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Facilitating the access to the ICT labour market of third country nationals by developing further their existing skillset

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National Report
Czech Republic

IO1. Assessment of prior IT-related learning background and skillset of third country nationals.

Introduction

The migration situation in the Czech Republic has been undergoing significant progress since the 1990s, when the Czech Republic ceased to be a transit country and gradually became a destination country for migrants. Immigration to the Czech

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Republic began to increase and since 1989 the number of foreigners has increased more than thirteen times.

As migration rate increased, some serious problems in the coexistence of Czech citizens and migrants started to appear and could be solved by creating an effective system to integrate immigrants into society. The Ministry of the Interior of the Czech Republic responded to the increasing number of immigrants by creating an integration policy for foreigners in the late 1990s, before joining the European Union.

The first state Concept for the Integration of Foreigners called "In Mutual Respect" (*cz. - Ve vzájemném respektu*) was approved by the Government in 2000. This document has been substantially updated twice since then, in 2006 and 2011.

The primary target group of integration measures are third country nationals (TCNs), legal long-term residents in the Czech Republic. The aim of integration policy is to support integration as a process that leads to the harmonious and mutually beneficial coexistence of foreigners and the majority, building awareness of belonging and responsibility for coexistence and creating a mutually interconnected and communicating society. Integration of foreigners is crucial for maintaining the social cohesion in society, for its economic, social and cultural development. Insufficient or unsuccessful integration leads to the risks of creating closed communities of foreigners, social fragmentation of society and the creation of parallel social structures, the growth of xenophobia, intolerance and extremism in society.

Integration policy aims to support foreigners' self-sufficiency so they are able to live in the Czech Republic and be able to perceive themselves as part of this society, know their rights and obligations, orientate in tradition, culture and way of life in a new environment, be socially and economically independent and have sufficient information on where to find help and support when needed. The main objective of the Concept is to maintain and further develop a proactive integration policy at national, regional and local levels, as well as strengthening the awareness of foreigners and the majority, and deepening communication with the general public on migration and integration issues in relation to citizens and foreigners.

Third-country nationals on the Czech Labour Market

According to Czech Statistical Office the Czech Republic by the end of 2019 has an estimated 10,69 million residents. There are 5% non-Czech citizens in the

population, nearly half of all the foreigners have permanent residency. This puts the Czech Republic almost on par with such traditional immigration countries as France and the Netherlands, and in the forefront of postcommunist Central and Eastern European countries.

The largest group of third-country nationals by nationality is traditionally Ukrainians (126 thousand), followed by citizens of Vietnam (60 thousand) and Russia (35 thousand). Moreover, citizens of the United States (6.5 thousand) and Mongolia (6 thousand) also possess long-term or permanent residence in the Czech Republic.

Due to the critical lack of workforce in the past few years, immigration and specific labour migration schemes have become indispensable tools of sustaining economic growth. As a result, employment and entrepreneurship remain the predominant purpose of long-term residence for the third-country nationals. These reasons are dominant especially among citizens of Ukraine and Vietnam, who also represent the largest groups of third-country nationals in the country as it was mentioned above. Czech government established several special regimes under which employers may find and hire workers in third countries in a speedy and simplified procedure. From 2018, there was the 'Regime Ukraine' with a doubled annual capacity, 'Regime Mongolia', 'Regime Philippines' and more recently also a 'Regime Serbia' (each at 1,000 persons per year).

As regards categories of jobs performed by migrants in the Czech Republic, a majority fall into the category of semi-skilled occupations, with a growing prominence of both high and low-skilled occupations. According to the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs the majority of TCNs are working in the following sectors of economy: Manufacturing (33 thousand), Construction (17 thousand), Accomodation and food services (14 thousand), Repair of vehicles and motorbikes (16 thousand).

The majority of the above mentioned sectors of economy generally do not require from employees specific knowledge, high level of education and developed technical skills. However, many TCNs working in the Czech Republic have limited opportunities to apply for better jobs due to several reasons: language barrier, lack of education and training, social background etc.

