

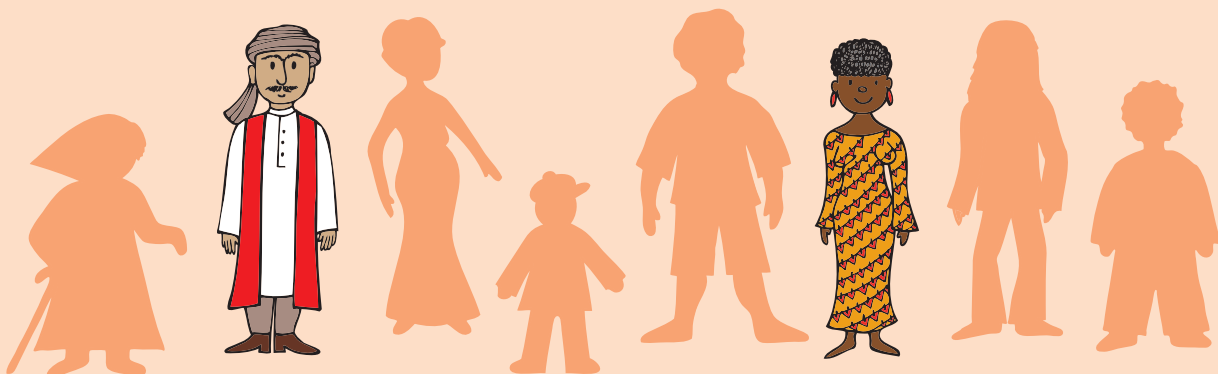
Andrea Krchová & Hana Víznerová

European Contact Group
in the Czech Republic



Discrimination against Refugees in the Czech Republic from a Gender Perspective

Facts and Recommendations





The European Contact Group in the Czech Republic (ECG) is a non-governmental organisation that promotes equal opportunities for men and women. We fight against racism and discrimination against minorities, migrants and refugees and challenges ingrained stereotypes and prejudices in the Czech Republic and in Europe.

Our focus:

- **women and labour market**
discrimination in the labour market, unemployment, home-based work, requalification and integration into the labour market after maternity and parental leave
- **migration and integration**
problems and challenges linked with integration of migrants and minorities into the majority society, different models of integration, community development, self-support activities of migrants
- **equal opportunities between men and women**
raising awareness, educations, publication and campaigns

Our activities:

lectures • seminars • interactive trainings and workshops • international conferences • multicultural groups • sociological researches • analysis • information and awareness campaigns • study visits • networking • publications and campaigns

We are a member of **the Czech Women's Lobby**, a platform of non-governmental and non-profit organisations promoting women's rights in the Czech Republic and internationally.

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DISCRIMINATION AGAINST REFUGEES IN THE CZECH REPUBLIC FROM A GENDER PERSPECTIVE

Facts and Recommendations

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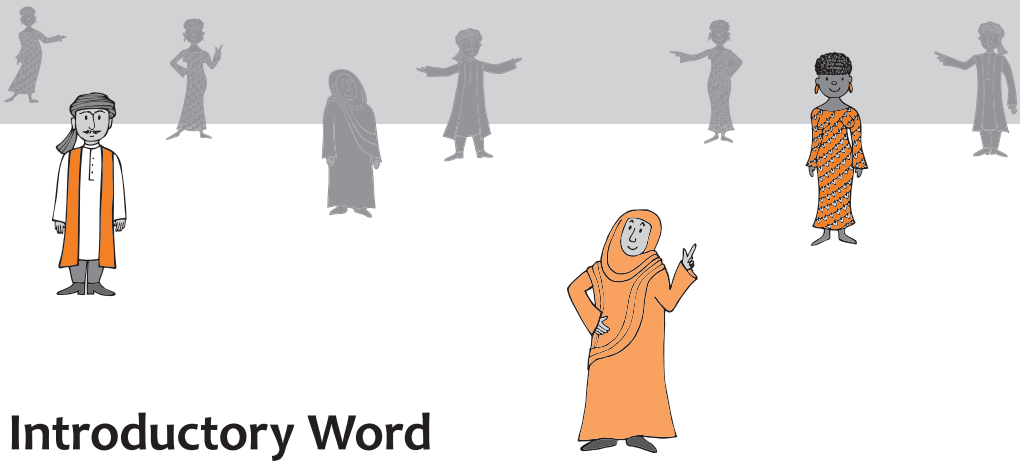
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Contents

Introductory Word.....	3
1 Introduction.....	5
2 What Does It Mean to Be Discriminated Against.....	8
3 What Is the Process of Migration and Integration into the Czech Society...	17
4 What Are the Experiences of Women and Men in the Process of Migration...	26
5 What Is It Like to Be a Refugee in the Czech Republic.....	36
6 What Refugees Know about the Czech Republic and What We Know about Them...	44
7 What Is the Importance of Knowing the Language.....	54
8 What Is the Importance of Having a Job.....	62
9 Conclusions.....	75
Recommendations & Advice.....	76
Literature & Resources.....	79



Introductory Word

My first encounter with the ECG occurred three years ago – just at the turning period in my life when our family started to build our New Home literally from nothing. So it happened that we, together with my husband and our two sons, suddenly turned up in the Czech Republic, practically without any preparation. As a consequence of a distressing political situation in Byelorussia, we were forced to leave our country and we gained international protection in the Czech Republic. Together with a heap of forms written in a non-understandable language for us at that time, we got a chance – a chance to build-up our new home, for us as spouses, and for our children. Together our family gained an unusual status of “asylum seeker”, also an amazing lottery ticket – an admission ticket for a feast of life, which may be lived without fear for the existence of our children and our own – it was our winning ticket.

One of the first people who I talked to during the morning trips was an extremely nice sidewalk sweeper who was always present in his reflex orange jacket on my way in the same time. He moved garbage containers with a pedant precision on Finská Street where we lived. He was doing it amazingly easily while he was permanently joking at the same moment and he created an illusion of our friendship by his formal wish of a good day. Back there at “home” in my past I would not even think about greeting a bypassing, unknown person. And here the ritual just got to my unconsciousness and the elementary “insignificant” morning greetings suddenly changed into a constant confirming of my existence, as if someone already knew me there and I had someone to exchange greetings with – and all of a sudden, my world did not seem to be so empty.

Soon after, I was given a chance to feel that I was not alone with my problems, thanks to an offer of ECG to take part in the International Women’s Conference, which was to take place in Kostelec nad Černými Lesy. And it was also an unofficial welcome for me for which I longed for very much at that moment. I ended my journey in that beautiful little town with a great pleasure and I met members of the organisation but also participants from more than 20 countries. Meeting the interesting participants was absolutely unique. Much new information and positive emotions gave me hope to solve problems of my family and showed me new ways and opportunities. I came back to Prague as a different person.

Since then we were in contact with EKS and we cooperate actively. I like the EKS’s approach towards surveys that it carries out. They are not only interesting but they are needed. The last project called “Discrimination against Asylum Seekers

INTRODUCTORY WORD

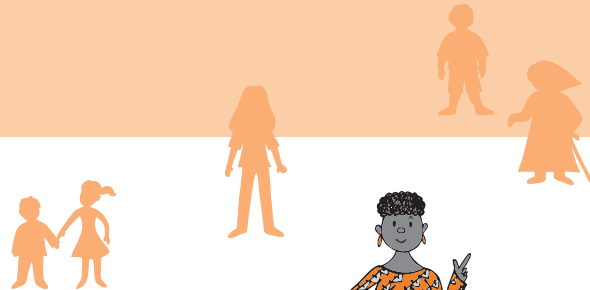
in the Czech Republic from the Gender Perspective” seemed to me untraditional because it did not put men and women respondents into typical situations but it gave them space to tell what they experience in their everyday life in their own words. “The insight” of the issue of discrimination is certainly very innovative in the field of gender studies.

In my case, the survey brought benefits in a wider sense and meaning of the word. When we answered the questions we could see, my husband and I, the men’s and women’s points of view and we often found vast differences. This exchange of opinions, which took place in our family, was interesting and enriching and I believe that similar discussions broadened views in other families as well where the survey was spread.

The general opinion regarding the asylum seekers’ problems differs from what I think about it. Thanks to my participation in the EKS’ survey, I could express my subjective thoughts regarding the issue. The gender differences are in my opinion not the crucial ones – instead they give us a chance to see usual things in unusual viewpoints. For example, evaluation of the level and grade of integration of the asylum seekers who participated in the survey project EKS may be different and at the first sight even contradictory in questioned men and women. If you open a space to all of them for a discussion, as EKS did, it shows that both groups enhance importance of different things but they both come to an agreement in the final evaluation.

I think that the process of refugees’ discrimination in the Czech Republic shall be viewed in non-traditional optics as EKS did it. I hope that their progressive approach to experience of multicultural cohabitation from the gender points of view will help to find a way of harmonious cohabitation not only to the asylum seekers themselves but also to the inhabitants of the hosting country.

Natalie




1 Introduction

In the project of “Discrimination against Refugees in the Czech Republic from a Gender Perspective”, which was carried out from July 2007 until June 2008, we wanted to learn more about refugees’ lives in our country, what preceded their forced departure from their country of origin (or from a country of their previous stay) and what kind of treatment they meet on an everyday basis. We present results of our survey investigation in this publication and we aim to describe particular cases of discrimination and rejection of equal treatment and also to record positive examples, which are characterized by gender and inter-cultural sensitive approach to persons coming from a different socio-cultural environment. Within the survey, we paid great attention to the question of what role gender played of respondents in the particular cases of discrimination.

We want to share the information we obtained with everyone who is interested in learning more about refugees’ issues. The intention of this study was to increase the general knowledge about life of asylum seekers and refugees in the Czech Republic and to bring truthful and undistorted information and thereby to break stereotypes and prejudice living in the minds of every one of us. Many recommendations and practical advices of how to eliminate this unequal treatment also form a part of this publication. They are intended not only to the state administration authorities who directly draft the laws and set forth the legal and institutional framework of refugees’ lives. Our recommendations also concern state and non-governmental organisations, which come to direct contact with refugees, but also to individuals and general public, because every one of us may contribute to making refugees feeling at home here and not as unwelcome guests.


Within the qualitative research, we used the method of deep semi-structured interviews. There were 30 interviews in total with 14 men refugees (one respondent provided an interview repeatedly as the current life experience seemed very challenging to us) and 15 women refugees.

The respondents were first addressed upon contacts from previous activities organised by the ECG (those were prevailing women respondents who took part in a multi-cultural women’s conference in Kostelec nad Černými Lesy in 2005). We gradually gained new contacts with their acquaintances, friends and family members from regions of the whole of the Czech Republic using a “snow




ball” method. Cooperation with non-governmental organisations who work with refugees and asylum applicants both in the territory of Prague and especially in the regions was another significant way of how to contact male and female respondents. So we conversed with 29 female and male respondents in total from Prague and other towns and communities from the whole of the Czech Republic. We intentionally chose places of various sizes and various distances from Prague. We verified our assumption that an offer from NGO’s side concentrates on certain degrees in Prague and other larger towns. And then in the regions and especially then in smaller towns the offer of such services is either very small or even non-existing. At the same time we could compare strategies to integrate refugees in relation to formal assistance from state authorities and other institutions or informal assistance from neighbours, colleagues from work or other bonds based on personal relations rather than formal and institutional help provision.

Respondents come from countries, which are tormented by suffer from political dictatorship. There are also people in the survey sample who come from areas where there was or continues to be an ethnic conflict. In particular, these are countries like Azerbaijan, Byelorussia, Chechnya, Kazakhstan, Ukraine, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, Afghanistan, Syria, the Republic of Moldova and Somalia.




Our respondents were granted asylum in the period between 1998 and 2007, the largest number of asylums of our survey sample was granted in 2005 and 2006. The period of their stay once they are granted refugee status seemed to be very important in the course of data collection. It was interesting that each of the respondents experienced a different period of the valid legislation, therefore some parts of their depositions and their comments will not correspond to the valid legal regulations of the Czech Republic.



A predominant part of our respondents graduated from universities. One half of them are employed, run their own business, are on maternity leave and almost one-third of the respondents is registered with the Employment Office at present. We talked to people in a productive age between 22 and 55.

Understanding in the Czech language and ability to react to questions was our condition for selection of a respondent. We did not want to distort the answers by any translations in case that a part of the sample would speak Czech and a part would not.

We led semi-structured interviews with the respondents and we had a set of questions available which we accommodated during the interview to fit each respondent individually. The interviews were recorded after an informed agreement about what they would be used for. Recordings served as a basis material for transcription from which we use quotations. We chose the method of qualitative data collection intentionally. We wanted to gain a deep, detailed, integrated picture on experience, life situations and conditions of a specific group of persons.



The publication intends to raise public awareness, as well as inform state officials, executive officers, employers, agencies, non-governmental organisations, and in particular those who are working directly with refugees. The publication is also intended for politicians who make decisions about lives of the asylum seekers and refugees on the legislative level.

We want to mediate experience of people who came to the Czech Republic to seek their new home. We will attempt to give a real evidence on conditions under which they settle here, start to learn Czech language, seek employment, new friends, raise children and learn to know a new culture, whether they really find their new home here, who and what helps them in their struggle, or as the case may be, who and what makes their situation complicated, and who puts obstacles in their way.

The first four chapters are very general. We will introduce four cross-sectional issues, which will be manifested also in three following chapters. These are focused on the most significant problems refugees have to face. Discrimination, migration and integration, gender and asylum procedure are the four general and also cross-sectional subjects for us.

Each chapter in the publication starts with a brief introduction and explanation of basic terms, which will be used in the chapter and which are good to know for better understanding of the issue. Last but not least, it is also necessary to know in what sense they are used by us. Then we will set the subject into a legal framework and we will introduce the valid legislation, which relates to the particular issue. We will get you acquainted with how the asylum seekers and in some cases also the Labour Authorities view the problem. We will share experience from foreign countries and examples of good practice in the particular area and we will conclude a chapter with recommendations and practical advices. We are convinced that each of us may contribute to a more culturally tolerant, and more gender-sensitive society. In the end, we therefore prepared several initiatives for your consideration which can inspire your everyday activities.

Three cartoon characters will guide you through the whole publication: Nia, Habiba and Murad, who you could already meet in our multicultural diary. They will always inform you about the beginning of a new chapter, introduce a section with refugees viewpoints and examples of good practice from abroad. We believe that you will find our publication interesting and useful and we hope you will find new, challenging and useful information inside.



NIA



HABIBA



MURAD





2 What Does It Mean to Be Discriminated Against



Introduction to the Issue

We will discuss the general understanding of discrimination in this chapter, we will explain basic terms and relations and we will share subjective views regarding discrimination against refugees living in the Czech Republic. We will thereby show how they perceive discrimination, i.e. unequal treatment. Particular cases of discrimination in relation to language barrier, integration to the labour market or cohabitation with majority will then be the subject of further thematically specialised chapters.

Discrimination is based upon prejudice. This is how we describe opinions or standpoints of one group with respect to another group. On the other hand, discrimination is based on real action and treatment of other persons. Prejudices survive in people's minds due to stereotype thinking, which may be based upon adopted, and frequently wrong or insufficient information. If we speak about discrimination, we have in mind any behaviour by which we can demonstrate to other person that it is not pleasant to us to talk to him or her, meet or work with him/her. Discrimination may be obvious or it may be demonstrated in behaviour of each of us in a hidden form, for example in our mimics, tone of voice, change in gestures etc.

Prohibition of discrimination is based on a principle of equal treatment of a person according to his/her personal qualities and skills, not according to membership in a certain group. Discrimination is not a problem of minorities, we all may become victims of discrimination. Both an individual and a whole group may be discriminated against.

Discriminatory behaviour may be demonstrated in various forms. If we speak about direct discrimination, we mean any situation when a certain person is treated less favourably (i.e. unequally) than other persons in the same or comparable situation upon certain discriminatory reason. Indirect discrimination is a behaviour in which a seemingly neutral decision disqualifies or gives preferential treatment to one person against another based upon specified discriminating reasons. Indirect discrimination shall not be considered if an apparent neutral decision,

distinguishing or procedures are objectively justified by a target and means for achievement of the determined target are reasonable and necessary.

Discriminatory behaviour has its roots in family environment in which we are raised, in education system. It is based upon situations, which we witness on an everyday basis, and last but not least, our near vicinity also influences us, as well as stereotype mood of our society and effects of media.

What are the reasons why a person may be discriminated against? These may be reasons the attributes of which are inherited or gained: race or ethnic origin, gender, age, health condition/disability, sexual orientation, religion or faith, nationality, political membership and other. We may encounter discriminatory behaviour in various situations: when looking for a job, at work, in a profession, in a business undertaking and other self-employment activities, in the area of social security/social care, in access to health care, education, in access to goods and services, housing or in access to political participation.

Discrimination based upon gender represents various forms of disadvantaging women and men, or more precisely, preventing them from access to sources, possibilities and chances based upon gender regardless of their individual skills and personal qualities. Gender discrimination appears in all spheres and areas of human activities – economic, social, legal, family, cultural etc. Inequality in remuneration of men and women in employment is an example of direct gender discrimination. Indirect discrimination is very difficult to prove in this field. There are frequent situations when a law, policy or practice seems to be neutral but they have negative impacts in their consequence on one or another gender.



Legal Framework

Many international treaties regulate protection against discrimination by which the Czech Republic is bound (e.g. the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination; The International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights; The International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights; The Convention the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women; The Convention on the Rights of the Child; The Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms adopted by the Council of Europe; The Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities; The Convention no. 111 concerning Discrimination in Respect of Employment and Occupation adopted by ILO; The Convention no. 100 concerning Equal Remuneration for Men and Women Workers for Work of Equal Value).

Prohibition of discrimination also arises from the Article no.7 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which sets forth equality before the law and the right for protection against discrimination out of any reasons. The Conventions of the United Nations Organisation also contain



2 WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO BE DISCRIMINATED AGAINST

provisions prohibiting discrimination including discrimination based on race, colour of skin, gender, national or ethnic origin.

The International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (no.120/1976, hereinafter referred only to the “Covenant”) contains the state’s covenant to secure access to rights secured by the Covenant without any discrimination, as well as the right for reasonable protection in case of their breach, assured by legal, administrative and legislative bodies or by other authority. The Covenant secures equality before the law and the right for the equal protection against discrimination out of any reasons, e.g. due to the race and colour of skin (The Article no.26). The Human Rights Committee is the inspection Body of the Covenant; it evaluates periodical reports of the contractual parties on measures to assure meeting of obligations arising from the Covenant. The Czech Republic submitted its Initial Report on the Obligations arising from the Covenant to The Human Rights Committee on 3 March 2000.

