of the majority, which may lead to the polarization and general disintegration of society, loss of social solidarity and the de-legitimization of the state (Banting, Kymlicka, 2006).

On the other hand, mutual coexistence may lead to the full merger of immigrants with the majority society (assimilation) and the blurring of differences, which newcomers were initially characterized by. However, assimilation is not considered a necessary condition for maintaining social peace and solidarity, for maximizing the benefits and minimizing the risks associated with migration². Rather, it seems the social integration of migrants is significant, which includes space for maintaining diversity.

How has the long-term lack of integration measures affected the process of social integration of a relatively substantial number of immigrants? Did it lead to marginalization or segregation of immigrants in the Czech Republic? Which strategies or mechanisms have immigrants used in order to position themselves in the host society?

In the following text, we will briefly introduce the Czech Republic as a migration destination, and outline the development of its immigration policy. In addition, we will focus on identifying the mechanisms and strategies that have been applied in given conditions for immigrants in the Czech Republic. We will draw on our analysis of aggregated statistical data, analysis of documents and literature, qualitative interviews with municipal authorities and other key actors of integration at the local level (50 interviews conducted between 2007 and 2009) and especially from the extensive qualitative study of social integration of migrants 2008, in which 250 interviews with immigrants living in three large Czech cities (Prague, Plzen and Brno) were conducted.

2. CZECH REPUBLIC AS A MIGRATION DESTINATION

In 1993 there were about 80,000 foreigners legally residing in the Czech Republic, thirteen years later the number reached nearly 440,000. There are tens to hundreds of thousands of others which are not included in these statistics, because for different reasons their stay did not correspond to the legislative requirements. Although in comparison with other European Union countries, the proportion of immigrants is still relatively low (about 4.5%), for Czech Republic it marks a significant step towards national and ethnic diversity, with associated new demands on maintaining the internal integrity of Czech society (compare Banting, Kymlicka 2006).

In general, the majority of migrants aiming for the Czech Republic are from European countries, partly from European Union countries (33%) and partly from outside the EU (44%). Less than a quarter of foreigners from countries outside Europe come to stay in the Czech Republic, most of them from Asia (20%). Migration from Africa and America is quite marginal. Citizens from the three most significant source countries of migration to the Czech Republic - Ukraine, Slovakia and Vietnam – have accounted for approximately two-thirds of all immigrants, and currently every third foreigner residing in the Czech Republic comes from Ukraine. Some other nationalities have grown in numbers substantially, namely Mongolians and Moldovans, although numerically they are less represented. Immigrants from eastern countries have increased the most in the last ten years. This is associated with, among other

² Moreover, complete assimilation does not occur or it is not possible, e.g., in terms of racial or ethnic diversity. Interviews conducted with immigrants in the Czech Republic, show that under conditions of persistent relative ethnic homogeneity, the exterior physiognomic characteristics are a significant factor of the differentiation (us - them), both on the part of immigrants and the majority society.

things, economic growth and the related demand for foreign labour – Ukrainians and other individuals from less developed countries were willing to fill the vacant posts, which are characterized by low quality, particularly in manufacturing and construction.

Half of foreigners employed in the Czech Republic perform assistant and unskilled labour or operate machines and equipment, another quarter work as craftsmen, manufacturers and repairmen, and 5% of foreigners work as operational staff in services and trade³. These are often jobs in the secondary labour market, which are characterized by low quality and high pressure from the employers for time flexibility⁴. A number of such jobs arose in locations that are focused on developing industrial zones aimed at simple assembly work. In these areas (Pilsen, Pardubice, Mlada Boleslav), there has been a particularly high concentration of foreigners, especially from Ukraine, Vietnam, Mongolia (as well as Slovakia), in unskilled occupations.

However, better jobs for foreigners from third countries are not very accessible. The Czech labour market shows a strong tendency to dualize foreign employment: while people coming from highly developed countries occupy high-quality jobs in the so-called primary market, for the rest, almost the only available jobs are those that Czech workers have no interest in (Pořízková, 2008, Rákoczyová et al., 2007). Even so, these are attractive for many foreigners. This is evidenced by the fact that work is the most commonly declared purpose for coming to the Czech Republic, and overall, foreigners exhibit a very high level of economic activity. In addition to short-term migrant workers, however, there are foreigners who come to the Czech Republic and wish to remain for the long-term or permanently. These include, for example, those migrating for the purpose of family reunification, applicants for international protection, and probably also some economic migrants and students at Czech universities. The tendency to reside in the Czech Republic is demonstrated in the growing share of people with permanent residency: while in 1995 a quarter of all immigrants had permanent residency, in 2008 that rose to 40%. In absolute terms number of foreigners with permanent residence in the Czech Republic grown from 70 000 to 173 000 during aforementioned period. Permanent residence is in most cases conditioned by 5 years of uninterrupted stay in the Czech Republic. The settling of immigrants, especially those from third countries, is attested by a marked increase in the number of foreigners born in the Czech Republic⁵ and a significant number of children who are attending nursery, primary and secondary schools⁶ in the Czech Republic. The high proportion of Vietnamese in both of the indicators reflects the gradual maturing of second generation immigrants from Vietnam. In view of the relatively short history of modern immigration in the Czech Republic, second generation immigrants are an entirely new social category.