All the residence of the Czech Republic (citizens as well migrants) can qualify for a particular profession by completing a qualification or retraining course. Czech governmental institutions, educational institutions as well as private companies are offering to the general public requalification courses in different spheres including

ICT. Courses range mostly from 150 to 800 hours and cost approximately 5,000 CZK (around 200 EUR) to 50,000 CZK (2, 000 EUR), some courses of basic knowledge and skills are provided for free, however their number is limited. Job seekers registered at the Employment department of Czech Republic can apply for retraining or re qualification courses reimburse, however it is not guaranteed by the law.

Obstacles and problems migrants face while their integration

According to Tomas Jungwirth, policy officer of Consortium of NGOs working with migrants, among the primary obstacles for fully successful integration of third country nationals there are:

- The legislative framework on migration addresses little more than regulating the entry and residence of foreign citizens in the Czech Republic and related matters. However, this legislation is extremely complicated and often even experienced lawyers face challenges navigating in it.
- The current Czech migration situation reflects the idea that foreigners coming for work are merely substituting for a temporary reduction in the domestic workforce, and that the foreigners would leave the country once work opportunities ran out. This also includes the false perception of migrant workers as just a cheap workforce willing to do dull, dirty, degrading and dangerous jobs.
- Migrant labour rights remain an area of particularly serious concern. It is common practice for foreigners to work long hours, to be housed in overcrowded dormitories, facing exploitation by employers and in many cases, not even receiving the agreed wages or compensation.
- In both European and international comparison, the Czech Republic nowadays stands among the least tolerant and most prejudiced countries towards migrants.

However, despite all the above-mentioned problems, the migrants situation in the Czech Republic is considered rather positive. Immigration has been an engine of substantial economic growth, and many of its effects have improved the lives of the local population.

One of the main tools created for overcoming above-mentioned obstacles is the joint effort of local governments, public administration and developed system of non-governmental and nonprofit organizations which focus on migration and offer various services to migrants, such as legal and social counseling, Czech language and social adaptation courses etc.

ICT industry labour market in the Czech Republic

As for such a specific area as Information and Communication Technologies industry, the field of ICT has over the past few years transformed into one of the most important sectors of the Czech economy. More than 35 thousand ICT enterprises in the country are employing around 150 thousand workers. However during the past years ICT businesses face increasing difficulties finding applicants and fill open positions. According to Eurostat data, 79% of Czech companies that recruited or tried to recruit ICT specialists had trouble filling those vacancies. This is the highest rate in the EU and nearly 30 percentage points higher than the European average (53%). Difficulties to fill open ICT positions in the Czech Republic increased by 12 percentage points compared to the previous year, the highest year-on-year increase among EU member states alongside France and Romania.

In the further field research we will try to analyze the opportunities which TCNs living in the Czech Republic have to be successfully integrated to ICT labour market and which obstacles they face. Moreover, we will try to understand which measures can be adopted to solve contradiction arising from above-mentioned data: the growing amount of TCNs, employed in semi-skilled and low-skilled occupations and seeking for better jobs on one hand, and Czech companies seeking for the ICT specialists on the other hand.

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Consultation with key stakeholders

Among the stakeholders there were:

- Oksana Belkova, Head of intercultural work. The Integration Centre Prague (ICP)
- Anna Darašenka, Social worker , Association for integration and migration.
- Mgr. Daniela Boháčová, education program coordinator, The Center for Integration of Foreigners
- Mgr. Anastasia Yanina, field worker and intercultural assistant for Russian speaking migrants, The Integration Centre Prague (ICP).
- Mgr. Helena Masníková, PR and fundraising specialist. Matertera.cz
- Zuzana Kropacova, Event Coordinator, Czechitas z.s.

- Elena Tulupova, Ph.D., Project Coordinator, Consortium of Migrants Assisting Organizations in the Czech Republic
- Mgr. Kateřina Váňová, assistant professor, Technical University in Liberec
- Mgr. Filip Dovydov, Russian-Czech Interpreter, Integration courses "Welcome to Czech Republic!"
- Mgr. Jan Matěj Bejčik, Methodologist and Social Worker, InBáze z.s.