The International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination, 95/1974 Coll. (hereinafter referred to as “the Convention”), includes under the term of race discrimination “any distinguishing, excluding, limiting or preferring based upon race, colour of skin, gender or national or ethnic origin, the target or consequence of which is disabling or limiting acknowledgement, use or implementation of human rights and fundamental freedoms upon equality in political, economic, social, cultural or any other area of public life.” The Convention binds the contractual parties not only to prohibition and elimination of racial discrimination, but also to assurance of effective protection of victims of acts meeting its signs according to the Convention, through mediation of national courts and other authorities (Article no.2 and 5). The Convention establishes own mechanism of checking fulfilment of the contractual parties’ obligations, by which the Committee for The Elimination of Racial Discrimination is commissioned. Submission of reports on legislative, judicial and other measures leading to implementation of the Convention by the contractual parties forms the basis.

Accession of the Czech Republic to the European Union was the main impuls for constituting the anti-discriminatory law. There is very disintegrated and non-complex protection against discrimination in the Czech Republic at present, which does not correspond to the requirements specified by the EU in many areas. The anti-discriminatory regulations are at present contained in many laws of the Czech Republic. Its disunity is also demonstrated by the fact, beside others, that the scope of obligations to secure equal treatment and protection against discrimination in the individual laws (i.e. for various situations) is formulated in various ways. As well as the scope of claims, that the victims of discrimination may enforce is set forth differently in individual statutes.



We may find the general prohibition of discrimination on the highest place of hierarchically arranged pyramid of the Czech legal order (compiled in compliance with the degree of legal force of the particular regulations), in particular in the Article no. 3 of the Charter of Rights and Freedoms, which assures basic rights and liberties to all regardless their sex, race, colour of skin, language, faith and religion, political or other opinions, national and social origin, membership in national or ethnic minority, property, gender or other position.

On the legal level, protection against discrimination is regulated in most details in the sphere of labour law (The Labour-Employment Code, The Service Act, The Professional Soldiers Act, The Employment Act, Act on Service Relationship of Members of the Security Corps, The Equal Pay Act). However, the community government representatives, members of Parliament, senators, volunteers, persons executing civil service, prisoners, members of professional organisations (it concerns for example stomatologists, advocates etc.) are not protected against discrimination at their workplaces.

Directions of the European Union as well as the International Convention on Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms allow implementation of so-called “positive measures”. Those are however not regulated in detail in the Czech law.

The Czech Republic, according to the EU Directives, is obliged to commission a certain entity to support equal treatment. In the valid legal order however, there is no institution, which would be able to assure effectively equal treatment and fight against discrimination in compliance with the EU Directives. The deadline for meeting the obligation to work the anti-discrimination EU directives into the legal framework of the Czech Republic has already expired by the end of 2006. The antidiscrimination act has gradually passed through the Chamber of Deputies and Senate in 2008.

Legislation and Gender

The United Nations Organisation has been engaged in legal protection of women for several decades already. The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (1979, hereinafter referred to as “the Convention”) is an international convention concerning the rights of women, which prohibits making any distinction, exclusion or restriction made on the basis of sex, which has the effect or purpose of impairing or nullifying recognition, enjoyment or exercise by women in all areas. The Committee of UN regularly monitors development during implementation of the Convention and it organises hearings on reports submitted by the parties to the Convention.



2 WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO BE DISCRIMINATED AGAINST

Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women (1993) – or also The Vienna Declaration – presents violence committed on women as “one of the major mechanisms by which women are forced to subordinate position in comparison to men”. UN appointed a specialised reporter on violence committed against women who would collect data and recommend measures to eliminate this kind of violence and its causes.

The European Social Charter contains several specific rights of women, especially the right for equal remuneration, protection of mothers and working women and social and economical protection of women and children. Amendment Report dated of 1988 included also the right for equal opportunities and equal treatment in the area of employment and profession without any discrimination based upon sex. The Revised Social Charter includes non-discrimination clauses because of various reasons, where gender is one of them.



Refugees' Views



The refugees whom we met during our survey were forced to leave their countries of origin, their countries where they grew up and went to school and where they had their families, especially out of political reasons, which lead in many places even to war conflicts. Refugees run from consequences of political-repressive measures, or from areas where their lives were in immediate danger due to war conflicts and they seek refuge and security in a new country, they seek asylum. They do not require anything else but equal treatment in case when the Czech Republic decided to grant them asylum.¹ These experiences reflect how refugees perceive and evaluate discrimination.

“Well, I will say this, I did not experience it, the discrimination. Maybe my approach is not such because... in Russia, if you live there, everybody is discriminated, simply all are discriminated from the government...”

Sergej, Russia

Refugee's reaction to discrimination is also determined by his/her personality and the fact that he or she comes from a country where they meet with much worse treatment than “only” verbal attack. However, this is not any justification for discrimination.

“Was at work. First day I came and I heard: ‘I hate Russians.’ One woman saw me there. And I tell her: ‘It is your problem.’ (...) I am happy that most of the people

¹ You will learn more about the procedure of asylum application in the chapter “What is it Like to Be a Refugee in the Czech Republic”.



2 WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO BE DISCRIMINATED AGAINST

are normal. And it does not matter that somebody hates someone or something... I also hate beer."

Ovsana, Armenia (Russia)

We asked our respondents what they understand under the word discrimination:

"If somebody takes me let's say unequally, and in fact questions some of my possibilities and decreases the quality of something what I cannot do for example, or that does not provide me may be purposely what he would provide to anyone else on my place. In my opinion such..."

Kuzma, Byelorussia

Regarding the first question of whether they encountered discrimination, respondents frequently state that they have no personal experience with discrimination, and during the interview situations come up which they designate as discriminatory. This led us to an assumption of whether refugees are aware of their rights for equal treatment. It seems to us that refugees' feelings of conciliation and resignation are slowly growing after leaving their country of origin, during migration and within the process of application for asylum, which is together with their insufficient awareness a fertile soil for discriminatory treatment from the side of majority. If there is no reaction to unequal and discriminatory treatment and nobody defends himself or herself, the problem cannot get into a wider all-society discussion. We met with many cases where a refugee was refused to be given something which he/or she was legally entitled to. However, the person was not aware of existence of that right and he or she took the reality as it was. A university-educated man can be an example who could work at the same position part-time, but there was a precondition of the Czech state citizenship in case of full-time employment:

"Yes, the condition was the Czech citizenship. It is an interesting question, I was not interested in it because I had some other problems in my head, but it was one of the things which surprised me a bit."

Kuzma, Byelorussia

Refugees frequently get into an ambivalent position when a status of a refugee is granted to them with all rights attached to it, they are accepted in the Czech Republic, but on the other hand they beat against non-accepting and prejudice. Then they reconcile with a more or less unequal position in the society.

"It is everywhere the same, good and bad people. It is among us and among you as well. I cannot say: it is bad everywhere. I live here as well and I do not have any problem. It is only some kind of feeling sometimes, but you do not want to live with her, meet her, but you do not want. A foreigner is a foreigner, Czechs really do not like foreigners it is very clear."

Elza, Chechnya



2 WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO BE DISCRIMINATED AGAINST

“We are, of course, we have come here and we are not wanted here, no foreigner is wanted anywhere.”

Maksim, Byelorussia

Respondents answer the question of whether they met discrimination:

“I can even say that I have never met anything like that, I do not know. Czechs are very good people and I do not know, I cannot say anything not even a single thing to remember, just nothing like that... I should say, that it is a discrimination during seeking for accommodation, when you call to flat owners, then they say ‘yes’ but when they hear a Russian language, then they simply say it is rented already. Well I do not think it is a commerce, do you understand, as a person wants a foreigner or does not want a foreigner, I cannot say that it was a discrimination. I think that the problem is not that they do not want foreigners they probably have bad experience. And I cannot blame people for the fact that some foreigners leased an apartment and made a mess there and so that I cannot be angry with a person who has bad experience and does not want to repeat it so that it why it exists. (...) We just sought apartments in the advertisements and they had it specified already like: no animals, no foreigners or foreigners yes, this is what it is...”

Vanda, Byelorussia

“Surely was discriminated a lot simply because when started to talk with people when looking for a job in offices, even where people see what it is to be a foreigner, they know what comes from Russia or what it is from Chechnya, from Ingushetia, they start normally and suddenly they get uppset.”

Vakhid, Chechnya

The way majority treats foreigners is often based upon a stereotype way of thinking and prejudice. Individual qualities and skills of a person are erased; his or her identity is not taken into account. A situation of a man from Byelorussia who was granted asylum in the Czech Republic for political reasons and who is put into the same group with economic migrants, may serve as an example. Stereotype thinking doesn't not necessarily lead to discrimination, if it isn't value-shaded, i.e. in case it is neutral. A man who has good relationship with his neighbours may be an example; he appreciates his relationship, but the neighbours know nothing about his position or life situation.

“Nobody is interested, for example, neighbours are not interested, we are just Russians for everybody. Nobody makes differences.”

Stanislau Byelorussia

“Yes, there is a difference, I tell you this way, they put us all together with the Ukrainians who are here upon working visa or as a black labour or I don't know how...”

Ovsana, Armenia (Russia)



Value-shaded stereotype thinking supported by historical, but not personal experience then leads to discriminatory behaviour as experienced by a female respondent who dealt with authorities:

“I remembered everything here, when I was here at the Labour Office, I moved here,... I didn't understand any single word in Czech. And the lady looked at me, she saw Russia in my passport, and she said to her colleague: ‘She reminded me of communism, I cannot see her.’ I looked at her and wanted to say something but I did not. I pretended... I did not understand and that man saw it in my eyes and he told her: ‘You should not say such words.’ And he saw I understood.”

Elza, Chechnya

“I do not know, may be they have a right to be against terrorists, but they should not put all people into one group. They do take all people into one group. He who has black hair is a terrorist. It is not right. Not every Mohamed is a terrorist... they should understand that a man is a man, regardless his name is Mohamed or Alexander, they should take him as a man.”

Salim, Syria



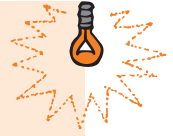
Experience from Abroad

An anti-racial campaign was started in May 2005 in the Irish town of Galway called “Towards a City of Equals”. Local government, development agencies and community associations as well as commercial sector were engaged in this campaign together. Representatives of ethnic communities played an important role when the strategy for the campaign was being prepared. It turned out that people have different opinions regarding what is racism and what is not. Therefore the evidence of those who experience it personally appeared to be inestimable. The whole process was then controlled by organisations who work directly with migrants and minorities as well as refugee communities themselves to assure that the prepared strategy was relevant in respect of their experience. Thanks to the fact that ethnic minorities representatives took part within the whole process, an access to those communities was assured in later phases of this project as well when research was carried out and consultation meeting were in progress (for more information, please refer to Galway City Partnership – www.gcp.ie).





Advice and Recommendations



- If the refugees are more and better informed about their rights they will be able to face discriminatory behaviour better and defend themselves.
- Greater awareness among Czech public about the life of asylum seekers and refugees will contribute to better understanding of their position.

What Each of Us Can Do



- Try to think whether you personally do not behave in a discriminatory way towards an individual or a group based upon your prejudice and in spite you do not know anything about him/her.
- Try to search for more information about refugees on the Internet.
- Read something about culture of a country from which people who you meet come from. Try to find why they come here, what their life situation is.
- Try to yield from your personal experience with particular foreigner. Do not adopt other people's opinions without thinking.





3 What Is the Process of Migration and Integration into the Czech Society

Introduction to the Issue

Migration in general is understood as relocation from one place to another, migration as such is connected with humankind for centuries. In the past, it was prevalently related to settling in new places, or migration related to a certain form of livelihood, which in some populations continues up to the present day. Migration cycle is thereby bound to possibilities of pastures for cattle, production of crops, occurrence of water etc. Figuratively we meet such forms of migration even in the Czech Republic as well. Today we travel to places where they offer us better jobs or where we see better remuneration of our work. Such migration is voluntary, we call it economic migration and improvement of conditions of someone's life is its purpose. It is thereby innovative. Migration occurs either within a country and then we call it internal migration, or outside a territory of a state and in such case it is called external migration. We may also distinguish between temporary or permanent migration.



Opposite attributes are related to the issues of refugees where it concerns especially forced migration. Prevalently it is migration, which is a reaction to current events in the home country. Reasons due to which a migrant decides to leave his or her home, may be of political, religious, ecological or ethnic origin. It can also be a war conflict, which endangers lives of all local inhabitants. This kind of migration is related to a loss of home, native country and often a family. This is a life situation related to chaos and necessity to make sudden decisions, the consequences of which reflect in later phases of migration and integration in a new country. For example, if somebody must leave his/her home all of a sudden, he/she does not realize what documents and certificates he/she will need in a new country to start a new life. Forced migration may be also called conservative migration. A refugee wants to preserve the same conditions of life that he or she had before the war, political, ethnic or religious persecution in his or her country of origin.

These are individual phases of forced migration in relation to migrants' experiences and feelings:

- Escalation of a problem and decision to leave
- Departure from a country of origin, journey
- Visions and expectations – selection of a country of destination
- Arrival into a country of destination (cultural shock)

3 WHAT IS THE PROCESS OF MIGRATION AND INTEGRATION INTO THE CZECH SOCIETY

A process of integration into a new society starts in the country of destination. Integration is a term widely interpreted in political, theoretical or scientific spheres. Briefly, we may see integration as a process during which an individual or a group is integrated into the existing system. The system functions according to certain rules, which are internalised by each member of that particular society. We perceive integration as an interactive process where migrants play their role on one side and the majority society plays its role on the other side.

Integration takes place on several levels (dimensions) of social life. There are certain conditions on each level, which must be all partially fulfilled if the integration is to be considered successful (Bauböck 1994). Quality and quantity of such prerequisites is different in each state entity. A summary of these preconditions should be integral and transparent, otherwise the cohabitation of majority with minorities is accompanied with larger or smaller scale of assumptions and ambivalences.

We may distinguish following dimensions of integration (Barša 1999):

- Civil and political – acquisition of rights related at the beginning with asylum (international protection) acquisition, subsequently with naturalization (acquisition of a citizenship) and thereby related possibility of political participation.
- Social and economic – access to labour market, possibilities of economic activity and thereby related self-reliance and independence on the help of state and other sources. Social integration includes both formal and informal functioning within the civil society, enabling social contact not only within migrant communities but also with the majority society.
- Cultural – learning and understanding of culture, habits and traditions of a country where a refugee decided to settle. This dimension of integration contains subjective feeling of unity with a culture with the particular country, feeling of home and safety, may be included here as well.

There are several theories of how to assure the process of integration both on the level of migration and integration policy. Following principles of integration policies are applied in Europe, however, none of these principles exists in a pure form. We can say that in each society prevails a certain model of behaviour towards foreigners:

Assimilative model applied in France is open to immigrants, it accepts them on its territory and conditions, which they must fulfil to be recognized citizens of France are obliging. There are many tools how to help foreigners to adopt French culture. On the other hand, it requires assimilation, i.e. renounces group cultural differences (e.g. the Head Scarf Law).

Pluralistic model stands on the opposite pole of an axis. It is applied in Great Britain, which is not so “friendly” towards foreigners. Differences are allowed, they are respected and taken into account, and, anti-discriminatory measures are asserted in case of need. Rights of individuals are connected with their belonging to a certain group, which defends their collective demands. Pluralism anticipates certain degree of adoption of majority culture. However, certain hierarchization cannot be sometimes completely avoided.

3 WHAT IS THE PROCESS OF MIGRATION AND INTEGRATION INTO THE CZECH SOCIETY

Differentiated incorporation (Germany) represents a model of transitional (and some say permanent) differentiated incorporation. Diversity in case of immigrants is understood as unsurpassable obstacle of integration – immigrants and their groups may become involved in the society in the economic area, the state even supports maintenance of their culture, but it is considered only as a transitional period and it shall be terminated by a final departure of immigrants from the country (Barša 1999).

If we want to cover the issue of integration complexly, we must understand that the group of foreigners living in the Czech Republic is not homogeneous. The following belong among the main factors, which subdivide the group into following subgroups: Socio-cultural area from which the migrants come from, their language skills, age, sex, length of stay in the Czech Republic etc.

Legal Framework

The Updated Concept of Integration of Foreigners came into force in 2006. It is a conceptual governmental document, which defines priority areas and activities for implementation of successful integration of foreigners living in the territory of the Czech Republic on long-term basis (it also includes group of refugees). This document was adopted by the government (The Updated Concept of Integration of Foreigners was adopted by Government Resolution no. 126 dated of 8 February 2006) is a basis for legislative measures drafting in the area of the integration of foreigners living in the territory of the Czech Republic.¹ Each ministry drafts its plans for integration policies, which are based upon this document and announces programmes for foreigners' integration support.

¹ There is no special statutory regulation in the Czech Republic regulating exclusively the issues of foreigners' integration, i.e. a regulation where integration of foreigners would be the major purpose of statutory regulation (The Updated Concept of the Integration of Foreigners 2006: 9).



Refugees' Views

Process of migration comprises of several phases. We will try to present a closer insight into what refugees must go through before they are accepted in the Czech Republic as asylum seekers.

Escalation of a Problem and a Decision to Leave

Situation when a person decides to leave his/her country and apply for international protection in another country is accompanied by strong so-called "PUSH" factors. These are influences, which have effect on decision-making in a sense of "pushing" a person from the country of his or her origin. In case of forced migration, these factors play a much more important role than the so-called "PULL" factors, i.e. influences that attract in the country of destination. "PUSH" factors may also be designated as causes for departure from a country. We asked our respondents why they had to leave their countries, what were the reasons:

"... practically why I had to leave was that because I could not go on anymore. Ad a) the national the national minority in Russia - me as an Armenian in Russia. And then the divorce and the fact I could not find any job, I could make provisions neither for me nor for my children. It seemed I would not be able to survive... and then he started to harm the children, the daughters..."

Ovsana, Armenia (Russia)

"But unfortunately it did not happen, because the situation in Byelorussia even worsened and worsened and unpleasant things happened, and I would say that bad things, which I experienced at work were not so bad for me, but when my children experienced threatening... as a handwriting expert I used to make such expertises. It was the pre-election period and I carried out expertises regarding the signatures of political parties' voters and it was rather a fake... I had 1072 objects and only 5 were correct and all the rest were fake and I put down the real results but the person ordering the expertises did not like it... they tried to investigate who signed it and when they learnt that it was me, my director was asked why he employed such a person like me, person who did not want to cooperate with the authorities..."

Venera, Byelorussia

"I left because there was a civil war for 17 years already. In particular, we had there, I do not know if you know, but there are tribes in Somalia. And we are a minority. They kidnapped my father in 2003. Since then we decided we had to go somewhere else where situation is safe. We had no chance until 2005 to get to Europe. And so most of the boda wanted to get to Europe or where it was safe. But the others could not."

