



**FACES OF  
MIGRATION**

**Progress towards SDGs in Relation  
to Migration in the Czech Republic**  
**Policy Brief**





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# PROGRESS TOWARDS SDGs IN RELATION TO MIGRATION IN THE CZECH REPUBLIC

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## POLICY BRIEF

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This brief is based on the findings of the report *“Governance of Migrant Integration in the Czech Republic: Monitoring report on progress towards the 2030 Agenda in relation to migration”* which acknowledges the contribution of migration to sustainable development.

“Leave no one behind” is the central promise of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. The 17 agreed Goals represent a universal call for actions to end poverty, protect the planet and improve the lives and prospects of everyone, everywhere. Many targets in the Agenda are relevant to migration or mobility, including Goal 10.7 to facilitate orderly, safe, regular, and responsible migration, target 4.b focused on the expansion of transnational scholarship programmes, Goal 8.8 regarding the protection of migrants’ labour rights, and target 10.c, which seeks to reduce the fees for sending remittances to countries of origin.

As of 2019, the Czech Republic is closest to achieving the goals on Poverty Eradication (Goal 1), Reducing Inequality (Goal 10) and Water and Biodiversity (Goals 6 and 15). Conversely, the Czech Republic is furthest from reaching the goal on Gender Equality (Goal 5), Quality Education (Goal 4), Resilient Infrastructure (Goal 9) and Climate Action (Goal 13). It is important to underscore that this assessment is based on currently available data. Data gaps exist, for example, on Sustainable Production and Reducing Inequality (Goals 12 and 10). Results could change if more complete datasets were available.

The 2030 Agenda promises to leave no one behind, meaning that the migrant population needs to be systematically included in the review of targets. Indicators do not reflect the specific situation of population groups, hence any migration-specific disadvantages may remain hidden behind population averages and do not create any pressure on governments to address the vulnerability of migrants. Goal 17.18 specifically emphasises the building of local and national capacity to improve migration data in the future. Monitoring the local and national integration process of immigrants with better data and dedicated financial resources, together with publishing data on a regular basis on migration-related topics is an essential prerequisite for the implementation of the 2030 Agenda. Czech institutions collect considerable amounts of data on immigrants, but lack the mechanisms to centralise, disaggregate and cross-reference all data collected from various branches of the government. The timely, reliable, and comparable data disaggregated by migratory status are necessary to guide policy makers in implementing plans of action to tackle the migration and integration issues.

Over the last two decades, the Czech Republic has become a favourite destination for immigrants. The inflow of immigrants largely accelerated in the economically successful years preceding the Great Recession in 2009. The number of immigrants residing in the country decreased temporarily after 2009, and started to increase again in 2015. In 2019, the number of legally residing immigrants reached a historic high of nearly 600 000, representing 5.6% of the Czech population.<sup>1</sup> The Czech population is ageing and the participation of older people in the labour market is rather limited. The inflow of the migrant workforce is therefore presented as a solution to at least partly alleviate the pressure on public finances associated with population ageing in the near future.

Immigrants are attracted to the Czech Republic by favourable economic conditions, the shortage of skilled workers in the labour market, and the pro-labour Immigration Policy. The majority of immigrants in the Czech Republic originates from countries outside the EU and their migration motives are primarily work-related. Two-thirds of applicants for long-term residence permits state work reasons; a quarter of applicants states education and one-tenth of applicants states family reunification as the purpose of stay. Most immigrants (80%) residing in the Czech Republic are of working age (15-64 years old) and their employment rates are higher than those of native-born Czechs. Immigrants aged over 64 make up just 5% of all immigrants. Migrants mostly work in manual, low paid, low quality positions that are less attractive to the Czech labour force. As a result, immigrant labour is perceived more as complementary rather than competitive to the Czech labour force.