The majority of the stakeholders we asked for consultation are representatives of organizations directly working with migrants, and especially with TCNs, as such specialists usually have a better understanding of the needs, problems and characteristics of migrants. All stakeholders noted that TCNs they are working with are very diverse, their situations depend on factors such as: age, gender, country of origin, reasons for immigration, level of education, level of knowledge of Czech, English and other languages etc. However, Oksana Belkova suggested some basic classification of TCNs and their technical skills and the majority of other stakeholders agreed to such classification:

- One of the most numerous groups is Vietnamese nationals, aged between 35-65 years old. They usually have very limited technical skills, often do not know about such basic things as email, Google, social media etc.
- Post-soviet countries nationals (Ukraine, Russia, Belorussia, Moldova, Kazachstan, Uzbekistan etc.) aged between 45 - 65 years old. They usually have a basic understanding of such tools as emails, social media, messengers, Skype, Google.
- Arabic speaking countries nationals (Syria, Egypt), aged between 30-65 years old. Also possessing low technical skills limited mostly to messengers and Skype.

These groups usually require special technical assistance of social workers working with migrants. Social workers usually need to explain how to find relevant information via search engines, how to create an email, use passwords, create a Facebook account etc. They also briefly describe to TCNs where on the internet they can search for a job and show the useful technical tools and applications such as public transport application, maps etc.

 Among the other groups TCNs the more developed technical skills there are:

- Students of all nationalities
- Young people of all nationalities aged between 18 - 35 years old, usually with some education from the country of origin

These clients usually have a good understanding of search engines, perfect knowledge of messengers, social media and mobile applications. However many of them lack such important competences as evaluating digital content, protecting personal data and engaging in citizenship through digital technologies.

Among the main challenges faced by TCNs wishing to build their capacities and knowledge on ICT skills the majority of stakeholders name cultural differences, the inability to buy a computer or any other electronic device (tablet, smartphone etc.). Moreover, some stakeholders note that some of TCNs are not used to using electronic devices and do not understand the importance of basic IT knowledge in modern life.

As for the main challenges faced by TCNs wishing to enter the labour market, stakeholders unanimously named Czech language skills. However, the ICT skills were also named among the challenges. An interesting point was also expressed by Daniela Bohacova, who believes that often TCNs are not confident in their skills, knowledge and background and do not believe that they can get a better position or better job relevant to their education and skills from the country of origin.

Regarding the building capacities on providing training and education to TCNs among the stuff of organisations such as The Integration Centre Prague, The Center for Integration of Foreigners, Association for integration and migration etc, the stakeholders - representatives of these organisations assert that their staff are capable of providing the basic ICT training to TCNs such as introducing Search Engines, Social Media, Online registration in NGOs and public institutions etc. However they would be interested in building capacities on providing training on such topics as security, protecting personal data and managing data, information and digital content.

Among the good practices for the integration of TCNs in the labour market there are such big initiatives as integration courses "Welcome to Czech Republic!", Czechitas z.s., Job Clubs at The Center for Integration of Foreigners which will be described in details in the section "Selection of the good practices". However one of the smaller initiatives which proved itself as very effective, was presented by Oksana Belokova. Her department at ICP created a Facebook post with the list of the websites where TCNs can find jobs. Each link has a brief description of how to use the website. The post was translated to English, Vietnamese, Ukranian and Russian languages and had the highest amount of reposts among other ICP posts.

Online Survey Findings

The national survey asked 30 TCNs permanently living in the Czech Republic (nationals of Ukraine, Russia, Belarus, Canada, United States of America, Kazakhstan and Azerbaijan) some questions on their IT-related learning background and skillset.

TCNs covered by survey:

- The majority of respondents have Bachelor's degree (around 33%) or Master's degree (24%),
- Are in age of 25 to 39 years old (86%)
- Are employed (61%), but only 10% are employed in ICT departments.

Regarding the ICT skills and background the absolute majority (100%) of respondents have given a positive answer to the question if they own personal laptop, SmartPhone or PC, and almost all of them use them on a daily basis, however only 25% of them attended ICT related training (most of them were part of school or university programmes).

The majority of respondents indicated their level of knowledge as 'excellent' or 'very good' for the following skills:

- looking for information online using searching engines;
- using advanced search strategies;
- save and store files, retrieve them once saved;
- share files using simple tools;
- communication via email, Skype, messengers etc.;
- solving routine problems;
- social media platforms.