Oke, Somalia



Leaving a Country of Origin, Course of a Journey

This phase is accompanied by feelings of uncertainty and also with expectations. Experiences related to removal are often traumatic and respondents usually do not want to talk about it. It includes things like overcoming long distances and illegal border crossing. Of course, we also met respondents who were lucky and could cross borders legally with their tourist visas. We also met cases when people came here to start a new life without persecution and repression but not as refugees. When their independent start was not successful for them, due to reasons which accompany migration in general (non-recognition of qualification, inability to get a legal job), they decided to apply for asylum.

This is how our respondents describe their journey:

“No. We drove, we paid for a journey and went in a car to Germany and then we came to the Czech, they said: ‘It is Germany.’”

Lena, Chechnya

“So we arrived here and before I experienced several unpleasant moments because I could not tell to anyone at work where I was leaving for, why I was leaving and I rather said because it was in autumn, a period of autumn holidays, so I told them we were going for holidays with children and I just did not come back. I even did not tell my parents because if they knew it would break their hearts because they knew nothing about the Czech asylum...”

Venera, Byelorussia

“We were four people and had only one bag, two children, husband, my sister-in-law and I really had only such a small bag. Did not need. I had only one dress. I washed it in the evening and dressed up in the morning again, it was enough...”

Elza, Chechnya


“From Chechnya who wants to escape. And by a train we arrived in Brest and in Brest there were many people from Chechnya, and it was not any easy to cross over the border, we had to wait until from Polish side the border guard like every morning at seven waited for a tram and we went to the border and then the border guard like 50 people across the border they allowed us... and the first day we were not lucky, the second day were not lucky and the third day we were lucky and crossed the border.”

Chava, Chechnya

Selection of a Country of Destination, Presumptions and Expectations


Most of the refugees did not choose the Czech Republic as a country of their destination at first. As we already mentioned before, most of the decisions are very sudden, non-thoughtful, without any clear plans.

3 WHAT IS THE PROCESS OF MIGRATION AND INTEGRATION INTO THE CZECH SOCIETY



“Yes, we arrived to Poland. And from Chechnya we ran away just only ran... just ran... just to stay alive, we did not plan to get to Czech, to Poland, to Belgium, we just had a plan to run, only to run to stay alive, because if you are put in front of a decision whether to be dead or stay alive, you choose life, you want to live, nothing else...”

Elza, Chechnya



“Well, we chose Czech Republic accidentally, it was not in fact a purpose to come directly here, because the first thing we had to do, was to leave Byelorussia, because it was not possible to live there normally at that time.”


Maksim, Byelorussia

“At the beginning I knew nothing. I knew that I would travel to Prague, Czech Republic, when I got to Dubai. At the beginning, I knew nothing back there in Somalia. But we went completely differently... someone drove us and we did not know where and which way. But in Dubai I learnt I was going to Prague.”

Oke, Somalia

“This was, let’s say, rather a good luck... because Poland is too close, it is almost that like. And further on it is too far. And Czech Republic, I tell you, it is rather a good luck, we did not know how to do it, what and how and where. And it’s just the way it is...”


Vanda, Byelorussia



“At the beginning we thought about going to America, etc., now it's too late. But a bit earlier – ten years ago, it could be maybe, now... but it is also good, it is like the Slavic mentality here in Czech...”

Ilja, Moldavia (Byelorussia)

There is a group of refugees, who decided for the Czech Republic because they already had friends or relatives there. Existing bonds to the Czech Republic make migration and integration easier.



“Well, it was the first country where they had sort of normal visa regime and Poland was closer to Byelorussia but Poland had no visa regime and any worker of Interior or prosecution or KDB could come to Poland... as if the border did not exist at all and we were afraid... at that time there were many Byelorussians there in Bohemia, I knew them... they were people I knew and also from my political party, so those people had already been there in Czech and they had the major things arranged already... and I also knew basic information what kind of things to do, what I could do, where I could go and so on.”

Stanislau, Byelorussia

“We had relatives here. We have an uncle with family here. It is like the uncle, wife and two children. They have been living in the Czech Republic for eighteen years already; they have citizenship and so on. And they left Armenia... Of course I think

3 WHAT IS THE PROCESS OF MIGRATION AND INTEGRATION INTO THE CZECH SOCIETY

that if we had no one here, I don't know but I probably would not go anywhere. I would stay there. What would happen I don't know... But it is really difficult if you have no one, you come to an absolutely foreign country, foreign language, foreign... I don't know, everything is foreign."

Ovsana, Armenia (Russia)

Arrival to the Country of Destination, Cultural Shock

After arrival in the country and filing in an application for the international protection (asylum) all applicants must spend several weeks in the detention centre either in Vyšné Lhoty or in Ruzyně. With regard to the fact that this is the first camp, this experience is not very pleasant and especially women with small children bear it with a great displeasure.

The first contact with the Czech Republic is again related to a feeling of embarrassment and with an uncertain idea of what way their future lives will take. This period is mostly accompanied with so-called cultural shock, i.e. a feeling of disorientation, misunderstanding and misinterpretation of the surrounding world. Simple everyday activities seem to be invincibly difficult.

If a family arrives separated (e.g. if the husband applied for asylum first and his wife afterwards) this period is marked a family separation and loneliness.

"When I arrived first time, I applied, I had psychological problems, because my wife and small children were in Byelorussia and I was here, thousand kilometres away and had no idea what would happen. What I would do and what would be with Czech language, what would be with the flat, job and so on."

Stanislau, Byelorussia

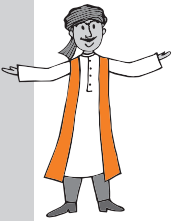
Testimony of a woman refugee who arrived in the Czech Republic after her husband:

"When I arrived to join my husband, we saw each other several days and then approximately the third day we went to Vyšné Lhoty, because I had visa only for six days, the journey had already taken me one day and I did not want to... somehow breach the laws, the rules..."

Venera, Byelorussia

Asylum procedure brings further obstacles, which are related to migration and integration. After the asylum seekers are granted international protection (asylum), they still have to undertake a long way to be finally integrated into the Czech society. They form relationships and ties in course of asylum procedure – either naturally or due to formal necessities. These bonds become fruitless once they are granted asylum and asylum seekers must release from them if they want to fully join the Czech society. Each refugee then chooses his or her own strategy of how to deal with process of integration individually, according to his or her prerequisites and possibilities. The State Integration Programme (which is a formal help from the state) as well as services and programmes, which are provided by

non-governmental organisations serve as a certain bridge, which should help refugees to step into the real life. Refugees do appreciate this help as we found out from our respondents. Nevertheless, they would prefer having their own life in as short period as possible. They have a feeling that the Czech Republic has done enough for them already and they want to be useful to the society.



Experience from Abroad

Sunrise – The Strategic Upgrade of National Refugee Integration Services – is an integration service for refugees in the territory of London. According to this scheme, each new refugee who wants to participate in this programme is assigned a social worker who will help to develop his or her personal integration plan. This plan should help him/her to integrate into the society as much as possible. The intensive work of “one to one” is conducted within the statutory period of 28 days from the moment when the asylum was granted.

The social worker concentrates in his or her first steps to assistance in areas of accommodation, health care and provision of education for children. In the same time he or she arranges provision of basic social allowances to the client and consultancy in the area of employment. Then the client is provided a long-term support in the course of one year, which is regularly revised and during which the street worker in cooperation with the client seeks to assure successful achievement of the personal integration plan.

The social worker will also help his or her client in following areas linked to personal action plan:

- housing
- integration into the labour market and consultancy in the area of social allowances – usually in cooperation with a Job Centre
- other financial consultancy
- provision of other services, especially health and education services which have not been provided yet or were changed in relation to change of residence of refugees
- English classes
- access to voluntary activities
- information regarding family reunion
- contact with a community, cultural and religious organisations

Smoother and faster integration into a new life in Great Britain is the key task of this scheme.²

² For more information, please refer to <http://www.london.gov.uk/mayor/equalities/immigration/straegy.jsp>



Advice and Recommendations

- Respecting and considering individual and group needs of asylum seekers and refugees within integration activities in both state and non-governmental organisations will contribute to effective course of integration process of newcomers.
- Full integration of refugees into the society anticipates their self-reliance and independence on help from outside.
- Support for own initiatives and activities of refugees and involving them in integration activities will fulfill the real meaning of integration as an interactive process (helping to set up a community centre as an example).



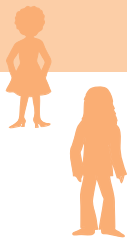
What Each of Us Can Do

As we have already mentioned, integration of a newcomer is not based only on the fact whether he or she will fully accommodate to the Czech society a give up his or her cultural habits and specifics. We understand integration as a bilateral process, which also depends on the way majority treats foreigners.

Robert K. Merton distinguishes four basic types of standpoints and treatment of minorities by members of the majority society. Try to classify which type you belong to. Does your conviction correspond to what you really behave like?

1. “Unfailing Liberal” – does not have any prejudice in respect of minorities and refuses participation in discrimination, even though it brings a personal risk to him/her.
2. “Accommodating Liberal” – considers himself/herself as a person without prejudice, but refuses swimming “against the stream”, if he or she should pay for it. When there is a protest for example against a black/Roma family to move in their street he/she will provide a silent support because the fact would devaluate market price of his/her own house.
3. “Cautious Racist” – though he or she has prejudice against minorities, statutory pressure or financial interest lead him/her to equal treatment.
4. “Active Racist” feels strong prejudice against other ethnic groups and really discriminates them.





4 What Are the Experiences of Women and Men in the Process of Migration



Introduction to the Issue

The name of the project (as well as of this publication) indicates our essential point of view. We chose to examine the question of what life is like for male and female refugees in the Czech Republic. The “gender perspective” is an approach to the process of forced migration and integration of refugees, which includes above all awareness of the fact that women as well as men are subjects of an uneasy life situation. This situation is caused by the forced departure from their home country and an everyday struggle for a “normal” life in a new society, new culture, in a new country. This view aims to understand the way both women and men adapt to this change, understand their feelings and see the obstacles and problems they must overcome.

The concept of gender¹ is different from the term sex. Gender is a socially and culturally constructed category, which expresses the fact that the meaning of the terms man and woman is not permanent and unchangeable. They are always created in a certain cultural and social context and their content, i.e. what it means to be a man/woman (what roles, acts, norms and expectations relate to a man and to a woman) change in time and in various cultural and social conditions. The term gender implies socially conditioned cultural differences, prejudice, stereotypes and specific position of women and men. The term sex is biologically specified and its content does not change in relation to time or place. The concept of gender expresses on the other hand the fact that social roles, expectations, claims and code of conduct attributed to men and women may be different in various cultures and societies (Věšíňová-Kalivodová, Maříková eds. 1999).

Gender roles, which attribute different work, obligations and responsibilities to women and men, are formed and strengthened within the process of education and socialization, in family, school, employment, in a context of social and cultural

¹ The word “gender” in literal translation means “a (grammatical) gender”. Despite the fact that this word has many meanings in Czech, however it does not exactly catch the principle of the original concept of gender, and therefore this term is not translated in the Czech environment (see Věšíňová-Kalivodová, Maříková eds. 1999:9).

4 WHAT ARE THE EXPERIENCES OF WOMEN AND MEN IN THE PROCESS OF MIGRATION

values and norms. We are presenting here conclusions from a research carried out by Margaret Mead. These were published in a book called “Gender and Nature in Three Primitive Societies” (1935) and focused on analysis of socio-cultural conditionality of a men’s and women’s roles in three native tribes in New Guinea. Settlements of these three tribes were not far away from each. Despite their geographic proximity they were significantly different in the understanding of a man’s and a woman’s personality: “Arapesians populating mounting areas allegedly ignore human tendency to evil, men and women are being naturally generous, sensitive and willing to cooperate. (...) Their loving care and fascination by small children are exemplary. Fathers play equal role as mothers in upbringing of children. A cannibal tribe of Mundugumors is an opposite of hypersensitive Arapesians. Its members live in a world filled with permanent animosity among members of the same sex. (...) Mundugumors do not distinguish between mentality of men and women, members of both sexes are aggressive, brutal, combative, competitive and jealous. Men of the Champuli tribe live... especially for their art; almost each of them can carve, paint, dance or carry out craftwork. Men pay great attention to preparation of costumes and masks for festive ceremonials. Women hold real power, they control fishing and trade and they behave in a very energetic and dominant way.” Margaret Mead was convinced that her researches in New Guinea proved cultural conditioning of men’s and women’s role in a society (Budil 2003:44).

The gender affiliation determines the position of women and men in a particular society. Gender isn’t however the only category which influences position of men in a certain social environment. There are other inherited and acquired statuses like age, race, ethnicity, class, sexuality, or religious and cultural affiliation, which can interact as well. Our social status and opportunities are determined by interconnection of all these categories. It is important to realise that certain categories are reasons for discrimination and unequal treatment and their “accumulation” places a person at a disadvantaged position in which he or she shall face multiple discrimination, obstacles and limited opportunities for equal integration into the society.

How can we determine gender perspective in the area of forced migration and integration of refugees? The fact that gender risks, dangers and threats, which women and men must face within this process are not taken into account is a great problem (Buijs ed. 1996). This ignorance can be found even on the level of governmental concepts, integration policies and practice – refugees are still perceived only as men-refugees or men with their families (Szczepaniková 2005:4).

Migration influences gender roles and relations in the sense that it strengthens and deepens the traditional roles and inequality or, alternatively, it changes the gender roles. Increased employment rates of female immigrants in comparison to women in their country of origin may serve as an example. However, this begs the question of whether there is true emancipation if these women are joining the labour market. The “double workload” that women have to bear (the fact that women are in charge of the care and upbringing of children and unpaid



household work in most cases, on top of a work schedule outside of the home) is another continuous problem.

Gender differences are manifested both in public and private spheres within the integration process into the new society. Changing women's and men's roles in a family is a frequently discussed topic, which is considered as a consequence of (not only) forced migration and integration into a new society. This situation is especially difficult in the area of refugees because the long period of waiting and inactivity in the isolated environment of the refugee camps. This experience often bears down on men, causing depression, particularly if they come from countries where strong patriarchal arrangement of the society exists (i.e. where the man represents a "head" of the family, the family's "breadwinner", who is expected to provide for the family's needs). These roles cannot be fulfilled when you live as a refugee. It is a very uneasy journey for both men and women to cope with a new situation and changes in their lifestyle (usually very different from the way of life in their country of origin) also in relation to the change of gender roles both in the family and in the society.

Legal Framework

The already mentioned Convention relating to the Status of Refugees (The Geneva Convention) from 1951 is the basic international legal document in the area of refugees and asylum seekers. This document however did not reflect the fact that gender specific threats, dangers and violence exist due to which both women as well as men are forced to run and seek safety in another country (for example a problem of domestic violence in countries where it is not legally regulated, sexual violence etc.). Situation has changed in recent years in many accepting countries: for example, Canada, Australia, U.S.A. or UK adopted recommendations to "conscious gender" guidance of asylum procedure and evaluation of the asylum claims (Szczepaniková 2005:4).

The Czech Republic has however adopted none of the particular gender sensitive measures in its policies and concepts. The National Concept of the Family Policy (2005) solves specific problems. Though it concerns women immigrants only partially, it offers clear and concrete concepts. The Concept of Integration of Foreigners touches gender issues only in some areas. However it does not resolve any problematic area or situation and it does not propose any particular procedure of how to eliminate drawbacks in assertion of equal opportunities within integration of foreigners. The concept does not provide any complex outline of particular measures, which would lead to equal position of foreigners.

The asylum legislation defines so-called endangered groups of asylum seekers (those who claim international protection).² “A special attention should be paid to these groups within the period of asylum process and during their stay in refugee and integration camps. “The manager of a refugee or integration camp shall take specific needs of asylum seekers into account, if this person is a minor without accompaniment, a person younger 18 years, a pregnant woman, a handicapped person, a person who was tortured, raped or underwent through serious forms of psychological, physical or sexual violence, and other persons that need special treatment.” says the law on asylum (Act No. 325/1999 Coll. on Asylum as subsequently amended, section 81).



Refugees' Views

We alluded to many areas during our interviews, in which specifics related to gender affiliation became evident. Men and women in the process of integration into the Czech society meet similar obstacles. However, there are situations in which gender affiliation manifests more significantly; and women and men are forced to face different risks and problems. One example of this is the arrangement of gender roles within a family and the division of work and obligations reflects in approach to services and activities. This division is necessary for successful and equal integration into the society (access to education, Czech language courses, joining the labour market, access to information, to resources, and economical self-reliability, etc.).



The asylum procedure is a period of overcoming obstacles and limitations, either on administrative and legislative level (e.g. limited access to services and resources or employment) or in everyday life. It is very difficult to meet important needs and fulfil usual roles of women and men in such conditions.

One of the female respondents described impacts of limited access to health care on pregnant women in the asylum procedure. She recognised importance of being a refugee and not an asylum seeker especially in relation to care for children



² They represent a special category of clients from the caretakers' point of view. These are clients who are disadvantaged in comparison to the others and also more vulnerable. Children, minors and juveniles without accompaniment of a statutory representative, single women and mothers, incomplete families, seniors and physically, mentally or socially handicapped persons belong to this group. The Refugee Facilities' Management adopted necessary measures, which shall secure necessary protection, satisfy their individual material needs and differentiated social and health care to such persons residing in the asylum facilities. The Refugee Facilities' Management decided for implementation of a project called Strategies of Internal Safety in Asylum Facilities, the objective of which is systemization of care for the aforementioned groups of asylum seekers. Refugee camps are therefore divided into two zones, a standard and a protected one, which operates in different regime (<http://www.mvcr.cz/ministerstvo/suz/sluzby.html>).



and their future life (this theme was also discussed in interviews with other men and women refugees who came to the Czech Republic with their children).

“... because in my case becoming a regugee meant also one chance, to register myself with a doctor. I felt I was pregnant with Alexandra and it was terrible but the law was different and asylum seekers were allowed to visit only certain doctors because there were such lists and appointments could be made only according to the lists. So when I really needed to see the doctor because I wanted to make sure that everything was all right, I suddenly found myself in a situation that I knew that I had a decision on refugee status but I could not prove it because I had not got the papers and could not register for health insurance like normal because had not got the papers in my hands. I needed it necessarily and I had to telephone to somebody permanently and explain it and always the men for example, the men listen to me on the phone asked me why I needed it so badly. But I could not tell them. I said well we need it and I felt embarrassed and bad as it took about two months you would not get the papers immediately in your hands and you must wait like police if wants to have the passport processed and so on. So it was rather sort of awaiting end of trouble. No joy out of it, happiness arrived of course, I got luck, but no, you do not feel it that way. You feel rather it is the end of regular routine trouble, such stupid little things which trouble your life and life of your children.”