In contrast to the Labour Migration Policy, the process of granting asylum or international protection in the Czech Republic is highly restrictive. Over the last two decades, asylum was approved for less than 3% of all applicants for international protection. The extremely low share of asylum granted reflects the anti-migration feelings in the public discourse. Nor has the vote of the Czech government against the EU's refugee quota plan in 2015 improved the image of migrants and refugees in Czech society. Migration became a source of polarisation during the 2017 parliamentary elections and the 2018 presidential election. According to Eurobarometer surveys, Czechs hold some of the most negative attitudes in the European Union toward immigrants and refugees. Most of the Czech respondents perceive migration as a problem and express a negative attitude towards immigrants. In 2016, the Czech Republic, together with other CEE countries, ranked among the 10 countries least accepting of migrants among 138 countries in the Migration Acceptance Index prepared by the Gallup World Poll. Public awareness of immigration and integration-related matters in the Czech Republic is below the EU average. Czechs tend to overestimate the numbers of migrants and refugees in the country (often as much as three times higher than reality), in part because of incomplete or biased information presented in the media.

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<sup>1</sup> Migration statistics are collected separately by several Czech institutions, which may create confusion. The statistics of the Ministry of Labour refer to employed foreigners (based on work permits), and the statistics of the Czech Statistical Office refer to residence permits (and probably underestimate the number of EU nationals).

Many immigrants in the Czech Republic become permanent residence permit holders, which signals a shift from the temporary and fluctuating nature of migration towards one in which immigrants more often settle. Permanent residency status is also a safer status for third-country nationals, as it provides them with the right to claim unemployment benefits and the right to remain in the country after job loss, as well as the access to public health insurance. The successful integration of immigrants and their children is vital for social cohesion, and contributes to the population's acceptance of further immigration.

The Czech Republic is making progress in implementing well-managed migration policies. The new Immigration Policy legislated in 2019 makes economic migration for skilled workers from non-European countries more effective. The administration process is faster, employers have more certainty of foreign labour and foreign workers have guaranteed wages. The quality of integration policies as measured by MIPEX improved in several areas between 2014 and 2019. Starting in January 2021, the Adaptation Integration Course for foreign nationals will become compulsory, which should further improve the access of foreign nationals to professional integration support.

**Based on the Report's analyses, the following recommendations are proposed:**

- Emphasise language learning as the most effective tool of migrant integration. Language as a barrier to integration is identified by immigrants in several surveys.
- Promote access to the public health insurance system. Make the public health insurance available to all temporary immigrants and their families from countries outside the EU.
- Promote inclusive education and training from early childhood to higher education. Support the systematic integration of foreign pupils in primary education by finances, state guidance and supporting materials for teachers.
- Facilitate the visa administration process for foreign university students.
- Monitor activities of employment agencies that arrange work for foreigners and enforce compliance with Labour Law. Approximately one-fifth of foreign nationals is recruited by employment agencies, i.e. seven times more than Czech nationals.
- Improve the awareness of migrants of their rights and working conditions, with the aim of preventing the exploitation of labour.
- Make specific reference to migrant women as a distinct category in anti-discrimination and gender equality legislation. Adopt targeted measures to strengthen gender equality in the social and employment policies.
- Recognise the specific needs of female migrants in the integration policies. Support targeted integration policies with resources for female migrants.
- Promote active participation of foreigners in public life. Foreigners without permanent residence cannot participate in local elections, while the vast majority of foreigners expresses little interest in Czech political affairs.
- Open discussion about the ILO Convention on Decent Work for Domestic Workers, the adoption of which would strengthen the rights of migrants.
- Address disinformation in public media and highlight the positive outcomes expected from properly managed migration. Promote real-life stories of successful and integrated migrants in the mainstream media to reduce the threat of immigration.
- Promote active communication and awareness about migration issues on the municipal level. Emphasise migrant integration at the local level.

- Encourage interactions between migrants and Czech society through greater mutual understanding, to break down barriers and dispel xenophobic sentiments. Confront prejudices about migrants through job performances and their usefulness to the economy.
- Promote more efficient and cheaper channels to transfer remittances.
- Increase development assistance and monitor its effectiveness.
- Facilitate the process of skills' and qualifications' recognition to increase the mobility and integration of migrants.
- Approach the refugee needs in a framework of European solidarity and provide early access of refugees to the labour market to facilitate their integration.

The Sustainable Development Goals were adopted in 2015 to improve people's lives now and in the future. The Agenda states that "Targets are defined as aspirational and global, with each government setting its own national targets guided by the global level of ambition but taking into account national circumstances". This study presents an initial exploration of the key strengths and weaknesses in the national processes across the goals and targets relevant to migration. A deeper analysis of the trends could be considered for future work.



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