Table 1: Foreigners from selected nationalities who reside in the Czech Republic and their basic characteristics

Total (2008)	Percentage of women	Percentage of children up to	Percentage of seniors from 65	Percentage with permanent	Development of migration from
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³ See the data of 31.12.2008 on the ČSÚ website <http://www.czso.cz/csu/cizinci.nsf/tab/93005CA6C1> (breakdown by KZAM) and <http://www.czso.cz/csu/cizinci.nsf/tab/93005BC3B3>

⁴ As supported in the RILSA study (Rákoczyová et al., 2007), foreign manual workers are exposed to a much higher degree of job insecurity, have a very limited access to further education and work training, and are at higher risk of injuries. Working overtime or on weekends and holidays is common. Moreover, indirect indicators suggest that these workers occupy jobs with low wage pay (Rákoczyová, 2007, Pořízková, 2008).

⁵ While in 2001, 888 foreigners were born in the Czech Republic, in 2007 their numbers reached 2,094. The largest number of children were born by Vietnamese (767) and Ukrainian (431) parents.

⁶ In the school year 2007/2008 22,500 foreigners attended this type of school, of which about a third were Vietnamese children. Vietnamese students also study at universities, among them a portion come specifically to the Czech Republic for the purpose of study.

		(2008; %)	15 (2007)	and up (2007)	residency (2008)	2001-2008*
Ukraine	131 965	40,9	5,3	0,8	30,8	2,5
Slovakia	76 034	41,2	5,3	1,7	33,4	1,4
Vietnam	60 258	39,3	15,9	0,6	57,7	2,5
Russia	27 178	53,4	12,6	5,3	44,7	2,2
Poland	21 710	45,1	1,8	5,9	51,3	1,3
Germany	17 496	19,2	2,3	9,8	25,3	3,5
Moldavia	10 644	35,2	5,1	0,2	19,9	4,3
Mongolia	8 569	57,5	9,3	0,1	17,1	7,4
Bulgaria	5 922	35,9	9,2	12,8	51,8	1,4
USA	5 272	38,4	n.a.	n.a.	50,1	1,7
Total	438301	39,7	7,4	2,7	39,5	2,1

*The development of migration is expressed by the ration between the number of foreigners in 2008 and 2001.

n.a. – Data not available

Source: ČSÚ, author's calculation

Individuals in marginal positions in the labour market, either from the domestic population or foreigners, are in general the most exposed to the negative impacts of economic development. However, these effects are more pronounced for foreign workers, especially if their position in the labour market is associated with a low degree of social integration (for example, as regards the knowledge of the Czech language and orientation in society, social capital or residence status). These people may then find themselves in very difficult situation in the Czech Republic, which is hard to manage due to the lack of social and cultural competencies. A degree of social integration is therefore important not only for immigrants with permanent residency, but also for those who consider their stay to be "temporary." Even purported "temporary" stays may prove to be long-term; furthermore, the acquisition of key competences generally reduces the vulnerability of migrants and increases their ability to take care of themselves and their families in the Czech Republic, regardless of the proposed and actual length of stay.

3. ROLE OF INTEGRATION POLICIES

The processes of social integration may take place, at least in part, spontaneously. The experience of several countries that have long-term experience with immigration, however, show that to a large extent, opposite processes take place spontaneously - marginalization, separation into ethnic enclaves, the growth of social and cultural tensions, etc. There is a need to promote the processes of social integration by suitably configured and comprehensive policy, particularly in the case where there is a growing proportion of immigrants.

Integration policies represent a set of measures, which aim to promote the processes of social integration of immigrants, i.e., “*their inclusion and acceptance in key institutions, relations and positions of the host society*”⁷. In view of the complexity of the integration process, it is necessary that integration policy has a multi-dimensional character and includes measures from a number of fields. Bosswick and Heckman (2006) distinguish four dimensions of integration policies, which relate to specific dimensions - structural, cultural, interactive, and identification - of social integration of foreigners.

Current immigration policies in European countries focus on the integration of immigrants into the majority society, which is based on individual key areas (including language and liberal-democratic principles), while respecting the differences of immigrants in the area of

⁷ Bosswick, Heckmann, 2006

cultural and religious identity (Barša, Baršová, 2005:164). As indicated by these authors elsewhere (2006:147), in recent years there has been an increase in the political will for the adoption of integration not only as a national theme, but also as a pan-European one.