Venera, Byelorussia

In further chapters, we will demonstrate how particular areas of discrimination and unequal treatment apply to gender and where possible barriers limit and disadvantage men or women in their effort to build their new life. These are especially common in the areas of working life, access to information and knowledge of Czech language.

Following paragraphs belong to refugees whom we approached in our research, their experience with overcoming obstacles and coping with the new way of life and changes in relationships and in family as well as their reflection upon the position of women and men and interpretation of gender roles in society:

“I think that it is even more difficult for a woman because women experience more of those discriminations. But I think that it is easier because woman is more flexible and adaptable than man. So I take it as equal. Men have their troubles and I think that men are less successful than women because women are used to the fact that they must make an effort right from the beginning rather than men and it goes through the social system in the same way in Byelorussia, Czech Republic, Germany, or for example in America. So I think that in the end women develop more effort and they are more successful in the I' d say integration but only because of their harder physical effort and their adaptability. I think that this is the difference.”

Venera, Byelorussia

“I think that the bad experiences of refugees are in their own families. Because well women must adapt as soon as possible because they must take care of their children.

4 WHAT ARE THE EXPERIENCES OF WOMEN AND MEN IN THE PROCESS OF MIGRATION

And men do something all the time, still at work. And it is complicated with men. So I think that the major problem is in family between spouses because woman as if she knew right from the beginning that there is no time to wait for anything, to be upset, she just has to do anything, work, seek for job, she must put children somewhere, and it is in her mind all the time and she has not got thoughts like I am useless, I know nothing, I won't manage, I cannot cope with anything."

Jelena, Russia

"... the men, the men have some depressions out of it, and so as if they were in sort of trans for some time, but nothing else can be done, you must go on anyway... your family must live on something and something and something, and live somehow, so therefore probably husband is like in trans, so his wife comes to his place and must do something... that's the way things are. And I tell you frankly, that the thing we had as a family, we just had with my husband, the periods changed, the times when I was to make living for our family, and then he made living, I had nothing and then the other way round... It was sort of a rotation in our family... I think that it does not matter in a family whether it is a man or a woman and so because both have their duties and it is great... when my husband had a bad period, I made living for the family. When I had bad period, nothing happens, nothing like that."

Vanda, Byelorussia

There are several factors, which influence change of gender roles. We will introduce two of them, which we think have the greatest influence. Change of socio-cultural environment is one of them. It is a great challenge for a family coming from a society where roles of men and women are perceived in a very traditional way, i.e. woman should take care of the household and man is the breadwinner, to face the fact that Czech women are economically active and emancipated. Economic pressure and difficulties, for example when a man is unemployed, is not paid well enough or his qualification is not accredited or he is not able to make living for his family due to insufficient knowledge of the Czech language, both these factors lead to the fact that woman will start to work and man stays home and cares for their children. If this arrangement differs from habits of their previous life in the country of their origin, it is difficult for both of them to deal with this change. As one of our respondents told us, he finally appreciated this initially radical change. As he stated, he especially appreciated being able to share troubles related to bread winning for the family with his wife and the common responsibilities brought him a feeling of liberation.

"The hardest was that we changed, but I even cannot say what was hardest. For me that we changed such an internal approach and habit between us in our family, because we had different traditions there: I worked as if more and made money and my wife was at home taking care for our kids and me. And each of us had a sort of specific role and fulfilled it well. And we were both or at least I think, both happy. Or at least I surely was. And she as well. And here everything changed because I could not fulfil my role and one had to work to make money, for the rent and my wife



could not stay home and take care for the daughters etc. etc. Such a pressure has been exerted upon us that we had to work both and all the time. And everything changed. The roles as well of course.

(...)

And then what I did not like much I finally understood. We had different roles there, well, different roles in family for a man and a woman. And now I have already coped with it, I think. Women have different life here. It brings them some advantages as well of course, but it takes them something away at the same time, because then a woman for example as if independent, has a good job or builds up her carrier, so it is difficult in the relationship. I am surprised of it and personally, for the foreigners, because they had different habits, they saw their parents and they already lived in that for some time there and now it is quite a big change...

(...)

Simply it is such a quick change, radical change and not many can bear it. Women maybe deal with it a bit better, because you are already trained for it, you can cope with changes better. But men, when I look not only at myself but at my friends they just cope with it with difficulties, I mean changes in the relationship between each other etc. they are changing. When somebody comes and starts working here, but women here are given this chance, many women as if start a freer life. Well, independent. Well money is made by women. And this is what men do not like.

(...)

But then I found advantages in it because if you cannot change anything you must find advantages in it and get used to it. When I got used to it I also understood men I knew who were not responsible enough in their lives. In the beginning when I started to understand, I experienced such a feeling of liberty, I experienced it: 'I need not to be in charge of it now.' (...) And I could devote more time to myself in this case. So I liberated myself. Because until that time all my thoughts and feelings were only to care for my family."

Sergej, Russia

Conditions of existence for men and women refugees and dealing with difficulties related to orientation in a new country without a background impacts their partnership/marital relationship. In our interviews, we came across a story of a married couple who got even stronger through the emigration because they supported each other:

"We supported one another. And I tell you it brought us together. And simply just the family."

Vanda, Byelorussia

However, there is also the story of a woman whose marriage broke. It was too difficult for her husband to overcome such a significant fall in his professional career and standard of living that he finally decided to return to his home country:

“My husband did not stand it here. (...) He tried to work, he worked in a dairy, he was working overtimes, he was paid low money, he was so tired every day, because of hard physical work. It was difficult for him to get used here, to change his way of life, which he had with me. We, women, get ready for it lot easier rather than men. (...) No, it was difficult for my husband here to get integrated, and he said: ‘If the diploma cannot be accepted.’ He wrote applications for job... May be he would get job there, but they refused him also. Why? Because we are not citizens but only citizens can work there. (...) And it was difficult for him to find ta job, an employment.”

Elmira, Kyrgyzstan

Experience from Abroad

In Schleswig-Holstein, the Interior Ministry commissioned a gender analysis of integration courses: was there equal access for men and women? Contrary to expectations, the analysis revealed that a higher percentage of women than of men participated in the courses and additional incentives were needed for male rather than female migrants. The reasons for men and women to follow language training were almost the same: they wanted to learn German primarily for use in the labour market, to communicate with authorities, and to talk with neighbours. Moreover, men and women had very similar results in the initial test before starting their language course, excepting ‘classical’ guest workers with 20–30 years of residence (Handbook on Integration for policy-makers and practitioners 2004).

The Citizenship and Immigration Canada (CIC) has introduced in 2005 a requirement to report annually on the impact of relevant asylum and immigration legislation and the corresponding regulations from the perspective of gender-based analysis (GBA). The legislative requirement to report on gender-related impacts is unprecedented in federal statutes.

GBA is not a stand alone activity or product. While it is an ongoing analytical process that supports more informed decision making and better public policy, it represents only one aspect of the analysis undertaken in policy formulation, program development, management and evaluation. Gender impact analysis focuses on important social and economic differences between men and women and different groups of men and women over their life cycles, and seeks to examine existing and proposed policies, programs, and legislation to ensure that they are having their intended effects and producing fair results.

Based on lessons learned from previous refugee group processing initiatives, the Resettlement Program undertook a review of the gender and diversity impacts related to the future arrival of 800 Karen refugees from Thailand, expected in the fall of 2006 and in early 2007. This group represents CIC’s third group processing initiative, a process whereby a group of refugees is accepted as Convention refugees as a group rather than on an individual basis. By conducting a GBA of the



Karen refugee group resettlement project, CIC hoped that such an analysis would help to mitigate challenges that arise throughout the resettlement continuum.

The GBA for the Karen refugee group processing initiative identified factors, implications of these factors, and potential mitigating strategies for the first two stages of development: the preselection and post-selection stage. During the preselection stage, the possible gender and diversity issues were analyzed – based on the initial United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) group profile – and studied how they might be mitigated. Factors addressed included issues related to cases of women-at-risk, single, female-headed households, risk of permanent separation of family members, issues linked to age, implications of large numbers of de facto dependents, and the possible consequences of admissibility screening and selection of refugees with high needs. This process helped identify possible challenges and issues in advance of the group’s selection and played an essential role in raising awareness about the group and the individuals who comprise it. This analysis was also forwarded to UNHCR who is responsible for on-the-ground selection of refugees for governments with resettlement programs.

CIC also undertook a preliminary gender-based analysis of data collected from individuals eligible to make a claim for refugee status and who entered Canada under the Safe Third Country Agreement signed by Canada and the United States in 2002 and which came into force in 2004. In addition to the Department’s legislative commitments to GBA, the Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration recommended that “GBA be part of the ongoing monitoring of the Agreement to ensure that victims of domestic violence are not adversely affected.” Therefore, in light of stakeholder concerns about how the Agreement may affect women and girl refugee claimants, and the Government’s commitment to incorporating gender impact analysis into public policy development, this section provides a starting point for an ongoing gender-based analysis that will inform the various review processes associated with the Safe Third Country Agreement. The objective of this preliminary gender analysis is to establish a baseline of data in order to track gender impacts and trends over time (Annual Report to Parliament on Immigration 2006).

In December 2000, the British Immigration Appellate Authority launched its Asylum Gender Guidelines for use in the determination of asylum appeals in the UK. Their objective was to assist judiciary at the Immigration Appellate Authority (IAA) in fully considering all aspects of asylum seekers’ claims to international refugee protection and ensuring that the gender of asylum seekers does not prejudice their application. It turned out that most of the rules and guidelines, according to which the asylum applications were evaluated, took to account only men asylum applicants and women were disadvantaged very frequently, or more precisely their reasons were not recognized. The asylum legislation did not completely take specific situation and needs of women-applicants into account and assessed them only from men’s points of view and based on men’s experiences. Secondly, procedural and evidential requirements, which have to be submitted in the course of the asylum procedure, are not equally accessible to men and women and women are disadvantaged in this respect (www.ein.org.uk/iaa).

4 WHAT ARE THE EXPERIENCES OF WOMEN AND MEN IN THE PROCESS OF MIGRATION

These guidelines build upon similar initiatives and documents, which were published in other countries. These are special materials on protection of women – refugees: “Guidelines on the Protection of Refugee Women, 91; Sexual Violence against Refugees: Guidelines on Prevention and Response, 95), which investigate specific problems and needs of women refugees, including equal access to resources in refugee camps, problems of female victims of sexual violence from military personnel and the need for gender-sensitive interviewing and procedural requirements (www.unhcr.ch/).

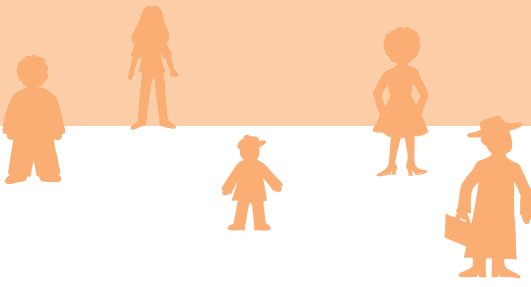
Canada was the first country to formally issue guidelines related to women’s asylum claims (Guidelines on Women Refugee Claimants Fearing Gender-Related Persecution; www.irb.gc.ca/human_rights/hrp_reports_mainhp.htm/) followed by the United States (Considerations for Asylum Officers Adjudicating Asylum Claims from Women; www.state.gov/global/) and Australia (Guidelines on Gender Issues for Decision Makers, 1996; www.austlii.edu.au/) (Berkowitz 2000).



Advice and Recommendations

- Social work with asylum seekers and refugees should be based on gender and culturally sensitive approach.
- Gender sensitive measures in the area of asylum procedure and integration programmes should be introduced to support integration of refugees into the society.
- Equal opportunities policy must be fulfilled in practice.





5 What Is It Like to Be a Refugee in the Czech Republic

Introduction to the Issue



Who is a refugee? What is the position of a person who claims international protection in the Czech Republic and what precedes the moment he or she is granted asylum. We will answer these and other questions in the following text. We will also show how refugees experience the period of waiting for asylum and the moment of its granting, what is their legal status and what is their real position in the society.

A refugee is, according to the Convention relating to the Status of Refugees (1951), a person who reasonably fears of persecution due to racial, religious, national reasons and because of affiliation to a certain social or political group; who is living in the country outside of his/her residence, and cannot or does not want to go back home out of the fear from persecution.

A person who intends to claim asylum fills in an application after arriving to the Czech Republic in order to be granted an international protection (asylum), and he/she is thereby granted a status of an asylum seeker and asylum procedure is started. The applicant stays in the first instance in a detention centre, where he/she must stay until the end of the initial procedure (a period of approximately three weeks), which comprises of identification carried out by the Foreign Police, complex health examination and passing through the first interview on reasons of his/her application. The asylum seeker can then stay in a refugee camp or in a private accommodation. Department of Asylum and Migration Policy of the Ministry of Interior of the Czech Republic is the sole body, which decides upon asylum granting. Once they are granted asylum refugees can use the possibility of temporary residence in asylum integration centres.

Refugees, i.e. persons who have been granted asylum have formally almost the same rights and obligations as citizens of the Czech Republic. These are rights and obligations which are related to a permanent residence status in the territory of the Czech Republic (with one or two exceptions – refugees do not have active and passive voting right and they cannot be employed in the state administration, because these function require a Czech citizenship). Refugee has an equal access to social system and to the labour market, health care, education etc.

Once a refugee is granted asylum, he or she can access the State Integration Programme (SIP), which is aimed to help refugees in their integration into the society. They are offered both free preparatory language classes and support with finding a place to live within this programme.¹ Originally there was only one way to get a subsidised accommodation – refugees could rent a state-owned flat. Nowadays there are three options within the SIP. Either you can rent a state-owned flat as we already mentioned above (option no.1), or you can get a state contribution to pay your rent (the whole amount or a part of it) (option no.2). In 2005 a third option has been introduced into practice (option no.3), which comprises acquisition of a rental flat. These flats were built within the programme of “Rental Flats Development Support for 2005” of the Ministry for Regional Development of the Czech Republic. A refugee who entered the SIP has a possibility to choose one of the aforementioned options. This process brings along many problems in reality. Apart from others these are unclear rules related to allocation of these flats or complicated administrative procedures of rent contributions.

Legal Framework

The Czech Republic started to grant international protection (asylum) in 1993. In 1993, the Czech Republic adopted the Convention relating to the Status of Refugees (adopted by the UNO in Geneva in 1951). The Czech Republic stood up for the Convention in 1990. The Convention relating to the Status of Refugees (or the Geneva Convention) is a basic legal document defining refugee’s status and rights. It is based upon the Article 14 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights: “Everyone has the right to seek and to enjoy in other countries asylum from persecution.” The Convention is a legally binding document for the Czech Republic.

The Asylum Act no. 325/1999 valid from the 1st January 2000 is a basic legislation in the Czech Republic. It has been amended several times. This act regulates asylum procedure in the Czech Republic in compliance with other international documents. It is focussed especially on foreigners claiming international protection in the Czech Republic, the course of asylum proceedings, asylum seekers’ and refugees’ rights and obligations, care of asylum seekers and the State Integration Programme.

¹ Implementation of the State Integration Programme in the area of housing is based upon government resolutions, which are always adopted for that particular year. Ever since the SIP has been introduced, this specific part underwent the most significant changes.



Refugees' Views

Problems, which we will discuss in this chapter, will lead us through the period of asylum claiming, moment of its granting and life experiences of new refugees. We will focus on two important areas in refugees' lives, which are important in the process of adaptation to a new environment. These are areas of housing and economic (non-)activity.

Asylum seeker's life is full of permanent insecurity, long passive waiting, lack of hope and worries.

"I remember the only feeling from that period, it was uncertainty, because you don't know what will be tomorrow, what decision you are going to get. You simply wait that each moment they may normally banish you from here."

Maksim, Byelorussia

"...sometimes I had a whole week, a whole week when I did nothing in the refugee camp. And now I go to work or to school as well and it is good for me... that I do something. I feel like being lot better."

Oke, Somalia

Asylum seekers can use the opportunity of living in the refugee camp or they may decide to find a private accommodation. Both possibilities entail troubles. It is possible to take advantage of financially affordable housing on one side, but it also means a loss of privacy.

"And it was quite long three years of waiting, wasn't it? R: I cannot even tell you how it was. It was so long, in the end I was completely tired. I could not wait so long. I was just repeatedly going to the refugee camp, in (name of a town, author's note) there is, there is a director of asylum seekers. And I repeatedly forced him: 'Tell me yes or no. I am really tired of it.' Do you believe, when a man lives, and I live alone now, but when you have to live there... when it is dirty, when there are bad people, and there are good people, people are not all the same. And I had to take shower with them and share kitchen."

Elza, Chechnya

They may choose a more economically demanding option on the other hand, but they have to bear in mind the fact that asylum seekers cannot work legally for one year ever since they apply for asylum. Living in a private flat brings along administrative complications and a necessity to quickly adapt to a new environment. Asylum seekers are very often without any help in such case and thus they are forced to become independent.

"No, because asylum-seekers just could not turn to the Employment Office because they could not be registered with the Employment Office. It is, it was such a group of people, which was separated from a normal life."

Venera, Byelorussia

5 WHAT IS IT LIKE TO BE A REFUGEE IN THE CZECH REPUBLIC

Asylum seekers cannot work for 12 months since applying for asylum. This provision is meant to prevent migrants from misusing the asylum procedure for economic benefits. But it brings refugees into the situation when they lose their everyday duties, they become economically dependent on state allowances or they work illegally.

“When I was an asylum seeker, for example the first year the asylum seeker cannot work. It means that for one year, which is 12 months, must go to canteen, sleep, and it is not pleasant at all. It is better if anyone of us has some job. It does not matter that the refugees got work, anybody. When they do something the first year. Provided by the state or by the camp, it does not matter, at least to collect something or go to school. There are no schools and no Czech classes here.”

Oke, Somalia

“But when I waited for asylum, nobody could give me normal work, because I did not have any normal long-term visa. Also a problem. You don’t need to work. I want but nobody employs me. I made several steps, I wrote applications for example in a shop, there, there, there. And they told me: ‘Oh, a visa for one month, I am sorry, I cannot.’ They adopted a new law and prolonged the period of visa up to two months, but nobody accepts it here, at least one year. We cannot work. Also a problem with those to the asylum and already got asylum, because the one month visa did not give you right to work, to travel, absolutely nothing.”

Stanislau, Byelorussia

It is a great relief once you receive the news that you have been granted asylum. People we interviewed spoke very often about feelings of joy and happiness, closing of “one chapter of their life” and about a new beginning and hope that they would finally be allowed to “live like normal people”.

“Well... the fact that I had been granted asylum meant for me personally that I could finally make my decisions alone... what decision to make... I knew that I could start working. And I knew that I had a right to get a job. (...) That somewhere would not give me a job it all came later but at that time... do you understand, when we arrived to Foreign Police, we were given passports, documents and the policewoman told us: ‘Well, now you have the same rights and obligations like the other citizens. You just cannot vote and do work for the police.’ This was such a feeling. I said – finally! It was such a nice start... and then of course we had some time, about three months, the language, if you learn language etc. And then it went on. Rights and obligations, yes, you have them written on a paper, but if you come to... an office.”