However the majority of respondents indicate their level of knowledge as 'poor' for the following skills:

- encrypting emails or files;
- basic programming languages;
- creating websites;

The rest of skills asked in survey the majority of respondents indicated their level of knowledge as 'good' or 'limited'.

Among the main challenges TCNs face when building their capacities on ICT skills in Czech Republic, respondents named:

- age (the most popular answer), as it is hard for older people to use modern devices and applications, they often lack a basic technical education;
- accessibility of such trainings and the fact that sometimes TCNs are not aware of the opportunities of ICT training;
- language barrier, not only for training but also for further usage of gained skills.

Among the main challenges faced by TCNs in order to access employment in the Czech Republic the great majority of respondents named language barrier as many companies require a high level of Czech language, and the issues connected to Visas and residency, as not all of the companies are willing to provide their employees all necessary documents to require Visa. Moreover some respondents also mentioned limited information about jobs available in Czech labour market and limited diversity of jobs in the Czech Republic.

Regarding the topics for the provision of a training course aiming to develop ICT skills and competences, the majority of respondents (60%) named *Protecting devices, personal data and privacy* as extremely important. *Developing digital content, interacting, collaborating through digital technologies and solving technical problems* all the respondents named as very important. Less important but still important respondents named *Browsing, evaluating and managing data, information and digital content as well as Social media.*

Focus group with professionals

As participants for the focus group we invited 10 professionals, who are working with TCNs on a daily basis. Among them there were social workers, lecturers, advisers and consultants who work at NGOs and non-profit organizations in the field of migration in the Czech Republic .

There was a mutual consent that the level of ICT literacy among the TCNs varies according to the country of origin, educational level, lack of language knowledge and the absence of social network. Social worker Anna Darašenka pointed out that

since 2006 when she just started her career in the social sector the practical skills of clients indisputably increased, though she still explains elder people how to approach ATMs or creating new email accounts, what is more of an age peculiarity. Jan Matěj Bejček, Social worker at Educational courses for intercultural workers, offered a classification of the TCNs according to their knowledge of the topic:

- Newcomers who do not have any network, which could help them to orient, and they do not speak the local language. Both of these factors stop them from learning the basic needed knowledge on how to find a job, accommodation, work out their residence status etc. Usually the members of this group are either have financial difficulties, thus they do not have access to Internet or a computer, or were not economically independent even in their country of origin, as seniors or some Muslim women are, for example.
- The second group includes people who obtain the basic ICT skills, but have issues only due to the absence of language as the majority of web-sites are in Czech.
- The final group consists of people who have already worked out the necessary social network and who posses necessary ICT skils, such as PC and Internet knowledge.

Other participants of the focus group agreed with this classification and added that the last of above mentioned groups is extends with time as TCNs are improving their ICT skills might only need occasional help with some specific websites and applications.

The principal challenges that TCNs face while entering the labour market are:

- the immigration law which becomes more rigorous in the course of time;
- the illegal employment coused and supported by the limited knowledge of the the legal ways of getting emplyed on one hand, and and unwillingness of the employer to learn how to recruit a migrant on another hand;
- salary discrimination, which implies that the TCN most probably will get a much lower salary jobespecially in case of unqualified jobs;especially for
- lack of education or foreign diploma recognition ;
- lack of Czech language skills;
- issues with getting the free access to the labour market if a migrant has residence permit as a family member;

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- unfamiliarity with the process of looking for a better position.

The participants of the focus group claim that the staff of their organisations is capable of providing the basic training to the TCNs who lack the ICT skills. However not many TCNs ask for ICT related help (such as working with the Search engines, Internet in general, applications etc) or support at the NGOs   They usually they come to figure out some urgent issues, whilst the questions of the ICT matter come up during the counselling.

The majority of the professionals explained their concern about the depth of the further building its capacities on providing training and education to TCNs in the domain of IT. It could be an additional service they offer, but independently they are interested for now in a close-related-to-it direction. They believe that there is a change in the type of requests they get from the migrants. Nowadays people come often not just to solve an urgent case, but also with an inquiry of how they could self-develop, where to find the necessary courses for requalification or how to construct a career plan and this is what they are planning to work on. Anna Darašenka stated that the most important thing in the social sector is to be able to work with the potential of TCNs in order to help them to develop and become independent.