On the other hand, however, the impact of local conditions on the integration process is apparent. While at the European level a common framework and principles of integration have been created, in local conditions it is necessary to take into account particular local factors and conditions, and then specific strategies and measures are formulated. The needs of immigrants, as well as the impact of the failure of their integration, is the most expressed in cities, as it is typically the objective of migration flows. The presence of immigrants with specific integration needs and the need to address particular problems have led local governments to develop integration strategies, which are often more realistic, more flexible and more prudent than the official national policies. The development of local integration policies in many cases, pre-date the creation of national strategies (Schierup et al.)⁸, or already envisaged a response to their ineffectiveness. Currently, in Western Europe a number of competencies in the area of integration of immigrants is passed on to local governments (Alexander, 2007). Therefore, in European cities specific local strategies of integration of foreigners are developed, that are often significantly different than the national strategy (Ibid.), showing a clear trend of convergence (see, for example, Baršová, Barša, 2005).

Despite a significant increase in immigrants since 1990, social integration has remained on the backbench for social policy makers in the Czech Republic⁹, and generally beyond political and public discourse. More attention was directed at migration policy in order to regulate the influx of foreigners and to protect the domestic labour force. Originally a very liberal approach to immigration, it was later replaced by the tightening of conditions for foreigners' stay and limiting their employment opportunities. This development was mainly a response to economic development – the growth of unemployment and the overall poor conditions in the labour market; further, the regulation of migration was often seen in conjunction with fulfilling the requirements for joining the European Union. After 2000, attention was also focused on the regulation of migration and an attempt to influence its development according to the development of the labour market. While there still continues to be regulation of foreign employment through the institutionalized work permit, and on the basis that employers are unable to fill the positions with domestic workers; however, there is some evidence of the opening of the Czech Republic following the economic growth up to 2008. Among these measures are, for example, the project "Active selection of qualified foreign workers", whose aim is to attract qualified workers and their families, who would be interested in settling in the Czech Republic.

There was also the introduction of the so-called green card, which simplified the administration connected with coming to work in the Czech Republic, though favours highly-skilled foreigners. In response to the economic crisis, however, there are new efforts to limit immigration (for example, the 'green cards' were introduced for only a few selected non-member countries¹⁰; the temporary suspension of issuing visas in the source countries of migration; more thorough assessment of the circumstances when deciding to issue a work

⁸ For example, in Germany during the 80s and 90s, organizations providing social services and the municipality at local levels made de facto integration policy reform and integration process ("bottom up" process), while the federal government completely lacked a coherent vision of integration policy (Borkert, M. et al., 2007).

⁹ An exception was the return of countrymen (especially from countries of the former Soviet Union) in the context of organized repatriation and integration of refugees, who were already being provided integration housing during the nineties.

¹⁰ However, the demand for the cards is very low and within the first 6 months only very few of them were issued.

permit, etc.), and the formalization of efforts to support the emigration of immigrants back to their country of origin under a program of voluntary return¹¹.

Since 2000, there gradually began to develop an integration policy at the national level, which focuses mainly on the area of proficiency in the Czech language, economic self-sufficiency of immigrants, orientation of foreigners in society, and relations of foreigners to the members of the majority. Particular attention was paid to integration of asylum holders. State program for integration of asylum holders, which aims at supporting refugees in finding housing and in learning the Czech language, was formulated.

Successful social integration of migrants, however, foresees the creation of an appropriate mix of measures at national and local levels (OECD, 2006) and the corresponding political will. While building a national model for the concept of integration of foreigners in the Czech Republic reflects the need to involve regional and local governments in the implementation of integration policy, however, appropriate mechanisms have not been created yet with an exception of the State program for asylum holders (see below). As shown in a series of interviews with employees of local governments, the needs of immigrants living in their area have remained until recently, largely hidden to the Czech town representatives and consequently local policy did not include immigrants among the target groups of their measures (Rákoczyová, Trbola, 2008). The activity of town councils in the area of integration is limited to a narrow area of state administration (particularly administration), support for multi-cultural events (especially ethnically-oriented festivals) and where necessary, crisis intervention. Other possible integration activities were delegated to the non-governmental, non-profit sector, whose extension in this area in many regions of the Czech Republic has also been limited, and also (mostly informal) to regional or foreign social networks (Ibid.). The gap between municipalities and immigrants has therefore increased, whilst there has been an increase in foreigners. The vulnerability of migrants, however, has also deepened their dependence on the mentioned structures (in particular, nationally or ethnically defined networks). This has been expressed in situations of economic crisis, which pried open the social problems of immigrants and a portion of the majority population. Manifestations of social problems of migrants and an increased risk of polarization in society is reflected, for example, in the increased interest of the media and other stakeholders (researchers, politicians and the public) on issues of migration and social integration of migrants, and in particular the gradual development of public discourse in these areas.