Ovsana, Armenia

“So for me it meant the end of uncertainty and in fact I already knew what my next goal would be, that I just must try hard to integrate as much as possible into the Czech society, it means to go back to my occupation, to manage Czech language



5 WHAT IS IT LIKE TO BE A REFUGEE IN THE CZECH REPUBLIC

on such level to be able to make it. So it surely was a nice feeling, good feeling and I was happy I was granted asylum.”

Kuzma, Byelorussia

“It surely changed the situation, I knew already what I would do tomorrow, when I did not have the asylum I lived one day, the day ended and I did not think of tomorrow, day after tomorrow, I just did not know anything about my future. Certainly, finally from the psychological point of view it was very good.”

Vakhid, Chechnya

“I felt very well myself. I was happy when I finally got the asylum. And it meant that I really may stay in the Czech Republic, that I need not fear... that I am safe, that I have right to live in the Czech Republic for example. I was very scared before, that I might get a negative response or I was afraid that I had really nothing.”

Oke, Somalia

If a refugee decides to enter the SIP, he or she is entitled to free Czech language courses and also a chance to obtain “integration flat”. He or she may, for a transitional period, use the accommodation in integration asylum centre. Respondents use various possibilities to find a private accommodation.

“We also quickly left the integration centre, we got a flat, because we did not sit and wait, we were writing letters, we were active, we wrote letter, we wanted to have our own life and leave it all behind, because life was hard there in those camps, in the integration centres. It is not good there.”

“We got a flat from there and we were very happy, that everything was already over, all the camps, we moved away...”

Elmira, Kyrgyzstan

Refugees consider private housing as a basis for their life in a new country and full integration into everyday life.

“I see one more problem with housing that a person who wants to settle down in the Czech Republic, that a flat is one of the basic things to have here. So to make it a bit easier. (...) Housing is a principal thing, so because the option number two, which is proposed within the State Integration Programme, is a nonsense. It means that one must find someone and lease a flat. And always if you lease it from somebody, it does not give you any guarantee for tomorrow, because tomorrow will be five years later and the owner will tell you: ‘Well, my daughter got married, can you go away?’ And like he lived there for five years, he has all his equipment there, and then he must pack everything up and move away, and when he has it all moved, it is like moving from another state, it is a shock a bit, he must go through an adaptation and then other removal, it is not a good thing for people... because people in refugee camps, in integration centres, it is horrible, because I was already fed up with all those refugees there. And of course everybody doesn’t want to see the third one,

everybody wants to move away and have his own life. Because of that I think there are not enough flats provided by the state, there is lack of them in average, so people prefer moving to the option number two. And they find some private owner and they rent a flat there. And it is not good and he moves away. But yes, first of all it is good. But he has no guarantee, that is the problem...

Ilja, Moldavia (Byelorussia)

Living in a private flat is not easy either. It is necessary to orientate in a new life situation, understand the rules and regulations, understand the way Czech authorities are functioning as well as the labour market, educational institutions, social security system, health care system etc. Those who were interviewed frequently appreciated help provided by NGO workers and also social workers of the asylum integration centres.

Unequal access to help in the area of housing, to which refugees are entitled for after being granted asylum, manifests in different situations. We encountered an asylum seekers' family who strived after an independent, self-reliable life in the period of claiming (they found a private flat and they got job) and once they became refugees and asked for an 'integration flat' within the SIP and their request was not accepted and asylum seekers living in the integration centres were preferred instead. Vanda, one of our respondents, speaks about troubles she experienced when she claimed with her husband what they were entitled for in the following paragraph:

"I tell you that I was simply, when they told me, I had tears in my eyes, because I was ashamed that we were like stupid, that we just aimed for to do things on our own not to trouble the others. Do you understand, when we can do it ourselves, so we will not trouble other people, why to get money from the state when we can work. The money can be given to seniors instead, or a child can get the money, a person who does not have a chance to work. But we are able to work, so why not to? And they then simply told us : 'You are doing well, you have a job and you work so you can...' Well, so I told them to whom should I explain that I worked from seven, eight in the morning and went home at eleven in the evening, and cried for having it over because I could not go on, because I had to pay the rent 12.000 plus my husband had almost nothing and I went and cried when it would be over, I don't know already. Well, that's just the way it is in life."

Vanda, Byelorussia

It can be rather difficult to fulfil the SIP principles declaring assistance to refugees in their integration into the society in practice. It shows that lack of interconnection of the individual areas of integration and the existence of obstacles for their implementation is a drawback of the whole system. It is case of one refugee who found a job in one regional town and he settled there with his family, but nevertheless the town did not enter the SIP and the person had no entitlement to housing support in such case.



5 WHAT IS IT LIKE TO BE A REFUGEE IN THE CZECH REPUBLIC

“We are entitled but I was all the time, we had a problem with the mayor here... he is so... I do not know... We, normal people, he does not want foreigners here... I told him to give us, because there were two options – you are either given a flat or they support your rent. I said: ‘So I get the rent?’ ‘No.’ ‘I said that it was in the law.’ ‘No.’”

Salim, Syria

Refugees and their children often have to stay in integration asylum centres for a long time because of long waiting for integration flat. It means that they have to live their lives mainly among refugees, and have minimal contacts with the Czech majority. Integration into society is thus slower because there is a lack of contacts, conversation and opportunities to get to know each other.

“My children almost started to speak Ukrainian. Do you understand? If I got a flat somewhere among the Czech community, so I would speak Czech and my children would speak Czech and my wife would also speak Czech hundred times better. And it would be a lot, many things would be the other way round. Simply I would speak with them, I would get to know the neighbours, who would live with us. I would find a better job, my life would be hundred times better. Simply they would finally look at me, who I really was. I criminal, I non-criminal, I say something wrong and they see that I normal man, that they could communicate well with me.”

Vakhid, Chechnya

It is often quite a problem if refugees stay in integration centres. Integration centres share the same premises with refugee camps and the residential regime of asylum seekers must be obeyed. These rules apply also to people who have already been granted asylum and thus their situation hasn't improved at all.

Despite the fact that refugees are declared to have almost the same rights and obligations like Czech citizens, the reality is different. Respondents are aware of it and many of them struggle for the Czech citizenship. Position of a refugee does not allow them to be fully integrated into the life in a country where they try to settle down. Therefore it is important for them to be granted Czech citizenship. It will assure them a fully-fledged position and a chance to participate in decision making process:

“It is a different life again. (...) If we will have an identity card, nobody could say: ‘This is a refuge.’ If I go to Germany, we would have to wait on the borders, until they look into the computer what it is. And a citizen shows – such citizen and goes away. (...) Wait on the borders. And there is another thing. We wanted to buy something for instalments, in the market for example, so they did not give it to us.”

Salim, Syria

“... because it brings formally only a right to vote and to be elected, and in principal maybe... I would like to participate more actively in the political life in the Czech Republic. I am interested in such things and I think there should be more possibilities

either for refugees, or for foreigners. I heard that in western states for example foreigners without citizenship may participate in local elections and it is important. So I think people there are more integrated into the public life and such a person does not feel like: though we live in this society, we can only gossip about politics over a cup of coffee.”

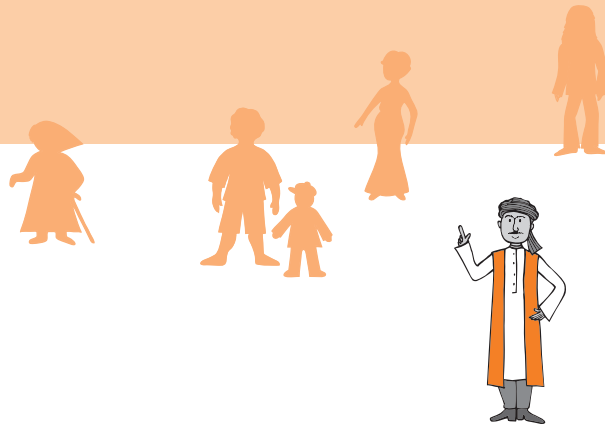
Kuzma, Byelorussia



Advice and Recommendations

- It is important to make the State Integration Programme more transparent. The rules, which are defining conditions of obtaining integration flat, must be very clear.
- Towns and flat owners should be motivated to enter the State Integration Programme. State administration linked to these procedures should be simplified.





6 What Refugees Know about the Czech Republic and What We Know About Them



Introduction to the Issue

We came across the problem of awareness many times during our interviews. Refugees frequently spoke of insufficient, missing and inconsistent awareness and orientation, either on their side or on the side of the Czech majority. It is obvious that quality and adequate awareness is one of the basic preconditions of successful integration of newcomers into the society.

We can see it not only in refugees' stories but also in other researches, studies and literature (both Czech and foreign), which deals with life of foreigners and in particular life of refugees.

We will demonstrate the level of knowledge, awareness and orientation not only among refugees, but also among general public, among those people who are in a daily contact with refugees. Responses of our respondents are the basis for our conclusions, where they tell us about their experiences, we also include interviews with representatives of public administration institutions (Employment Offices).

Orientation of refugees in a society is a part and precondition of integration. It includes their ability to orientate in a new society, knowledge of means by which they can fulfil their goals, orientation in both public as well as private institutions in the society and awareness of their rights and obligations. A research that has been carried out among Czech NGO s working with migrants proved that the biggest disadvantage of refugees stays the same. It is the lack of orientation in the Czech society and respondents emphasize that there is a lack of information especially on the side of state and its institutions (Tollarová 2006:59).

Awareness and orientation of refugees in a new country should include not only knowledge concerning legislation and rules of the public space (labour market, public administration institutions, social and health security system, school system, education system etc.), but also rules of the private sector. Missing, lacking, insufficient or inconsistent orientation of refugees in the area of social (social and cultural) system, which may significantly differ from the cultural system of the

country of their origin, may be an obstacle of their successful integration to the society. Awareness of existing social relations and functioning of informal rules, traditions and habits of a new society helps refugees to overcome barriers and misunderstandings which they face in their everyday life.



Legal Framework

Orientation of foreigners in the society is one of the so-called targeted specific measures of the Updated Concept of Integration of Foreigners.

“One of the targets of the state integration policy is to assist foreigners to get orientated in the society, and provide them systematically all the basic information they need after their arrival to the Czech Republic. This integration measure also expresses the state’s concern about trouble free integration into the local society.” (Updated Concept of Integration of Foreigners 2006:23)

“Relationships of Foreigners with Majority Society Members” is another targeted measure of the state integration policy. It emphasises the necessity of raising awareness of the Czech majority, including representatives of public administration institutions, on newcomers: “Multicultural education has its place even in the development of competence of public administration employees, who come into daily contact with foreigners. It primarily concerns employees of foreign police, employment offices, trade licensing offices etc.” (Updated Concept of Integration of Foreigners 2006:25).


The Asylum Act only regulates the obligation of Ministry of Interior to inform refugees after they have been granted asylum on their rights and obligations: “The Ministry informs the refugee in writing in his/her mother tongue or a language in which he/she is able to communicate, about his/her rights and obligations no later than in three days from legal force of the asylum granting decision” (The Asylum Act, Part 2, section 50a).




Refugees’ Views

Refugees often have to face different barriers in communication with state administration and public institutions employees. This is one of the things we found out from our respondents. What are refugees’ experiences with providing information and style of communication of Employment Offices’ employees? Lack






of knowledge of Employment Offices' staff leads not only to discriminatory and unequal behaviour, but refugees' lack of awareness also decreases their ability to defend their rights in such situations. Authorities do very often use a power approach when they are dealing with refugees. Refugees find themselves in an unequal relationship where they lose self-confidence and it is difficult for them to assert their legitimate applications and claims.



“The approach to me was absolutely the same like to any other person, who comes to the Employment Office. It means that I arrived, I applied, there were some misunderstandings, it was about..., it was just because..., there was one thing, I remember, that somebody wanted from me, when I got the refugee residence permit, that man who was the head of the Employment Office here in (name of the town, author’s note), wanted to have in this card written by some policeman that it is a permanent residence and that I permanently reside here, I do not know, in such street and so on. And I tried to explain to him that asylum is a permanent residence and that I have a permanent residence here. ‘But you must have it written here.’ (...) I went to the police and said: ‘Please, sirs, help me with it, because if I don’t do it, the man would not register me at the office. And I need it.’ And they told me: ‘Well, that man simply does not know the law.’ But in fact it is somewhat strange to me, because in fact it is not a permanent stay, at least not a classical permanent stay, so it is an asylum. And the man did not know that. Finally the colleagues at the police agreed and wrote that I have (permanent residence).”

Kuzma, Byelorussia



What exactly was the cause of insufficient or in some cases absolute lack of information and awareness of representatives of the public administration institutions? It is especially the lack of basic knowledge of the residential status, lack of knowledge of the legislation concerning rights and obligations related to the status of a refugee. Public administration employees often confuse various categories of residential statuses or they are aware of only some of them. On the contrary, they are usually not informed about what entitlements are related to asylum, and sometimes knowledge regarding the existence of this type of residence is missing at all.

Similar situation, which experienced the respondent at the Employment Office described in the previous situation, has another respondent with the employees of the Municipal Office in Prague (it is obvious that under these conditions, sufficient awareness of a female refugee to be able to assert her rights is very important):

“... at the time we came, we were the first, it was at (a metropolitan district of Prague – author’s note), and people there, I would say, were more than surprised that such things exist. And I had to explain over and over again and it was so difficult. (...) No, they just did not know that such things exist. They had no idea about it.”

Venera, Byelorussia

6 WHAT REFUGEES KNOW ABOUT THE CZECH REPUBLIC AND WHAT WE KNOW ABOUT THEM

“With our passport we really had no problem, but we were forced over and over again to explain. Because our passport is called a refugee’s residence permit. People see it for the first time in their life and they do not really know about it, they have no idea what it is and they ask only one thing: do you have a permanent residence or not. And we had to explain that refugees have, yes, they have a permanent residence and all the entitlements and so on and so on. At the end we learnt the sentence regarding the permanent residence and always showed the page where it is mentioned and say, please copy this page just in case. You would certainly need it when you deal with someone superior. And I forced them to do it several times and I was happy that I did not need to bring some other papers two or three more times only because I did it in advance (...) People just do not understand that a refugee differs from the other types of foreigners. (...) People, the officers, are satisfied with the fact that you have a permanent residence and that your passport is valid for next ten years so that it brings relief to them, moreover, we can find some government resolution on the websites about it, and it is the final drop to make them happy. But if I did not know exactly about it, maybe I would have had troubles because I would not know where to get the information from.”

Venera Byelorussia

Refugees gradually realize how to deal with the others to reach their goals, i.e. what they are entitled for. Awareness or rather certain orientation regarding the proprietary rights is a basic prerequisite for successful communication. Respondents usually meet with lack of willingness (though we also recorded positive experiences of refugees who told us about officers willing to help) and lack of knowledge of the Czech majority. Own initiative and exact and direct requirements seem to be the only successful strategy in this respect.

“But I already knew how it goes and I never asked for anything in the way ‘please I want something’. I always asked for something particular. Yes, please, I do not know how to request parental allowance, would you please help me. I do not know what the forms look like, please show me. And if you ask a particular question, you will always get a particular response.”

Venera, Byelorussia

“But in fact the officers should also do something to let people know what they are entitled for. It is so unilateral, from one side, that a person must, must, must, there, there, there.”

Ilja, Moldavia (Byelorussia)

Confusing and unreliable information provision is also a problem for refugees leading to uncertainty in a new “environment”. Lack of information on the side of public administration institutions also includes lack of knowledge about the competences of individual offices. Weak communication among the offices also makes refugees’ lives even more problematic.



“This is what we do not solve, this is in competence of the Ministry of Interior.’ We went to the Ministry of Interior and the Ministry of Interior told us that if the municipality grants, we would give you the flat. So we went to the Municipality Office and they told us: ‘This is not our competence, this is the competence of the Ministry of Interior.’ So it was like a roundabout and no result.”

Vanda, Byelorussia

“Or I told you here that each officer thinks something different. I was at the Register Office of Births, Deaths and Marriages, and the first lady said something wrong and the other one said yes.”

Salim, Syria

During their visits to offices refugees meet with humiliation, insensitive approach, lack of understanding and discriminatory, racial behaviour from the officers’ side:

“... she told me: ‘What did you think when you came here voluntarily, that everything falls down from the sky?’ And I say: ‘I am afraid of you, do not tell me I came voluntarily, I did not come voluntarily. I also have very nice, very good parents, I am not just anyone without a family... I have good parents and family, but I had to come here, it is not nice how you talk to me...’ And she said: ‘It is your problem. Homeless also come here and want to stay somewhere, have no accommodation, no food to eat. And you have a flat and this is not enough for you?’ (...) “And she is not interested whether a refugee or not, she only sees that it is a male or female foreigner. (...) Document or no documents, it says Russia. (...) and written a refugee, yes. (...) And I think that it does not make any difference to her. She does not have any fear from anything, she can say whatever she wants.”

Elza, Chechnya

“Well, and one thing, we just do not understand one another. Not because of the language, we just do not understand each other. They do not understand, comprehend our problem. (...) We do not understand them. Simply it is so hard. That is just the way it is.”

Tatiana, Kazakhstan

Unawareness and lack of knowledge of the officers together with poor willingness to help and indifference lead to rejection in cases when refugees apply for various allowances, to which they are entitled after being granted asylum (e.g. allowance for equipping an integration flat, allowances for children, parental allowance etc.).

“They just explained, they helped us to make the document, the passport, they did it all there (social workers in refugee camp, author’s note). And then they brought us to the Social Office, you see. (...) The life minimum we did not receive because my husband worked. And for the children they just told us that: ‘You will not be getting anything and even she will not be getting anything because she is a sister. And she has no documents.’ So those things they told us... With my husband with

6 WHAT REFUGEES KNOW ABOUT THE CZECH REPUBLIC AND WHAT WE KNOW ABOUT THEM

that social worker, but the lady was very young because she also did not know. (...) And they told us that the law was that, such provision, you see. We do not know all the laws, you see. So we just left it as it was...

Karyna, Byelorussia

Some respondents emphasized importance of having a Czech citizenship, for which they want to apply. What are the reasons for such a decision? It is very often caused by a low degree of information of the Czech public, representatives of public administration institutions or employers about refugees' legal position. Obstacles and complications linked with a status of refugee are the other reason why refugees decide to apply for Czech citizenship.

