

Family Strategies of Immigrants in Post-Communist Czech Republic

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Transformation of migration process in a post-communist country

During the communist era the proportion of foreigners in the Czech Republic was utterly minimal – their number only started to grow when the borders were opened in 1989. Czech society thus faces a new question: how to cope with the influx of foreigners?

Basic migration movements in the Czech Republic after 1989 (ranked roughly in order of magnitude to date)

- immigration from Slovakia in connection with or after the split of the common state;
- re-emigration of Czechs living abroad;
- individual immigration from third world countries;
- individual immigration from the West;
- state-managed immigration mainly from eastern Europe (re-emigration, brain drain).

Whereas in the beginning the Czech Republic was merely a transit country for a large proportion of third world country migrants, it has now become a final destination for a quantity of migrants. Although this was usually a question of individual immigration, the number of families of immigrants settling in Czech territory temporarily or permanently has of course increased over time.

Starting points of the survey, methodology and survey sample

The immigrant family project scrutinises the issue of immigration from a family perspective, which has so far been largely overlooked by research into migration in the Czech Republic. Only one group of immigrants is focused on, namely immigrants from “third countries” (this is an important concept in Czech legislation, because the strictest legislative measures apply to third-country foreigners). The methodology used is that of a qualitative field survey in non-mixed families of immigrants from Ukraine and Vietnam, which are currently two of the largest groups of foreign nationals in the Czech Republic (the third being Slovaks). The survey sample consists of fifteen immigrant families, usually families with children. Besides

families of the aforementioned nationalities, a contrast group of families of Bulgarian immigrants was included in the survey for methodological reasons (in collection and transversal interpretation of data). In each nuclear family one-to-one, semi-structured, non-standardised, in-depth interviews were conducted with all family members living in the Czech Republic, including children, if they were old enough to answer the questions. The interviews were considerably extensive; they sought to identify the details of family histories from each family member and covered many aspects of immigrants' lives:

- the circumstances and motives of their emigration;
- first days and finding their feet in their new environment;
- communication languages;
- family relationships (in the Czech Republic and with the original family);
- finding work;
- living conditions (housing; education; healthcare);
- religion;
- adaptation to and integration into the new environment;
- comparison between the original and host country;
- plans for the future.

Survey questions and expected findings

- Audio recordings of interviews are currently being transcribed and coded; analyses and outputs will be fully prepared at the time of the conference. At this point in time, it is only possible to mention the principal research questions and outline the anticipated findings.

- When processing data, the main emphasis is placed on the point of view of the protagonist.

- The survey is based on the assumption that migration strategy is not dependent merely on the individual, but also, to a great extent, to the individual's family ties. The different strategies of immigrant families from Ukraine and Vietnam are compared, but processes that are common to both groups are also highlighted. Although the chosen approach treats the family as the basic research unit, the point of view of the individual actors, i.e. individual members of the families, are taken into account and differences between the family members are also disclosed. Analyses of qualitative data thus take place on three levels: national, family and individual. Another aim is to assess gender roles and different strategies based on gender differences between individual family members. Interpretations take into consideration family histories and also the culture of and conditions in the country of origin.

Attention is focused on the following areas of foreigners lives that can help to explain many of the strategies opted for by foreigners in the Czech Republic:

- family networks;
- finding work;
- legislation;
- living conditions.

- The research results should bring answers to the following questions:

- What types of family strategies of immigrants are used most often in practice?
- What influence do family networks (or possibly other social networks) have on immigrants' decisions and conduct?
- How do transnational contacts with other family members take place?
- What are the negative and positive factors affecting the integration of families of immigrants and the integration of their individual members?
- Are there structural or more generally applicable differences in the degree of integration of individual family members?
- What are these differences caused by?
- What role do children play in their parents' immigration strategies?
- Are there distinct gender differences in immigration strategies within a family?