Due to the deepening of social problems of immigrants, and awareness and insights in the public discourse, there are also increasing efforts to strengthen integration measures at the local level. In one of the most affected regions, Pilsen, for example, the national government together with the local town-council realized a so-called emergent program. In this area, there is beginning to show positively the projected availability of financial resources from European funds targeted specifically at areas of integration: in the framework of the European Fund for the integration of third country nationals, for example, there emerged in one of the regions of the Czech Republic the first regional integration centre, which brings together major regional and local actors in integration, the comprehensive strategy of the first regional government in the social integration, and among others includes a formulation of the first coherent strategy for regional governments in the area of social integration of immigrants to the Czech Republic. In addition, for non-governmental, non-profit organizations, European funds represent one of the most significant financial sources. As for other organizations, EU funds are used not only as a source of finance for the non-profit sector, but also as a means of

¹¹ The voluntary return program, in which legally residing foreigners were given tickets back to their country of origin and paid a contribution of 500 EUR (adults) or 250 EUR (child), was introduced in February 2009 and is the first program of this type in the Czech Republic.

introducing certain agendas (e.g. agenda for social inclusion), which are politically sensitive and which otherwise would not receive much attention, from lower levels of government in particular (compare, for example, Rákoczyová, Trbola, 2006, Sirovátka, Rákoczyová, 2009).

Integration policy, however, remains relatively underdeveloped in the Czech Republic. This is particularly true at regional and local levels of government – i.e. in the social environment, where there are real interactions between immigrants and the domestic population, the environment in which their daily lives are played out and which significantly shapes the joint coexistence affected by integration and exclusionary factors. The lack of policy is reflected not only in the absence of a conceptual approach and suitably formulated measures, but also in the frequent absence of social and linguistic competencies of employees at public institutions, which are reflected in their dealings with foreigners. The approach of the majority of municipalities in the Czech Republic can up till the present be described as “non-political” (see Alexander, 2007); generally, ignoring the needs of foreigners and transferring responsibility for the integration of immigrants to other entities, in particular the civil sector, the state, and also to immigrants and their social networks, which they presume has a high degree of intra-group solidarity (Rákoczyová, Trbola, 2008). Municipalities, where the social problems of immigrants become acute in response to economic development, tend to favour the policy of temporary workers (see Alexander, 2007), aimed at short-term solutions and meeting the basic needs of foreigners, whereas the main responsibility lies with the government and employers. Municipalities are generally willing to participate in the implementation of integration measures for refugees (see below) and repatriated countrymen, where they are motivated by financial incentives and methodological support from the state.

5. IMMIGRANTS AND THEIR LIFE IN THE CZECH REPUBLIC

In the situation of a limited amount of integration services (as well as availability and clarity), foreigners are pressed to rely on other mechanisms, which will enable them to take a position in the structure of the host society and to reach at least an elementary (structural) level of integration. This includes: participation in the labour market, the acquisition of accommodation or “clearance documents” (legal residence), etc. The emphasis of immigration policy on regulated immigration, particularly on restrictions, may contribute to the development of institutional structures, which aim at overcoming established barriers in migration and thus the perpetuation of migration (Massey, 1993:450). These structures frequently lie on the boundary of the law or beyond it, i.e., using irregular practices. By neglecting social integration, the position of these structures is further strengthened, for example, by increasing (extending) the dependence of immigrants on their services and reducing the offered services (e.g. information, consulting, and language services), which would promote the autonomy of immigrants in the new environment¹². Furthermore, the lack of social integration strategies is also reflected in the attitudes of local populations and may contribute to their uncertainty, connected to a lack of, or distorted, knowledge of immigrants, their needs and customs.

Unless the social integration of immigrants is supported by appropriate integration measures in the host country, it will generally put extraordinary demands on the human capital of immigrants, on their ability and motivation to integrate. What integration strategies have immigrants chosen and choose in the Czech Republic? Which mechanisms significantly affect the chances of integration and in which way? The following text will focus on three examples of “localized” immigrants in the Czech Republic and the implications for social integration:

¹² Such situations occur, in particular, for immigrants from countries with growing ties to the migration destination country.

(a) partial integration of Vietnamese participating in ethnic economy, (b) social isolation and the insecure conditions of “temporary” labour migrants, who are employed by employment agencies in the Czech Republic, and (c) conditions of social integration of refugees, which is linked to a number of obstacles; however, currently reflects the most elaborate integration strategy in the Czech Republic.