"Well I think that yes. Because wherever you turn, they all need it. And they got asylum here, the decree, decision on asylum, and everything is easier for them if they have the citizenship. No questions at all. Everything is much easier, because I am a citizen, and they all need your personal identity number and your that and who is a refugee and gets what. (...) And nobody knows what is he or she entitled for at all. And everybody is surprised. They say: 'A refugee and he can open a bank account?' I: 'Yes, I can.' 'You can?' Bank account, so I explain to him. 'Yes, you can, you can.'"

Pavel, Byelorussia


It is difficult for refugees to get oriented in the institutional, legislative and administrative system of the Czech Republic in case they don't get any help.

"... and they don't tell about it, the same like in these office matters. When they want something from you, they just come and tell you: 'And you have to sign it here.' and so on. But when a person is entitled to something, like to some money, they do not tell you. (...) It is silence in such cases and like simply like a refugee. It is difficult for a Czech citizen and it is three times more difficult for a foreigner, he must go to books for everything. And they say at the offices like: 'I don't know, go there, we do not know about this. And some new law.' And everything is like ciphered, sort of cryptography, and the person just does not know what he is entitled to or what he is not entitled to, simply like a blind. (...) I do not know, I talked few times to my Czech friends and they all say: 'Offices are terrible, it is terrible at the offices, just terrible.' (...) And we have this particular problem, which a Czech is able to deal with right from the beginning, because just can speak, but I also can deal with it a bit now, but at the beginning, when a person left refugee camp and come to the world like to the town, then he cannot cope with it, she would say something simply as if she is in hurry for lunch and simply like that..."

Ilja, Byelorussia/Moldavia


There are also other areas in which refugees lack information or at least a basic orientation. Respondents presented insufficient knowledge regarding functioning of the labour market, education system (for example in relation to education of their children) or about functioning of the social and cultural system of the Czech Republic.





“I had so many questions and I had no answers to those questions of mine. This is a basic life need, which we had to know, but we did not know and nobody explains to us... Because we want to be ready for this society, the Czech society, we have to know our rights, our obligations, we must know how people work here, how everything works, how the offices work etc. etc. Nobody explained to us all this... Well and now some non-governmental organisations already stated with it but it was not available in our time, nobody prepared us for it.”


Elmira, Kyrgyzstan



Gender differences also manifest in access to information, particularly in relationships with traditional (culturally conditioned) division of gender roles (woman is in charge of the “private sphere”, and man takes care of the “public” one). Women tend to get to a dependent position in such cases:


“T: And you didn’t follow any language course? M: No, because my (daughter’s name, author’s note) second one was small, she could not go. T: And nobody told you that a teacher could visit you at home and teach you there for example? Nobody offered you this? M: No... T: Maybe you received some information recently explaining where you can turn for help, who would advise you what to do and how? No? M: No. Maybe my husband knows, because he did the papers and so on. He knows more than I do.”

Marta, Syria



Access to information in general seems to be a lot more difficult in regions and in cases when refugees lived during the asylum procedure in private flats. Those who are living in refugee camps are likely to get some information from social workers working in the camps or from NGO workers, who do visit refugee camps on a regular basis. People living in private flats (and especially those in the regions) do not often have any idea that there are organisations helping foreigners/refugees. Other fellow citizens or refugees become a significant source of information for the refugees. They pass their experience and advices one to another.

When refugees come in contact with the Czech majority, they usually encounter ignorance and stereotypes (most people are not aware of specific situation of refugees; their attitude towards foreigners is full of prejudice and stereotypes).



“... Simply it is such a long and hard work to do. The work where there must be a certain kind of propaganda, simply it must be explained what is a refugee – same people like the Czechs here. Why refugees come here, because we have certain problems. And they did not come to take away jobs or money from the Czechs.”

Vakhid, Chechnya

“They not a foreigner, refugee and whether has a permanent residence or visa. It is all alike, it is a Russian. It is from Russia. They are not informed. They are not informed and it makes in fact no difference for them. “

Ilja, Moldavia/Byelorussia

Employment Offices' Views

We carried out five interviews with the Employment Offices' representatives from the whole of Czech Republic in frame of our research. All interviewed officers apart from one female respondent stated that they have experience working with refugees who are registered with their Employment Office as job applicants. The number of applicants in this category differs from place to place. Nevertheless it is mostly only a small number of persons who are registered in the Employment Office's databases. The number of registered refugees in the individual offices fluctuated between two and five persons. One metropolitan district of the capital city was the only exception. There are about seventeen refugees registered at the moment. One respondent stated that she has never got into contact with any refugee in her work because this group of people cannot be registered with the Employment Offices.



“We generally simply always when such a person comes, we give him leaflets of those organisations (NGO, author’s note) and we tell them to get more information there, and when two or three months later, I ask them whether he was there and asked for help. Someone says that he was there, but they did not help him. Someone says that he is just going to go there, so it is.”

EO 2

Lack of awareness is caused not only by the fact that information isn't usually provided to refugees but also due to the way it is passed to people. A well meant information can be refused if it is done in an inappropriate way. The interviews also proved the fact that information is provided to refugees only if they ask for something particular. This is again a road to nowhere, which leads to a deadlock again and again, and it does not solve the problem of lack of information and unawareness either.



“So, if we deal with some general offer of those services again, it is possible that we can mention it, but only as if such and such course, concerning entrepreneurship as such, it rather comes from the applicant. He’s the one who says: ‘I am thinking about starting my own business,’ and in this case we will come up with our offer.”

EO 4



“We must, we must, we offer, but I say, there is a language barrier so mostly they refuse it... There would be a great problem... There are special meetings. In fact there is a possibility to have some psychologist and such things. There is, in fact they are helped to find a job, yes. They even care better for them there. (...) I think that just from this point of view... I am looking to the papers... that it is just because there is the language barrier, well. Because my colleagues could not talk with them, you see, and there yes.”

EO 5

The following quotations clearly prove the need and interest of the Employment Offices' employees to increase their knowledge concerning work with refugees:

“But certainly yes, it would be very interesting for them some seminar about for example the legislation concerning refugees and about how they live here. And maybe it would be useful for me as well. I meet them here but only on a certain level. And maybe I would hear about other problems than those related to job seeking. Simply to have also their views on how we perceive them as society and how they understand the situation. I would certainly appreciate it.”

EO1

“With a view to the fact that I have only three people here so it is sort of a minor matter for me, because I have plenty of other work here which is as I said with those E301. At the moment. And loads of mails... So at the moment I am not so much interested. ... I do not have sufficient information, and if I had many of these people, I would have to cope with them somehow and it would affect my work. I would have to cooperate closely with them, then maybe I might be more interested, that's right but not in this case.”

EO5

Experience from Abroad



The Belgian town of Gent organises basic orientation courses for newcomers within integration services provided and paid by the municipality. These courses implement the law that was adopted in 2003 in practice. The law focuses on integration and education of legal immigrants, their family members, refugees and victims of human trafficking. The programme implemented by the town of Gent includes language courses (1200 lessons on 4 various levels) and courses of orientation in society (75 lessons). The orientation courses are composed of several modules – orientation in the administration, practical exercises and information on how to join cultural and social activities. Courses are held in Turkish, Arabic, French, English, Russian, Spanish, Persian, Albanian, Somali and Dutch. The city endeavours to cooperate with other organisations in order to prepare custom tailored individual integration programmes, which contain consultancy on integration into the labour market, education and training. There are more than 500 newcomers in these courses nowadays (www.gent.be/integratiedienst).

In Frankfurt in Germany a language block of 600 lessons is preceded by a 40-lesson block of orientation in the city. It includes a trip by the underground, tour around the city, visit of the municipal authority and information about German institutions and legal system. The course is offered in eight languages and long settled immigrants are the ones to guide the others (www.stadt-frankfurt.de/amka/).

Advice and Recommendations

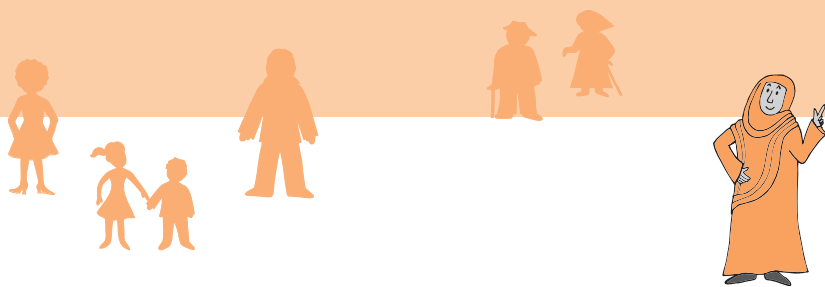
- Organise courses for public administration employees to improve their knowledge and orientation regarding the status and legal position of refugees.
- Increase awareness on refugees' issues and increase cultural and gender sensitivity.
- Introduce educational courses in all regions of the Czech Republic, assure equal access of all interested men and women to the course and take into account their work and family obligations.
- Assure equal access to sources of information and education to all refugees in the territory of the Czech Republic, with an emphasis on places where the refugee camps and integration centres are located.
- Information and education of refugees regarding their legal status and position should be organised on individual basis.



What Each of Us Can Do

- Do not accept information from media without critical appraisal; always try to learn more.
- Use all available sources to be well informed.





7 What Is the Importance of Knowing the Language

Introduction to the Issue



Knowing the language of the majority society is one of the most important elements of the integration process. Language is a main tool for a newcomer, which can help him/her to get oriented in a new world, understand the meaning and significance of individual situations around him. Learning the Czech language is a prerequisite for successful integration to the labour market, trouble-free communication when dealing with institutions of the public administration as well as in daily contact with other people.

Refugees have a chance to learn Czech especially within the State Integration Programme (SIP). National and international organisations do also support educational activities of refugees older than 15 years outside the SIP framework. These programmes allow refugees to gain qualification, improve their language knowledge and thus improve their chances on the labour market.

Legal Framework

Ministry of Education, Youths and Sports is the main body to implement the State Integration Programme in the field of language education. This is what the Asylum Act implies. A refugee shall be offered free language course not later than in 30 days since the legal force of his/her asylum granting decision (<http://www.mvcr.cz/azyl/integrace/html#sip>). These courses are provided by the one and only NGO, which is the Association of Citizens Engaged with Emigrants (SOZE).

Courses can be either individual or in a group. In first case refugees are given 100 lessons, the quota for group lessons is 100, maximum duration is 10 months. This time frame is highly insufficient, as we can see from the course graduates' proficiency level. In 2007 SOZE implemented an experimental project and increased the number of lessons up to 300 to 400 hours, which proved to be really necessary. Nevertheless, the present number of 150 lessons (100 lessons) still remains to be valid within the SIP.

When a refugee enters the SIP language course, he or she has to be informed about all possibilities and conditions. It is evident out of our respondents' statements that refugees feel insufficiently informed in this respect. They are not offered any alternative possibility in case that they cannot attend courses in the offered dates. All the graduates receive a certificate after they finish the course and pass the final exam. However this certificate has no relevance for employers.

Asylum seekers younger 15 years have to attend compulsory classes. It is organised by the Ministry of Education, Youths and Sports and it takes place at elementary schools.



Refugees' Views

We did not focus only on language education within the SIP in our research, but we also examined education within re-qualification courses organised by the Employment Offices or NGOs. There are many subjects concerning the language preparation. We would like to mention only some of them.

First of all we will look at evaluation of language courses organised within the SIP. Refugees' experiences regarding these language courses differ. We collected data all across the Czech Republic and found out that the quality varies greatly from place to place. A possibility to attend an individual course for example depends on the size of a particular town and it is different region to region.

Greatest dissatisfaction is caused because of insufficient number of lessons provided within the course. Some of our respondents do not like that they cannot continue the course or get somehow more specialised and that they finished the course as beginners.



"If they need a certain level of Czech language at work for example, so it is not our fault because we cannot get to the Czech courses here, nobody would provide it to us. We had 150 lessons... of the basic course, when we were granted asylum and we had the course right after. But the course didn't comprise all 150 lessons, it was only on paper, because in fact it was bad, it was not an individual course, and when I cannot come for example, because I am sick or she would write me down, that I had the lesson, the teacher put it down, do you understand? She had 150 but I did not have 150."

Tatiana, Kazakhstan

"Yes. Hundred and fifty lessons, had an examination... but it is not like, it is not enough the course, a man needs a contact."

Chava, Chechnya

"More than three months, we had for one year advanced Czech language course. Well so that course which we attended, those were words we learned in the Czech



7 WHAT IS THE IMPORTANCE OF KNOWING THE LANGUAGE



language, words we have to say to people outside, for example in a shop, or at work or something like that. And just the words authorities use, we did not understand, we did not study those. And when we got some paper from an authority, we understood one half and the second one not, we didn't understand what was written there... because the words are much like those official, that we do not understand..."

Sofia, Moldavia

"...I terminated when I got asylum, they offered me from the Ministry of Interior, and it was such an organisation called SOZE. But they don't have a tender for the courses any longer. I had a course for beginners and then I was supposed to continue but they cancelled it because SOZE did not have money so they cancelled it. And it was cancelled three months ago, so I forgot everything already."

Hanna, Byelorussia

"And this was also good, only that the course is such, I would say, almost nothing, because there are few lessons only. Moreover, when a teacher comes from (name of a town, author's note) and back there then of course during those several hours that we spend there we will not learn much."

Kuzma, Byelorussia

Respondents highly appreciated the fact that language courses participants are divided into groups according to their proficiency level or according to their skills to learn a new language.



"And then they gave us a language... we had a perfect teacher... Well, at the beginning we were three families, like me, mother, father and one more Byelorussian family. They applied separately because husband was shy to communicate in front the other people. And then mother and father were separated because they were complete beginners, because they did not speak at all and I was put somewhere where it was something in between. Well... I am satisfied with it."

Ovsana, Armenia

Language courses do not fulfil only a function of the language integration but they also represent an opportunity to start new social contacts and integrate within the Czech society.

"They improved the Czech language so much, they certainly did, we found friends like our teacher, we normally exchange letters with him, they visited us... so now I have already got a job, so I cannot continue in studying Czech much. Unfortunately... But I am trying to converse at my work already."

Fjodar, Byelorussia

Respondents sometimes cannot choose when their classes will take place. It happens sometimes that the period of classes is identical with the working hours in their jobs. A refugee is then put in an situation where he or she has to



decide whether to participate in the course and fulfil its conditions or go to work. The gender division of work within a family also reflects in the opportunity to participate in the courses.

“Yes we had that course in (name of a town, autor’s note). So I had the 150 lessons, then 220. My husband attended, he did not pass the exams after the first course, because he worked. And when he came from work for example and had the course in the evening, but as we had the exams, simply he was at work. It would be wasting of money for the whole day so he stayed at work and did not go for the exams. And I completed the courses, passed the exams.”

Karyna, Byelorussia

“... it was O. K. for me. They try to organise it so that all could join in, those who had time and those who didn’t. And if there was a problem, they said: ‘We’ll write a letter to your employer so that you are allowed to come.’... I think this was really good.”

Jelena, Russia

Other researches that had been carried out in the Czech Republic proved the insufficiencies of the courses organised by the SIP. Respondents of a survey called “Integration of Refugees and Effectiveness of the State Integration Programme”¹ expressed their satisfaction in evaluation of the language preparation with certain reserves and proposals for changes: “... the course was too easy, at a beginners’ level and provided only a basis of the language. Respondents also criticized that people with different proficiency in the Czech language attended the course. Lessons were accommodated to beginners’ level of proficiency and it lost its meaning for other participants then. Refugees would therefore appreciate to differentiate individual courses according to language knowledge of its participants. Some of the respondents coming from the states of the former Soviet Union expressed their opinion that it would also be useful to differentiate courses with a view to the language background from which the refugees come. Respondents who have some of the Slavic languages as their mother or communicating tongue learn Czech lot easier and classes may be even more comprehensive and difficult in comparison to students, who do not know any of the Slavonic languages” (Uherek ed. 2005:86).

Knowledge and ability to communicate in the majority society’s language is an important way for integration for newcomers. It is a question in case of asylum seekers in what moment it is convenient to start with language learning. When we asked our respondents, what they would change in their past to have a better life, they often self-critically responded that they should have learnt the Czech language even in the period when they were still asylum seekers, when they had plenty of time to get oriented and Czech language would be one of the tools then. At the same time, they explained that it had been a period of uncertainty,

¹ A quantitative research was carried out by the Ethnological Institute of the Academy of Sciences of the Czech Republic in 2005, in which 1321 respondents participated.

7 WHAT IS THE IMPORTANCE OF KNOWING THE LANGUAGE



whether they would stay in the Czech Republic or not so there was no motivation for learning.

“In that programme when I waited two years for asylum in (name of a town, autor’s note) I had a chance to learn Czech but I did not, as if I did not, because I did not believe I would be granted asylum. And why shoud I learn Czech when I do not know whether I stay or not.”

Chava, Chechnya

“In (name of a town, autor’s note) when we lived there for seven months and did nothing, we should have attended Czech courses. I believe that... because nobody, not a single woman attended the courses. The teacher went to work everyday and nobody went to her. To the Czech language course. Because everybody sat and thought: ‘I will leave the Czech Republic, I will go away from the Czech Republic.’ ”

Lena, Chechnya

“I learned, when I arrived to the Czech Republic, I started to learn Czech immediately. I completed Czech courses, I received a certificate and learned to write, and everything I learned. It was my good will, it certainly was. That is why I understand a little bit already, where I live, and what I am obliged to do, I know that...”

Vakhid, Chechnya

One of the aims of this publication is to point out gender differences in integration into the society, i.e. the fact that men and women do not always choose the same strategies of how to “settle” in a new society. Frequently they do not even have the same opportunities to participate in the basic activities important for integration of all refugees. It also reflects in case of accepting or non-accepting offers to attend courses helping to acquire Czech language. Possibility to attend language courses within the SIP is one of the examples. We met several women who stated that they would like to attend the language courses but they could not due to childcare. At the same time, they did not have any information regarding a support in case of childcare and possibilities of individual education.

“They opened a course, an intensive course of the Czech language. They did not know I had a small baby and I would have to go to (name of the town, autor’s note). I did not know the law myself. I put my son to kindergarten earlier, for five or six months because I wanted to attend the course, and then when there was an inspection in the kindergarten and they saw he was not four years yet and the kindergarten came. Then they wrote letters, that I have to pay them two thousand because I had put a child so early to the kindergarten.”

Nasima, Afghanistan

“No, because my (daughter’s name, autor’s note) the second one was small, she could not go... nobody offered me that a teacher can come to teach me at my place.”

Marta, Syria

Disadvantaging of parents with children reflects also in the case of inability to attend group language courses organised for applicants in refugee camps.

“... because in that camp I had a right but I did not have anyone, simply I could not leave the boy alone in the room and go to the course, simply... it was a group because there were ten people... no I did not ask them because I knew that many people attend and simply nobody of them took their children with them, so I did not simply ask. We had television, I learned by watching the news, some series. I had books...”