Focus group with TCNs

As TCNs Focus Group participants were chosen citizens of Russia, Belarus, USA and Ukraine, at the age between 23 and 50 years old. All of them temporary or permanently live in the Czech Republic and either study, work or currently unemployed. The gathered focus group was offered an in-depth insight discussion over the advantages and complications of entering the ICT labour market. The great majority of participants (10 out of 15) claimed that they have never gone through the ICT related training, whilst 4 having graduated from the ICT specialized institutes and have already worked in this sphere. At last,only one participant started to attend short online courses a couple of months ago.

All the participants agreed that the opportunity of receiving training for developing ICT skills and competences in order to improve their chances of employability at labour market is an exceptional idea and, due to the fact that this topic is very popular nowadays, they believe that it will be of great interest to many other TCNs.

Among the most often repeated answers on the question about the principal complications that the migrants might face upon building their capacities on ICT skills was the absence of language knowledge. English is crucial as it is used in coding and provides with an opportunity to get employed by an international company, whilst Czech is important in order to work in the local companies and to build up new connections. Moreover, the lack of language skillscould be a big problem in creating a useful network, which could lead to better and easier adaptation in a new country and faster learning about the options in the Czech labour market. Additionaly, the majority of people living in Czech Republic face a lack of financial resources due to the low salaries at the unqualified positions and the high costs of living (rent, food etc.). This deficiency leads to the next issue, which was identified financial resources for courses funding, which could supply the TCN with the needed knowledge. Financial shortcoming aside, sometimes it is difficult for TCNs to find the courses, which would interest them and provide knowledge helping to improve ICT skills. But the majority of the participants of the focus-group agreed that the most important thing during the process of learning is motivation of the student.

In discussion over the interconnectedness between the ICT literacy and age, everybody agreed that though as we are getting older, physically it becomes harder to memorize the new data, the success of a trainee depends more on how much he is devoted to the process. One of the professionals explained that the employers nowadays are not interested in age or a CV of a potential worker as much as they are interested in the employees' solving-problem and team working skills,

During the debate over the main challenges of the TCNs, who wish to enter the labor market, the participants agreed that the major issues are limited language skills, the demotivation of an employer to take a migrant, migrant`s lack of knowledge about his rights and responsibilities and the process of adaptation to the new social environment in the foreign country. The employers who did not have experience of hiring a TCN do not have enough credible information on how to do it correctly from

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the legal point of view. Eventually they either ignore the crucial steps in the preparation of the documents, or avoid recruiting a TCN, There are cases of illegal employment, when the TCNs are not protected by labour law. . In the meantime, many people who are trying to find a job and build a career are not aware of this process neither, thus they tend to rely on the employer, which leads to possible predicaments. The final statement implies that moving to a new country obviously causes certain discomfort, since the process of adaptation to a new culture might affect the migrant`s productivity and self-esteem, which in turn affects his employability at the market.

National level conclusions and recommendations that should be linked with the capacity building programme

Among the national level main conclusions there are:

- Due to the rapid growing economy and very low level of unemplyent Czech Republic in the past decades became an attractive country for TCNs. However the majority of TCNs are usually hired as a
- Czech government offers TCNs some opportunities to improve their professional skills and knowledge by attending various educational courses (language courses, ICT courses etc.) However not all the migrants have desire as well as time to use this opportunities and attend the courses.
- The developed chain of NGOs and non-profit organizations working in the field of migration also offer educational courses, social and legal support to the TCNs.
- However one of the main problems for TCNs is lack of information and awareness about the opportunities and support they can get.

Based on the research we have formed the following recommendations:

- Expansion of information channels that can inform migrants about educational and professional opportunities.
- Support of organizations such as Czechitas (see Good practice for more details), as they offer an education in ICT field. ICT field has a big demand of labor force in the Czech economy nowadays.

- Create a manual which can provide important information about Czech economy and labor market and distribute it among TCN in their countries of origin before they move to the Czech Republic, as it might help them to search and apply for the better positions.