5.1 Vietnamese in the Czech Republic - segmented integration through ethnic economy

Vietnamese belong among those immigrants with the longest migration history in the Czech Republic. The origins go back deep into the history of socialist Czechoslovakia: after a limitation in the amount of Vietnamese children, which was adopted by the country following the war in Vietnam, migration from Vietnam developed more markedly from the end of the 1960s. Following the international agreement between the governments of the two countries, tens of thousands of Vietnamese apprentices, students, trainees and workers came to Czechoslovakia (Brouček, 2003). Their jobs (as well as stay in the Czech Republic), however, were limited in terms of time and specifically allocated in selected sectors of the economy. Freedom of movement between jobs was not possible, even to a limited extent (Hofírek, Nekorjak, 2009a). The host society provided these people primarily with structural integration - besides employment, for example, housing (in employers-owned housing or student dormitories), access to health care, and education - both professional and linguistic¹³. However, their contact with the domestic population was generally at odds.

In 1990, at the time of the termination of the international agreement, there were about 13,000 Vietnamese citizens residing in Czechoslovakia (Brouček, 2003). With the loss of support in the legislation, the immigrants needed to address the new situation - either by returning to their country of origin, or legalizing their stay in the Czech Republic. Keeping their job was difficult for Vietnamese employees, particularly in relation to the restructuring of the state's industrial enterprises, in which a substantial part of them still worked. As a result of various factors on both sides (see, for example, Hofírek, Nekorjak, 2009a), the Vietnamese workers decided to stay, mostly on the basis of obtaining a business license and the initiation of business activities. As Hofírek and Nekorjak (2009a) show, ethnically linked social networks played an important role in the development of Vietnamese businesses, within which function the phenomena of compelling trust and bounded solidarity. These factors not only promoted business development, but also mutual unification of Vietnamese in the Czech Republic. Virtually the entire population of Vietnamese immigrants switched to business, and newly arrived migrants also selected this type of economic activity¹⁴. Their central economic activity, which continues today, has become selling clothing or general consumer goods to the majority. Gradually, from this type of activity there began to be included associated activities, such as selling groceries and traditional food (e.g. Hofírek, Nekorjak, 2009, Martínková, 2008, Brouček 2006). The Vietnamese living in the Czech Republic have, in a relatively short time, built an ethnic economy.

Economic and general structural integration, however, came with a significant deficiency in other areas of social integration, particularly in the area of relations with the majority

¹³ As regards education, apprentices in particular were given firstly practical training. Emphasis on fluency in the Czech language was not very high for workers – preparatory language courses, which were taken prior to arrival or after arrival in Czechoslovakia, were generally inadequate. The completion of the courses at that time did not help the Vietnamese improve their communication skills in Czech (Hofírek, Nekorjak, 2009).

¹⁴ For example, in 1998 in the Czech Republic employed 15 504 people in Vietnam, of which 15 454 as a self-employed. Although part of them could be involved in the system (and thus hold a position of employment), orientation to business was outright. Data Horakova (2009).

population. In this context Brouček in 2003 wrote about *the persisting ethnic and social isolation with regard to the majority population, which gradually transforms into ghettoization* (Brouček, 2003:6). Contact between Vietnamese merchants and the domestic population embodied (and continue to do so) a strongly utilitarian character and are mainly linked to business. It primarily involves communication between sellers and customers, or between employers and Czech employees. To a more limited extent, appear other types of relationships, such as hiring Czech nannies¹⁵, or entering into mixed marriages¹⁶. Communication with the authorities has been institutionalized – a part of the Vietnamese immigrant economy functions is an intermediary service, which for a fee, handles the administration connected with applying for residency in the Czech Republic, i.e. providing translations and managing the bureaucratic procedure¹⁷. The majority of Vietnamese utilize this service in their contact with the authorities (Hofírek, Nekorjak, 2009). The professionalization of mediation services lowers the need for immigrants to master the Czech language and orientation in pertinent laws. Further, these skills were not required in the Czech immigration policy. For example, until this year, the granting of permanent residence was not associated with the need to demonstrate knowledge of the Czech language¹⁸; and still, knowledge of the society is not required.

As indicated by Hofírek and Nekorjak (2009), for the majority of Vietnamese in the Czech Republic what is still very important and sometimes the single most important source of information are (ethnic) social networks. Their importance has not decreased even with an increasing length of residence. Awareness of existing official information sources (e.g. government websites in the Vietnamese language) among immigrants is low. Also, Vietnamese typically do not take advantage of the services offered by non-profit organizations. Entrepreneurial activities and efforts to achieve the highest possible earnings take up most of the free time for the Vietnamese. Otherwise, their focus is particularly on family life and family relations.