Karyma, Byelorussia



Language courses, which are organised within the State Integration Programme, are courses for beginners where the language preparation is not related to any other profession or specialisation. SIP does not contain these types of courses and offers of other NGO's are not sufficient and they do not cover needs of all interested persons.

Despite the fact that most of our respondents are university educated, they cannot use their knowledge in practice because they are not equipped for it from the language point of view. Results of another survey describe similar situation as it notifies about a situation of university educated and highly qualified foreigners. Not only recognition of diplomas but also insufficient acquisition of Czech specialised terminology is an obstacle in assertion. Authors of the survey see a solution of this situation just in establishment of specialised courses (Tollarová & co. 2006).

“Yes, specialised Czech is for me because nobody would put me in place as an engineer because I cannot explain. And as a business person the vocabulary is sufficient...”

Pavel, Byelorussia



“As regards this particular assertion in the Czech life in the Czech society so as I already said before, the major thing for me was to study Czech language. I wanted to really reach the level which I need and will need in the field of profession or in related fields. If I speak for example several languages... maybe some better possibility opens there for me in the labour market, it is important.”

Kuzma, Byelorussia



Employment Offices' View

Employment Office employees notice the language barrier when entering the labour market. Insufficient knowledge of the Czech language, according to them, is the main reason why refugees are turned down by employers. Some of them admit that it is just to hide the real reason of their unwillingness to employ a foreigner.



Links between the knowledge of the Czech language – education – possibility of employment are mentioned in each interview. Respondents stated that it is complicated to place a university-educated applicant because he or she does not have sufficient language skills in his/her field.

Employment Offices usually wait and offer the first jobs after refugees have their basic language course completed.

Experience from Abroad



Lack of language knowledge causes problems on both sides. Not only that refugees have a limited knowledge of the language and cannot find a job, but they cannot communicate with institutions, for example at the doctor's. This may have serious impact on their health. In London they try to prevent such situations by the following steps²:

Awareness: introduce training for London health service staff at all levels, on refugee background, rights and service entitlements and on specific ways in which health conditions (such as mental illness) may appear in refugee patients.

Recruitment: encourage more refugees to seek jobs in the London NHS.

Language: develop a comprehensive language support service across London, take steps to: train more interpreters in community languages for work in health settings; explore ways of using refugees' skills more widely in this work; get more health advice materials translated into relevant languages.

Health promotion: work to promote better understanding of refugee rights, entitlements and access to services, including advocacy for patients, major health risks facing refugees and asylum seekers, specific needs of equalities groups among refugees, and provision for them.

Experience from many countries of the European Union show that interconnection of language courses with a practical training focused on integration into the labour market seems to be the most effective way of teaching. If such interconnection does not exist and courses are strictly separated, it is then difficult to reach independence and self-reliability of a client. Some newcomers do not have any bonds to the labour market, especially if they went through the asylum process or the family reunion process. Combination of assistance services with training, re-qualification and job hunting, and language courses in such a case proved to be a good way. In the Netherlands, they call it "a double way". Language courses are related to another element, which may be a specialised training, work, childcare, voluntary work or a social help. Participants may improve themselves in their field or specialisation. This programme will then help them to return to the labour market and to learn the language of a new country at the same time.

² This measure forms a part of the Mayor's Draft Strategy for Refugee Integration in London, 2007.



It is also an advantage if a language course is terminated by some generally recognized certificate, which is known and respected by both language institutions and employers. A Common European Framework of Reference for Languages is one of them. Language courses and consequent tests in Denmark, for example, are regulated by this framework. The Institute for Language and Preparatory Studies of the Charles University is the only body in the Czech Republic to offer certified Czech language courses (Handbook on Integration for Policy –Makers and Practitioners 2004).



Advice and Recommendations



- Motivate asylum seekers to study Czech language.
- Increase number of lessons of free language courses organised within the State Integration Programme.
- Extend language courses within the State Integration Programme and offer specialised language courses with an emphasis on individual approach to every student (e.g. specialised terminology, courses focused on orientation on the labour market, etc.).
- Accommodate date and conditions of courses to requirements which are related to work or parental duties (provide baby-sitting during the courses, etc.).

What Each of Us Can Do

- If you do not understand what a person wants to tell you, show him/her that you are interested in explanation of the situation or a problem again.
- Even non-verbal communication is important.





8 What Is the Importance of Having a Job

Introduction to the Issue



Integration of refugees into the labour market and economic self-reliability is a basis for successful integration into a new society. We will therefore discuss different situations and problems related to access of refugees to the labour market. We will also focus on obstacles, which prevent them from their successful work integration.

Refugees, according to the law, have equal access to employment and business undertaking as the Czech citizens. They also have the same access to services, which help them in a period of economic non-activity, i.e. in case they are unemployed or they are searching for a job. Employment Offices (“EO”) provide basic services in the area of employment. After asylum is granted, refugees don’t receive any financial support from the state (immediately after asylum granting a refugee is paid a single financial allowance upon request). In case he/she is not economically active, he/she registers himself/herself at the Employment Office, which intermediate a convenient job, re-qualification and provides unemployment benefits to those, who are actively searching a job.

Refugees and foreigners in general belong among disadvantaged groups of people in the labour market. They can hardly find work in their field/profession and mostly they are placed on secondary labour market. They work under non-standard conditions without insufficient labour-law protection or illegally, they have unequal working and payment conditions compared to Czech citizens, they are often unemployed for a long period, etc.

Discriminatory treatment in the field of work occurs most frequently when people are applying for a job. Discriminatory job-advertisements or job interviews are one of many examples. Discrimination in the area of employment manifests especially in the area of remuneration or parental duties.

The law guarantees equality of women and men in access to the labour market and prohibits unequal treatment and discrimination based upon sex. Equal

opportunities guaranteed by the law do not mean equal conditions for women and men in reality. Gender inequality manifests in remuneration or professional advancement. Women are more frequently disadvantaged in their employment due to existing gender stereotypes concerning division of roles, work and responsibilities in family (traditional roles perceive man as a “family bread winner” and a woman as a “carer, housewife”). Responsibilities related to care and upbringing of children are traditionally assigned to them based on these stereotypes.

Inequality of women in the labour market is caused by vertical segregation. Women clash into so-called “glass ceiling” during their professional advancement. They occupy rather lower working posts in comparison to men, who on the contrary occupy most of the high-rank, prestigious and well-paid jobs. Horizontal segregation is the second significant factor. It means that there are whole branches which are significantly feminine or masculine. Feminized fields like education or health care sectors are paid significantly worse compared to branches like e.g. information and communication technologies (number of women in these fields is very low). There are also more unemployed women than unemployed men.

Problem of unequal opportunities in the field of employment concerns both Czech citizens and newcomers. Newcomers however face multiple disadvantages because being a foreigner in the Czech society still means to be “a second class human being”.

Lack of possibilities of harmonizing work with care and raising children remain to be a major obstacle preventing parents from equal integration to the labour market. Though this problem mainly concerns mothers, number of -fathers who are either partially or fully engaged in care and upbringing of children slowly increases in last couple of years. Balancing work and family is even more difficult for refugees in new life conditions in a new country, as we will show you below on particular experiences of our respondents.

Legal Framework

Labour-law relations, access to employment, operation of the Employment Offices as well as discrimination in access to employment are regulated by the Employment Act (no. 435/2004 Coll.) and the Labour Code (no. 262/2006 Coll.).

Employment Offices provide following services to job applicants: 1) intermediation of a suitable job, 2) re-qualification, which is necessary for gaining a suitable job (Employment Office can provide and finance re-qualification according to the law. In practice, it is offered only to job applicants who are promised a job. Employment Office is not obliged to provide re-qualification upon the applicant’s request. This makes the situation of refugees quite complicated. They are often not able to pay for further qualification due to difficult financial situation,



though it is necessary for their future work placement in many cases).
3) Unemployment benefits. Refugees are very often not entitled to unemployment benefits, because they have no evidence of their previous employment.¹ Refugees, who are registered at the Employment Offices and are not entitled to unemployment benefits, can apply for social allowances at social department of local municipal authority in the place of their permanent residence.

A single financial allowance should make difficult financial situation of refugees easier. They have to face a long administration process and arranging social allowances after they have been granted asylum. The level of the financial allowance is equal to a life minimum (Asylum Law, section 42, paragraph 3).

The area of employment was added to the integration measures implemented within the State Integration Programme (apart from assistance in the area of accommodation and Czech language lessons). A specific programme for refugees' employment support (Annex no. 4 to the Government Resolution dated of 26 January 2005, no. 104) focuses on so-called individual action plan.² It is one of the consultancy techniques, which should improve job applicant's chances in the labour market and decrease number of long-term unemployed.³ Employment Offices are obliged to offer this individual action plan to the refugees who register themselves with the Employment Office. It is a part of active employment policy measures.

¹ A job applicant is entitled to receive unemployment benefits if he/she has a) performed for at least 12 months in the decisive period (section 41) an employment or other profit-making activity substantiating obligation to pay premiums for the pension insurance and a contribution to the state employment policy, b) applied with the Employment Office where he/she is registered in the register of job applicants, for provision of the state unemployment support and c) he/she is not an old-age pension beneficiary as of the date to which the unemployment support should be awarded (The Employment Act, § 39).

² Refugees who are also "job applicants need special care, when they are searching for a job. They are temporarily facing great difficulties and therefore they need lot of attention. Employment Offices will therefore offer to all refugees–job-applicants individual action plan regardless their age" (Annex no. 4 to the Government Resolution dated of 2 January 2005, no. 104).

³ The individual action plan is designed to increase possibilities of the job-applicant's integration into the labour market in compliance with his/her acquired qualification, possibilities and job-applicant's skills. The job-applicant shall provide assistance in elaboration of the individual action plan and meet the terms and conditions set forth within (The Employment Act, section 33).

Refugees' Views

Economic activity is a source of income and financial security, self-reliance and independence for refugees and their families. It is also one of the ways leading to equal integration into the Czech society. The situation before granting an asylum when the asylum applicants are not allowed to work legally (they frequently work illegally) and they face multiple obstacles when they try to integrate into the labour market (even after they have a permission to work) prolongs their isolation and separation from the majority society. These people also lose their work habits, they do not orientate in functioning of the society and the labour market. Limited opportunities, disadvantaged position and obstacles they have to face cause, together with uncertain future, to low motivation to integrate into the life of a new society and thus the way towards integration once the asylum is granted becomes much more difficult and complicated.



“It is bad, I think, that there is nothing good in it, if a person had a chance to work, so he would contribute to the state at the same time, that some part of his costs could be saved this way, what then will have to be invested in something else because of him, but otherwise he would pay taxes and so on and so on. Work is of course the best integration bridge into the society, because you can learn more than anywhere else.”

Kuzma, Byelorussia



Discrimination from the side of employers is one of the most frequently mentioned obstacles that refugees have to face when they are searching for a job. Such a discriminatory treatment is caused by prejudice and stereotypes and it is based upon employers' unawareness and lack of knowledge concerning refugees' legal position (employers are afraid of complicated administration in case of employing foreigners, they are not informed that refugee's position in the labour-law area is identical to the situation of Czech citizens) at the same time. Some of the employers also directly turn down applicants upon their racial and xenophobic opinions (they do not want “foreigners”, only Czechs), though it is in contradiction with the law which prohibits discrimination and penalizes breaching of this provision. Refugees have frequent experience with unsuccessful interviews for vacancies, which were offered to them by Employment Offices, where they were registered as job-applicants.



“Even though you get an offer from the Employment Office... I got an offer, she came in and she interviewed me for two hours who I was – a gypsy, Czech or Ukrainian. And then she said: ‘Well, it makes no difference.’ And then she said: ‘It is occupied anyway.’”

Ovsana, Armenia (Russia)



The following quotation from an interview exactly describes the real position of many refugees in the Czech labour market. It shows limited opportunities of finding

a job with standard working conditions. It also demonstrates problem related to jobs provided by employment agencies, without any proper work contract (only temporary and seasonal jobs), abusing foreigners for cheap labour, unequal treatment on workplace, unequal financial remuneration and also problems of racism and xenophobia:

“Well, and I will say one thing, the only organisation which did not mind which colour is my skin and not only me, it was the agency. When we went to work, practically we were there A, B, C, D, E – five, like five shifts. We were thirty in each shift... Well, sixty persons per day, and I was with them. We were four foreigners... It was me there, and three more women. One was married to a Czech and so on... the other ones were Roma. And the agency employed us all. Why? Because they did not mind, what colour our skin was. But the factory didn't get it... it was practically when we were leaving the night shift and the morning shift arrived and the master was up there and when the avalanche of people was coming down... they said: 'Look. Blacks are here. Well, practically, the gipsies went to work.' Yes, they are dark, what now, but they worked. Even with the fact of how many there were your citizens, ours who came over and the second day they did not stand it psychically, because... not even physically. Physically it is hard, yes carrying boxes here and there and so on. But you must resist psychically because if someone works there for a year or two, three or five and he thinks that he is a master and a god and you must fly around as quickly as a bee. Yes, you fly from one place to another. But when you see such awkward behaviour.”

Ovsana, Armenia (Russia)

A limited knowledge of the Czech language is also a principal obstacle in the area of employment. In some cases, a certain level of (oral/written) communication is a precondition for getting a job (especially in case of a more qualified one). However, there is again a problem with discriminatory treatment from the side of employers.

“It is the accent, it is the missing written expression and it is, as the matter of fact, that you are a foreigner because the employer does not know what he may expect from you. Nevertheless, these are such general things, in my case the obstacle is rather the university education, because nobody would hire me either for manual work, or for a low rank job, because he can get an employee to whom he can pay lot less than to me. So it is rather an obstacle in my case, the education.”

Venera, Byelorussia

There were more respondents who stated that a university education was an obstacle for them and a reason for discriminatory treatment; either when they were searching for a job or while applying for a re-qualification or Czech language courses at the Employment Office.

Unequal access of men and women to a paid employment based upon gender stereotypes, division of gender roles within a family and discriminatory treatment

also reflected in our respondents' experiences in the work sphere. One female respondent described disadvantaged and unequal position of women in the work sphere described as a problem, which appears in all societies, in the Czech Republic as well as in the country of her origin:

“I think that it is more difficult because a woman experiences more of such discriminations. But I think that it is easier because woman is more flexible and mobile than a man. So I take it equal. Men finally experience their own troubles and I think that finally, men are less successful than women because women got used to the fact that they must try hard right from the beginning more than men. This is caused by the social system either in Byelorussia, or in the Czech Republic, Germany, or in America. The approach is... more open to men and more closed for women. I can say that it is not fair that women work hard and men are superior... I think that it definitely reflects in the financial remuneration but I think that it is just a secondary question because the first question, the basic question is: will they take me there or not? And if they take you they will simply offer you a different salary right from the beginning than they would offer to a man. ... well, this is because women do not traditionally apply for some jobs, and men do not apply for some jobs either. ... there are however some types of employment where they in most cases equally respect foreigners, Czechs, it makes no difference, we might be refugees, or Czechs. It is a question of gender and they are quite traditional.”

Venera, Byelorussia

Division of women's and men's roles in a family reflects in different ways of integration and also in opportunities and obstacles they have to face when they are searching for a job. Women have for example limited possibilities to pass Czech language courses or re-qualification courses because they have to care for their children. This obligation decreases their chances to work integration. Traditional division of gender roles in a family can sometimes discriminate men as well. Male refugees coming from countries with a different social and cultural system where a man as a breadwinner and economically active, whereas a woman cares for household and children, can be discriminated as well, especially in the field of education. Time demanding employment does not allow them to attend Czech language courses. Nevertheless everyday work activity outside their household enables them to make informal contacts and bonds and increase their awareness and orientation in the new society. Every day communication in the Czech language also increases their language skills. Women who stay at home and take care for their children are disadvantaged not only in their later effort in joining the labour market, but also in the process of social and cultural integration. Traditional division of roles within a family leads in some cases to a more successful social and cultural integration of women. Women do often communicate with schools and kindergartens, deal with authorities and communicate with the Czech majority on everyday basis, which improves their language skills and fasten their integration in a very significant way (neighbourhood, maternity and care for children is a good mean for making contacts etc.). Men who are working in larger teams composed

of foreigners only, have smaller chances to improve their knowledge of Czech and their integration is rather slow under these circumstances.

Following paragraphs manifest the interconnection of discrimination and unequal treatment based upon gender (due to paternity, maternity and care for children) together with a position of a “foreigner” in the Czech society. All these factors put refugees in a position of multiple disadvantages in the labour market.

“I arrived there, there is sort of a centre for children, they work with children after school... they needed a pedagogue. I was so happy because it is 500 meters away from school. I came there, told them I am a teacher and could work with children. When they learned that I had four children and so small, they told me no, they just did not want me. The situation is like this, that they do not want me because I have children. They didn’t care at the Employment Office, they push me and ask me to work. Such a disproportion between the reality and the law... Like women, you see. I face it because it is clear, I can see it that they do not want to have any problems, they do not want, it is clear, when I have got children, and they might be sick. We have sort of roundabout at home, the first, second, third, fourth, and so I have to stay home for a month. If I would not go to my job, who would work? It is clear. The employer does not want. It also concerns (the husband’s name, the author’s note). He has to have a decent wage when he has four children. Nobody takes it into account, people who have no children certainly work there, they have no families. It is convenient for them, I do not know, they would like it better.”

Tatiana, Kazakhstan

Possibilities to combine work and care for children are limited for refugees, traditional non-institutional sources of help are missing (grandparents, other relatives and friends) and they also often cannot use substitute care due to multiple obstacles they have to face (nurseries, kindergartens, other facilities providing care and education of children).

“And therefore I did not look for a job. If I had a small boy in the kindergarten, I could happily work. I did not have.”

Lena Chechnya

“Well, maybe it is difficult, because Czech families, for example a young family has their parents nearby, who can help them, who can sit with the children. We do not have anyone like that. For example if I got a job now, I would have nobody to put my child with; it is a problem, that we do not have a family here, nobody from the relatives’ lives near. (...) But somehow it is more difficult because if me and my husband worked together, we should find time to pick up our baby from school and from kindergarten and organise somehow all of it and find a job according to the hours to be able to manage there and there. It is hard that I sometimes say: ‘Well, if we had a grandmother, if she could sit with the children, it would be good.’ Yes... and each woman has a lot of work

as a woman, she must look after her children, clean, do the laundry, cook, it is a lot of work. And to seek a job and go to work, so I think that each woman has it difficult here, it is a woman's lot."

Sofia, Moldavia

"Or I can accept only a part-time job. They want people for full-time job, for eight hours at least and I cannot accept this. Moreover we live far away in a small town, it is impossible to get job there. I must travel."

Tatiana, Kazakhstan

"Well, we managed for about a year, because I did not have so strict working hours. My superior took it as it was with understanding because I was an excellent worker of course. That is why we could manage somehow, we changed, my husband, my daughter, and some friends also helped me, they gave me a helping hand and they brought the child to the kindergarten. Then it was easier. "

Jelena, Russia

Using own education and qualification in the field of long-term work practice is an unrealistic dream for most of the refugees. A long and administratively demanding process of accreditation which frequently ends up unsuccessfully either because of missing documents or rejection/inability to recognize a certificate, secondary school or university diploma or other document of a completed education from the country of origin in the Czech Republic. Refugees need to complete their education in the Czech Republic, or as the case may be, to pass a course in another branch in which they would find a job. At the same time, they have a limited access to further education or re-qualification.

One of the strategies of how to integrate to the labour market is to open a small enterprise. Some respondents are aware of their disadvantaged and unequal access to the labour market, and therefore they choose this way of economic activity. Even though they have to overcome many obstacles and problems, they may be successful finally. One of the respondents passed entrepreneurship courses for beginners organised by the Employment Office (however, he had to apply repeatedly to be classified within the course and wait for a long time) and established his own company.

"I will say in this respect that I tried to figure out that I would work on myself, but I am not a young man, so I cannot work on at the conveyor-belt. Not even like a builder. I can be a locksmith as I started my carrier so I was a locksmith, I was a director on a train, then I was an engineer, and then I was a director, so I have experience. I had my own shop, so I have experience, therefore I must employ myself, I have some experience, I am good at it, so I do the bookkeeping myself, I have it all done. If someone was experienced in something different so I would employ him. I counted my possibilities, what I can do and what I cannot, what I can manage. I decided to try if it is possible. I attended a course, I asked for a loan, and it was possible. I tried to ask for help from the Employment Office, I tried to run my own business, and if



not bankrupt I employ even other people so I am not responsible only for myself because six people work here.”

Pavel, Byelorussia

“My wife is a professional hairdresser. And so she was issued a trade licence... No she had to take courses, she had a certificate with her where it was written, only we came... we did the nostrification process. (...) And then when she got ot, she went to the trade licensing office, she was issued a trade licence and she already employed there, not employed, she leases the premises, she pays rent and works there. (...) She was searching a job but she didn't succeed. We used to go to (name of a town, author's note) they wanted to employ her but it all didn't work out at the end. (...) I think that the Czech language was the first reason and the second that there were many hairdressers, most of them registered with the Employment Office and all of them were Czechs who were seeking employment, they were trained professionals. (...) They were so many. And they were young girls, Czech girls so she couldn't compete with them... So she had to pay for it alone. She now runs her business alone, she can make her living, and she pays alone, so it is.”

Pavel, Byelorussia

For refugees it is difficult to get a job for many other reasons such as lack of social networks or orientation in the labour market and limited job opportunities and possibilities to search for a job (although many of the interviewed stated that they searched for their job actively and individually, for example via internet etc.). Help provided by Employment Offices represents a basic starting point in the process of integration into the labour market. However, refugees usually do not find a job through intermediation of Employment Offices. The problem is that employers are finally those who are entitled to turn down a job applicant coming for an interview from Employment Offices. The respondents see it as a drawback in their cooperation with Employment Offices and they expect more extensive control and communication between Employment Offices and employers (who usually treat them in a discriminatory way).

“I do not know. It is on people. Of course an employer cannot turn it down: ‘I turn him down because he is a foreigner,’ he is not entitled but he just thinks: I just do not want to have a foreigner in my work and certainly there are many reasons he can turn down etc., he speaks bad, he writes bad, he is always there. At Employment Offices sometimes there are offers where it directly said that it is not a job for foreigners. This is something. (...) Not for foreigners. (...) In fact she did not notice when she printed it at the Office, she did not notice and just printed it. And I looked at it at home: not for foreigners.”

Ilija, Moldavia (Byelorussia)

“Well, I do not know, maybe some non-official organisations, but they write it on a paper, which I can do myself from the internet. And send on internet the questionnaires or CVs which nobody reads. And personal examinations, personal interviews,

people, when they start speaking they think different, that they are normal people, that people just try to speak Czech and they try to speak correctly. Well I think that something changes in their head. But I think that it is such a programme, I think that one person from the state should be at Employment Office, I do not know, maybe at the Employment Office, there should be one person, who is in charge of five or ten foreigners and helps them with job seek, he telephones himself, in what profession you are interested – locksmith, OK and will call.”

Fjodar, Byelorussia

Employment Offices' Views

During the interviews with the employees of Employment Offices we also tried to find out, what their opinion and experience with refugees employment is, what is their position in the labour market and what obstacles prevent them from using their qualifications in practice. We wanted to find out what are the problems and needs of women and men or what is their experience with the approach of employers in respect of employing refugees. They presented the care for children and maternity/paternity as the reasons why female refugees are disadvantaged. A different socio-cultural environment from which female refugees come and where it is a tradition that man is the one who works in a family may be another complication:

“It is a problem even for our job applicants, who are not refugees, and it is much greater problem for women refugees. Some of them deal with difficulties; they do not understand our mentality, they don’t understand they should go to work. But surprisingly we have only one woman here at this moment (laughter) so surprisingly mostly they stayed home and their family takes care for them. The husband started to run his own business for example or somebody from a family and they employed her from that family. We have a woman here, who started, they have a shop in (name of a town, author’s note) and it pretty got under way. So it functions this way. But we have one applicant who tried to get a trade licence for hairdressing, cosmetics, she just has to do the last steps to ge it, and she is going to start her business. So I see it’s very promising and I am glad for it.”

EO1

“It cannot be generalised, either it concerns a refugee or not, you see. Women’s position in the labour market is of course a bit more difficult because they have to care for small children for example, they cannot work on shifts. Children are often sick, and employers just see it from other point of view. So general rules apply here like to any other job applicants.”

EO4

“The second one is a woman, she came here with her husband and children. Her husband runs his own business here for a longer period already. I would say that they

cope with the language quite good as well, but in her case, I think the problem is that she has children because her husband runs his business and she has to care for the children all alone. She does not have her diploma recognised yet, May be there will be a problem she will have to face in respect of the employers. She said she has a secondary education as a dental technician, if I remember well. So if she would like to find a job in this branch she would have to prove her education somehow of course and she must prove also her practice as the case may be. So this is my experience with refugees for now.”

EO 4

Different work possibilities for women and men, which are based on division of the labour market into gender typical jobs and branches, represent another problem refugees have to face in the area of employment.

“I say it is interesting for example that we have families here, when a father and a son are here in the registration but at the same time a mother and two sisters just simply found a job in a shop. Simply they do not accept men for such kind a job, to work behind a counter, so they have a greater problem.”

EO 2

What kind of experience do the employees of Employment Offices have with discrimination from the side of employers?

Mostly they are aware of unequal position and opportunities of refugees in the Czech labour market and discriminatory treatment from the side of employers. However, their approach to this issue is rather passive and they accept the situation as unchangeable. They do not seek solutions and they do not offer help to refugees.

“Mostly they say that the job is already occupied. So I never had a problem with the fact that somebody is turned down just because of colour of his or her skin or something like that, no, not this case. Mostly they can write down that a position is occupied already so I can do nothing with it.”

EO 5

“And of course it is like that in the Czech Republic since 1968, simply it is like that normally, there is an aversion of the Czech population against citizens of those countries so there are also problems in seeking of some employers. It means that it is difficult to choose one of the vacancies we advertise her and send them anywhere. They can speak Czech only a little bit, and with an accent, everybody would classify them to the Eastern zone. I say many employers are not willing to employ them till now. They usually end up in various shops, these markets, where they sit behind a cash counter and they don't need to communicate with customers at all, they don't need to know prices because all the goods have the bar codes.”

EO 2

Experience from Abroad

Dublin has the highest number of foreigners working in the whole of Ireland. Many of them visit the Local Employment Service Network – “LESN”, which co-operates with many organisations and agencies providing services to foreigners in the territory of the capital. These organisations, together with the Employment Office (hereinafter referred to as “the EO”), have formed an operational partnership which strives for solving foreigners’ problems in their complex scale to meet their specific needs. Within the partnership, the following steps have been or will be taken:

- draw up a clear information services system concerning employment of foreigners which would collect, apart from other things, also the newest data concerning the labour-law legislation;
- narrow cooperation with the National Qualification Office to assure smooth procedure in certification and recognition of certificates on achieved education;
- organise English language courses with a technical specification oriented to integration into the labour market;
- establish so-called job-clubs for those who are prepared and able to work but due to difficulties in orientation in a new environment they need to learn social skills to be able to gain a relevant job;
- train a sufficient number of qualified interpreters and translators to be available to the EO in case of need;
- enhance a street work within EO so that access to the provided services is enabled to all foreigners (www.dicp.ie).



Advice and Recommendations

- Increase refugees’ awareness on different possibilities to defend against discrimination in access to employment and at work place.
- Inform about cases of discrimination from the side of employers.
- Increase co-operation between Employment Offices and employers and control whether the prohibition of discrimination in access to employment is respected.
- Broaden the range of assistance provided to refugees with a special focus on assisted employment, which would make their journey into the labour market easier.
- Employment Offices should take into account individual needs and possibilities of female and male refugees when offering and arranging re-qualification courses.





- Meet the measures for refugees' employment support in practice.
- Organise educational courses for refugees and asylum seekers focused on improvement of access to the labour market, which would enable their independence.
- Equal opportunities of women and men should be respect both in politics and in practice. Specific needs of women and men coming from ethnic and national minorities should be also taken into account.
- Eliminate barriers and assure equal access for refugees to be able to balance work and family (e. g. flexible working hours, shortened work shifts, accessible childcare)





9 Conclusions

People we have talked to told us their life stories with full trust. In this publication we tried to share at least partly the stories which are unique and unbelievable on one hand. On the other hand these are stories experienced by people who we meet on everyday basis. Because you never know what is hidden behind a smile or careworn faces of people in the streets.

To share worries, problems and pain requires a great deal of courage. In case of our respondents it is combined with a feeling of hope that their own experience could help someone else and that somebody would “just” find out that refugees live with us – people seeking and maybe finding a new home in the Czech Republic.

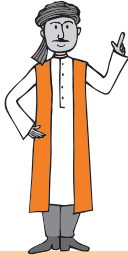
During their search of a new place in a new country they are sometimes offered help by people who are native in this country and who can contribute to their better orientation in a new environment. Refugees appreciate this support very much. It is important for them especially in their first steps towards a new society.

Our effort is to make the beginning of their journey easier. We want to show them which way they may go to find their place and help them to pass their experience to others. To be an independent person and cope with this “new life” successfully without help from others is an important step to regain own dignity. It is our objective to enable and support development of refugees’ activities, to offer them “a helping hand”, and appreciate them as equal partners.

In this publication we want to pass on stories of our respondents and thus make a next step towards better awareness of the Czech public on refugees. We endeavoured in our narration first of all to preserve the unique human stories that the refugees shared with us.

What to say in the end?

We met many strong and interesting personalities among the refugees with an ability to face demanding life situations. They have succeeded especially due to the fact that they found courage in themselves to leave their homes and seek a safe and peaceful place to live in an unknown country. It also depends on us to a greater extent how big their chance will be to use this strength and potential and to find a chance to make their wishes come true.



Recommendations & Advice

In the very end we will summarise the advices and recommendations which we presented in the individual chapters. In this way we would like to address those who are not indifferent to respecting human dignity. Not all recommendations concern only about a relationship towards refugees. Some of the advices are meant to contribute in an ideal case to a greater appreciation and respect for diversity in the society in general.

- Awareness of the Czech public about refugees' lives will contribute to a better understanding of their position. Try to find more information about refugees and refugee related issues on the internet. Read something about the culture of people you come in contact with. Try to find out why they are coming here and what their living situation is.
- Do not adopt opinions from others without thinking. Try to think whether you do not discriminate some individual or a group based upon prejudice and in fact you do not know anything about him/her.
- Do not adopt uncritical information from media, use all available sources and try to be well informed.
- It is necessary to assure equal access to information and education to all refugees in the Czech Republic, with an emphasis on places where residential or integration asylum centres are located.
- Information related to legal position of refugees should be provided to them on individual basis.
- We think that bilateral awareness is a good prevention against xenophobic or discriminatory ways of thinking. If refugees will be more informed about their rights, they will be able to face discriminatory treatment.
- Notify about cases of discrimination from the side of employers.

- It is vital to increase cooperation between Employment Offices and employers in order to monitor any possible discrimination, since Employment Office is authorized to carry out such monitoring.
- Promotion of assisted employment will enhance refugees' access to the labour market
- Individual needs and possibilities of refugees should be taken into account when offering re-qualification courses at the Employment Offices.
- Advanced training courses for refugees and asylum seekers focused on improved access to the labour market will support their greater self-reliance.
- Elimination of obstacles and equal access to possibilities of balancing work and family of refugees must be taken into account in the area of employment (e.g. flexible working hours, shortened work loads, access to childcare).
- All of this will contribute apart from others to fulfil the measures for support of refugees' employment in practice.
- Respecting and taking into account individual and group needs of asylum seekers and refugees within integration activities of the governmental and non-governmental organisations will contribute to more effective course of integration of newcomers.
- Full-fledged integration of refugees into the society expects their self-reliance and independence on help from outside.
- Support for refugees' initiative and activities will fulfil the real sense of integration as a mutual process (for example providing support to establish a community centre).
- It is desirable to spread training courses to all regions of the Czech Republic, to provide equal access to all interested persons and at the same time to take into account their work and family obligations.
- It is also necessary to improve the form of appropriate training of knowledge and orientation of the public administration employees regarding status and legal position of refugees. Furthermore public awareness regarding refugees and cultural and gender sensitivity should be increased as well.
- Social work with asylum seekers and refugees should be based on gender and culturally sensitive approach.
- It would be appropriate to include gender-oriented measures into the area of asylum procedure and integration programmes supporting refugees' integration into the society in the same time.
- Make the State Integration Programme transparent so that it is clear under what conditions integration flat can be obtained. Municipalities and flat owners should be motivated to enter the SIP and to reduce administration related with this process.

- In the field of Czech language teaching we suggest to motivate asylum seekers to learn Czech.
- It would be appropriate to increase number of free language courses and moreover to increase it by an offer of specialised language courses with emphasis to individual approach to students (e.g. specialised terminology, courses focused on orientation in the labour market).
- Time and conditions for organising language courses must be accommodated to requirements arising from refugees' work or parental duties (e.g. to arrange baby sitting during the group courses).
- Remember that even a non-verbal communication is important, and if you do not understand what the other person wants to tell you, show him/her that you are interested in his/her explanation of the situation.
- Fulfilling the policy of equal opportunities for both women and men in practice also means to recognize and respect specific needs and position of women and men from the ethnic and national minorities.



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www.gcp.ie

www.gent.be/integratiedienst

www.london.gov.uk/mayor/equalities/immigration/strategy.jsp

www.mvcr.cz/azyl/integration.html#sip

www.mvcr.cz/ministerstvo/suz/sluzby.html

www.stadt-frankfurt.de/amka/

Legal Regulations and Documents:

Convention relating to the Status of Refugees dated of 28 July 1951 as

Amended by the New York Protocol dated of 31 January 1967

Universal Declaration on Human Rights, UN 1948

Asylum Act no. 325/1999 Coll.

Act no. 326/1999 Coll., on the Residence of Aliens in the Territory of the Czech Republic

Employment Act no. 435/2004 Coll.

Other Related Web Sites

www.cizinci.cz

www.discriminace.eu

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www.domavcr.cz

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WOMEN AND HOME-BASED WORK IN THE CZECH REPUBLIC
A precarious and underpaid occupation concealed within the walls of the home, or a flexible option ensuring life-work balance?
 Prague 2007

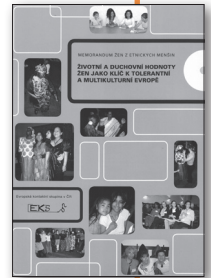
The publication summarizes results of a research carried out by the ECG from October 2005 to February 2006. It is the first insight into the phenomenon of home-based work in the Czech Republic and it brings a lot of surprising information about the present problems of women in the labour market.

Publication is available in English and Czech. Free of charge.

Women's Values and Spirituality as a Key to tolerant and multicultural Europe
MEMORANDUM ON MIGRANT AND ETHNIC MINORITY WOMEN
 Prague 2005

The publication represents the voice of refugee and ethnic minority women living in Europe. It offers an insight into their daily life and the problems they are facing because of their ethnic identity. It presents suggestions for effective coexistence of different ethnic groups living in Europe - all based on practical experience. The publication also brings up issues such as women's spirituality, Muslim and Roma women in Europe and discrimination. In addition, it contains practical tools for activism as well as life stories of migrant women.

Publication is available in English, Czech and Dutch. Free of charge.



Women and the Labour Market – Combating Unemployment and Discrimination
PRACTICALLY & STRATEGICALLY!
Examples of Good Practice from Europe
 Prague 2005

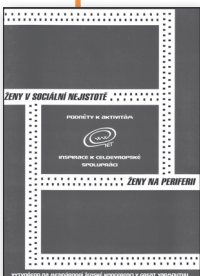
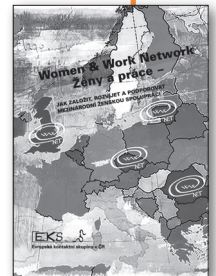
A collection of effective strategies and examples of good practice mainly from Central and Eastern Europe. This publication describes trade unions activities, the campaign against discrimination against women in the labour market in Romania, self-employment through microcredit in UK, women's self-support activities in Serbia, the ombudsman office for equal opportunities in Lithuania, etc.

Price: 50 CZK. Available in English and Czech.

WOMEN & WORK NETWORK –
Practical Tools for International Action
 Prague 2005

This publication describes, through a practical examples, the steps to develop and maintain international activities and cooperation between local women's organisations. It is focussed on practical advice and offers interactive tools for self-support activities, effective planning, organising, communicating and decision-making.

Publication is available in English and Czech. Free of charge.



WOMEN IN PRECARIOUS ECONOMIES – WOMEN IN MARGINAL AREAS
 Prague 2005

This publication is the outcome of an international meeting of women activists in Great Yarmouth, UK. It uses the local reality of Great Yarmouth as a case study to show the impact of structural changes (linked with poverty, social exclusion, unemployment, etc.) on the life of women. It also offers solutions to these problems and describes projects to support women.

Publication is available in English and Czech. Free of charge.

The European Contact Group in the Czech Republic, since its foundation, is the only non-governmental organisation devoting itself systematically to the questions of migration viewed from a gender perspective. It puts an approach inspired both by feministic way of thinking and research on migration into practice in a creative way. Neither statutory organizations, nor civil society and the academic sector pay sufficient attention to female foreigners. This distorts the view of exclusion and integration and of their development in the country. In this respect the ECG has its firm and irreplaceable position in the Czech as well as European civil society.

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