The limited contact with the domestic population is then perceived by the majority population as due to the closed-nature of the Vietnamese community. Staff at various institutions, and others, reiterate this belief (Rákoczyová, Trbola, 2008, Marisa, 2007). Limited awareness about the lives of Vietnamese immigrants raises uncertainty and reinforces prejudices within the domestic population. On the other hand, interviews with the town council staff (Ibid.), suggest that the closed-nature may also be associated with the notion of the intrinsic autonomy of Vietnamese immigrants and may serve to legitimize minimal interest and lack of integration measures by local governments. In general, the attitude of the domestic population towards Vietnamese is generally negative. In public opinion polls, respondents repeatedly refer to them as generally disagreeable. Vietnamese are placed at the bottom of the ladder of national minorities, in a poll created on the basis of declared sympathy from the majority population. Unpopularity of Vietnamese immigrants was also reflected in their own testimonies, they mentioned in the interviews, for instance, increased surveillance following entry into a shop, problems with finding housing, unpleasant customers or occasional ridicule or aggressive behaviour by Czechs (Hofírek, Nekorjak, 2009). Also in the testimonies of

¹⁵ Hiring Czech nannies is sometimes connected with attempts to provide children with the best possible acquisition of the Czech language, which is assumed as necessary for good results in school, something which the Vietnamese place a great deal of emphasis on (see Uherek, 2003).

¹⁶ According to Hofírek and Nekorjak (2009), every year in the Czech Republic several hundred of mixed marriages between Vietnamese and Czechs take place.

¹⁷ These services are performed in particular by Vietnamese - former apprentices and students.

¹⁸ Current legislation makes the granting of permanent residence conditional on knowledge of the Czech language, but only at an elementary level.

immigrants from other countries, there was some reference to negative attitudes of the majority towards immigrants from Vietnam (and Ukraine).

The question that remains is in which way the lives of immigrants from Vietnam will further develop – whether a complex process of social inclusion has been kick-started, or rather, whether the mutual distance between the Vietnamese and the majority society will deepen. It is likely that integration will be considerably affected by two major processes:

(1) A transformation of the Vietnamese immigration population has occurred in response to the economic development of recent years. This is linked to the variable nature of migration, which in response to a high demand for labour increased the flow of Vietnamese workers, usually in positions as agency workers. Economic development has also affected Vietnamese business - the failure in recent years has led some businessmen to take jobs; however, there is no reliable information about these jobs (presumably, they are positions in the secondary labour market). Further, some findings (e.g. MARISA research 2007) suggest that business failures may lead to the development of illegal activities, such as in areas of distribution and use of addictive substances.

(2) Particular characteristics of second generation Vietnamese living in the Czech Republic. The maturing generation of Vietnamese is characterized by a developed social and cultural capital, gained in particular through participation in the education system. Vietnamese parents consider success in education a high priority, and thus it plays an important role. At the same time, it is a value which the majority of Vietnamese immigrants generally appreciate. On the other hand, the second generation still carry specific physiognomic features, which continue to play an important role in the definition of "us" (the Czechs), and "them". As qualitative research of immigrants in the Czech Republic has shown, this difference continues to function as a barrier to the full integration of immigrants into society. Hence, the position of the majority is considered a key factor to full social integration of second generation immigrants, many of whom already feel at home in the Czech Republic, or even see themselves as Czech.

5.2 Agency workers: life in social isolation

Agency employment, which is associated with migration organizations and that focuses on filling labourer positions in the Czech industry has developed rapidly in recent years. The so-called work agencies were brought into Czech legislation in 2004 and their expansion and link to migration was primarily supported by the economic boom and excess demand in this segment of the labour market in the ensuing years. Currently, there are 2,500 work agencies in the Czech Republic. Agency employment is the most extensive for immigrants from the Far East, particularly from Vietnam and Mongolia; but also includes workers from other countries. A similar form of mediatory activities has been present in the Czech Republic since the nineties, with immigrants from the Ukraine (so-called clientelism). Although clientelism has certain specific characteristics, the consequent position of workers is quite similar: these people live in the Czech Republic in considerable isolation, and in connection with the employment practices of agencies (brokers) and the impact of the economic crisis, they get into a highly dependent and vulnerable position.

A study of Vietnamese agency workers in labourer positions in the Czech Republic (Krebs, Pechová, 2008) and interviews carried out within the framework of our research (Rákoczyová, Trbola, 2009, Hofírek, Nekorjak, 2009), show that connected to agency employment are illegal practices in areas such as labour law (sometimes employment contracts are not drawn or are in Czech, which the migrant does not understand; non-standard working hours; low wages and no supplemental payment for working at night or on holidays;

the manner of terminating employment; discrimination in comparison with domestic workers, etc.). Time flexibility, and particularly an interest in long working hours of agency workers, is often a common concern of companies, agencies and immigrants, who came to the Czech Republic for one purpose: to earn sufficient money. A narrow orientation on the output of labour, however, contributes to the social isolation of this group. On the job, immigrants normally work in an ethnically homogeneous environment, or in some cases among foreigners. Opportunities for establishing contact with Czech workers in the workplace, however, are limited. In other cases, they are constrained mainly due to a language barrier. Even outside of work, joint contacts are not developed: agency workers use the little free time they have to rest. Often, they are housed with other agency workers in a dormitory. Contact with the authorities is not necessary, as the agency does the administration for them. Some interpreters, consultants and agents deliberately create a relationship of dependency, which they then use to collect/charge various illicit fees (Krebs, 2009).

As stated by Krebs and Pechová (2008), what is significant in terms of social integration is the low level of awareness of these immigrants, language and cultural barriers, unpreparedness, reliance on agency, and the lack of interest within the majority society. Hofírek and Nekorjak (2009) add that in the situation of Vietnamese agency workers, their isolation is reflected not only in their relationship to the domestic population, but also in respect to other Vietnamese living in the Czech Republic.

For agency workers, and especially those from Vietnam, it can be presumed that their planned temporality will acquire a relatively long-term nature, in the order of at least several years. As demonstrated by the experience with the dismissal of these immigrants, these migrants have stayed in the country even when unemployed and suffering poor living conditions, extreme poverty and loss of legal residence. Their return to their country of origin is namely prevented by the Vietnamese agency workers being heavily in debt, as a result of immigrating to the Czech Republic¹⁹. If, before departure from Vietnam, agency workers assumed that they would have their debt paid with 1-2 years and then begin to generate savings, the reality shows that in fact, many of their earnings after deducting the cost of living, barely cover the interest on the debt, and sometimes not even that (Krebs, Pechová, 2008). Returning, however, is considered as unthinkable, because it would have a significantly negative impact on family living in Vietnam. As such, the repatriation program in relation to these migrants completely failed²⁰, yet the ability to independently manage difficult situations is very limited with regard to the above-mentioned barriers.

Czech society ignores the need to ensure at least basic integration services for this type of workers; in addition, it is unable to cope with the problematic functioning of work agencies, i.e. ensure compliance with legislation. The resolution to this situation is not the temporary suspension of work and business visas in source countries of labour migration (Moldova, Mongolia, Thailand, Ukraine and Vietnam).

5.3 Asylum seekers and refugees

Czech Republic belongs to those countries with low numbers of refugees: currently, there is only just over 2,100 refugees in the Czech Republic. The numbers of asylum seekers is also not high and in recent years continues to decline; for example, in 2008, 1665 individual applied for international protection. To obtain asylum, however, is very difficult in the Czech Republic; generally, only about 3% of applicants have been successful, while in recent years, the proportion is about 9 -10% of applicants. Furthermore, the asylum procedure is fairly

¹⁹ The agency costs in Vietnam, according to available data, are reaching 14.000 USD (see Martinkova, 2008).

²⁰ Moreover, it is open only to persons legally residing in the Czech Republic. A portion of redundant workers from Mongolia took the offer of voluntary repatriation, where apparently the phenomenon of debt is not as significant.

long, its length often takes several years. During this time, applicants live in great uncertainty, in a sort of vacuum where they would rather not make plans for future. It is an ethnically heterogeneous group – a large part of the applicants, as well as recognized refugees, come from countries of the former Soviet Union. The status of applicants for international protection and refugees is largely regulated in the Czech Republic. The social integration of individuals granted asylum in the context of Czech immigration policy may be considered as the most advanced. Nevertheless, the integration of those people is associated with a number of difficulties.

The situation of these migrants was from the beginning characterized by the need to overcome various issues and barriers. Yet, in general they lack the support of well-established regional communities. They often come to Czech Republic with very limited financial resources, they do not know the language or the culture of the host society, and they have none or only very limited social capital; additionally, there are some who have been affected by traumatic experiences or are concerned about loved ones in the country of origin.

Their initial position is characterized by the attending barriers in their access to the labour market, with a significant incentive to find paid employment. The barriers that they face in the labour market result from their low social and cultural capital, but are also institutional. In the case of asylum seekers, initially they are legally prohibited from working²¹ (till after 12 months from submitting an application, or after being granted asylum), and in other stages due to the ignorance or discrimination of employers. It is very difficult for asylum seekers and refugees to find employment, especially if they are staying in asylum and integration centres. Given the large number of foreigners in these places, there is considerable stigma and stereotyping of habitants at the centres. This is reflected in the dismissive attitudes of employers in the given locality. The difficult situation of asylum seekers and refugees, which is characterized by a very low income and an excess of free time, and the simultaneous unavailability of legal employment, supports the development of irregular practices. Local residents exploit the disadvantaged position of refugees in the local labour market, hiring them when needed, for example, when building their own houses. It is often work which these immigrants are not qualified for, nor do they have any previous experience.

After a 12 month period from their application submission, or after being granted asylum, access to the labour market from a legislative standpoint is completely open. However, because of their status in the Czech Republic, it is not simple for these individuals to find a job. As the case is, employers are not familiar about opportunities to employ refugees and some asylum seekers. In addition, we also came across open discrimination on the side of employers. Given the difficult living situation, asylum seekers and refugees are very keen to obtain work, as it would ensure meeting (at least basic) needs, economic independence, and enable them to fulfil any eventual care responsibilities. Therefore, in this situation it helps to have a definite "survival strategy", which typically involves accepting any job. In this way, asylum seekers and recognized refugees are steered into the secondary labour market, into jobs with low work quality and low wages, or in the informal economy. A portion remain temporarily unemployed or outside the labour market. The stated ways for getting incorporated into the labour market guarantee only segmented or partial social integration into the life of the host society. What is characteristic is, for example, the risk of poverty, uncertain residency status in the future (for asylum seekers), and barriers to the development of social and linguistic competencies. Immigrants compensate low hourly wages by long working hours. The lack of free time then represents a barrier to the development of social

²¹ Applicants for international protection are legislatively completely excluded from participating in the labour market for a period of 12 months from the submission of the application.

contacts outside the workplace. The potential of the working environment for the development of relations with the majority population in their case is often limited, either because of the nature of the employment (work that is socially defined as work "for foreigners") or as a result of participation in ethnic business networks, which domestic workers do not participate in.

Social integration of refugees, however, is strongly supported by some factors on the side of the host society and, some on the side of immigrants. Among the factors within the society include the functioning of a state integration program. This program combines support via rented accommodation for refugees, subsidies for the development of infrastructure in the municipalities and improving housing in municipal property, which representatives of the cities perceive as advantageous. In addition, for towns that participate in the state integration program, the Ministry of Interior actively supports direct negotiations with a city delegate. Despite minor problems (see Rákoczyová, Trbola, 2008), under this program asylum seekers are ensured accommodation²², and provided free Czech language instruction. Non-governmental organizations are substantially involved in the integration of refugees. Their activities in this area is supported both by public funds in the Czech Republic and to a significant extent also from European funds. Non-profit, non-governmental organizations among others are involved at asylum centres, where they succeed in establishing contact with asylum seekers²³. Interviews with refugees (Rákoczyová, Trbola, 2009) show that relationships with NGO workers are very important for them. They often last for many years, even after asylum has been granted.

On part of refugees, an important pro-integration role is played by their motivation to integrate linked to the decision to settle permanently in the Czech Republic. What is significant for the eventual overall success in the area of social integration of refugees is getting past the disadvantages in the labour market, which largely depends on their level of human capital, individual ability to adapt to the new conditions, and developing their social capital. In the interviews, we heard about refugees who had gradually managed to overcome the barriers and successfully integrate into Czech society, although they frequently faced long-term disadvantages in the labour market. On the other hand, such as in the case of the refugee Umar referred to by Topinka (2007), even a person with higher education who has gone through the state integration program can feel socially isolated in the Czech Republic.

6. CONCLUSION

Insufficient attention to the process of social integration may lead to a number of difficulties and problems in the lives of immigrants. At the same time, it may undermine stability and cohesion of the host society. The positive effects of migration for the receiving society may be accompanied, or even be outweighed, by the negative ones. A proportion of migrants face the risk of living at the margins of society, or even completely excluded from the host society, loss of skills, unemployment and poverty. This, in turn, leads to potential pressure on the social system of the receiving society and the mobilization and radicalization of immigrants outside standard forms of political representation (Castles, Miller, 2003). At the same time, together with other factors, negative attitudes within the domestic population may deepen. The development as a whole is then directed at increased polarization or segmentation of the society, loss of social coherence and overall social destabilization.

²² According to statistics provided by the Ministry of Interior, 1994-2008, 1296 people received housing under the state integration program. See the Ministry webpage: <http://www.mvcr.cz/clanek/statistika-integrace-azylantu.aspx>

²³ A difference is expressed here between asylum seekers and other migrants, who for the most part lack information on the activities of NGOs and utilize their services less.

It is evident that these social risks are not connected solely to migration, but rather to the question of social integration of migrants into the life of the majority society. Balanced integration of immigrants into society is the best way to minimize those risks and is a prerequisite for maximizing the positive effects of immigration in the host society. Successful integration is in the interest of immigrants, as well as the host society. Specific measures targeted on various dimensions of social integration of immigrants (such as education, housing, labour market, cultural values and traditions, social interactions and communication in everyday life, etc.) must not remain only at the formal level of recommendation of the national government. It is crucial to the effective implementation of the national strategy to motivate and involve local governments, as well as non-governmental organizations and develop communication and cooperation between stakeholders both horizontally and vertically. In the Czech Republic, there is virtually no formulated concept for the integration of foreigners at a local level. However, cities can potentially apply partial measures aimed at such integration or address specific barriers that foreigners face, and can apply a certain type of integration policy, de facto, without it being comprehensively formulated (Rákoczyová, Trbola, 2008:47). In addition, a state can use financial incentives in order to promote integration activities of the local stakeholders (municipal authorities and NGOs). Research as well as recent interviews with representatives of various public authorities reveal that the non-governmental sector is a key actor in the arena of social integration. However, financing and supporting their activities remains a long-term challenge in the Czech Republic.

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