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Minorities in the Czech Republic and the Immigration Strategy of the Czech Republic

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Summary

In the past, the Czech Republic was perceived as an ethnically, linguistically and culturally homogeneous state. However, this shared self-image has been undergoing a transformation in recent decades as a result of increasing labor mobility, European integration, armed conflicts and demographic pressures. In this text, we deal with the development of national minorities and migration policy in the Czech Republic, with special emphasis on the issue of state sovereignty, border control, integration of foreigners and the sustainability of the minority protection system. We start from the assumption that migration can only be beneficial if it is managed, legally controlled and accompanied by clear integration requirements. We also deal with the question of how migration to the Czech Republic has developed from a historical point of view, why the state does not fully control the influx of people, and what the future of national minorities is in the conditions of changing demographic and political reality.

Highlights

- The Czech Republic is changing from a relatively homogeneous society to a country with a growing number of minorities and migrants.
- Migration can only be beneficial if it is managed, legal and controlled by the state, with an emphasis on national sovereignty, border protection and the rejection of illegal migration.
- The future immigration strategy of the Czech Republic must be based on integration and social cohesion, knowledge of the Czech language, respect for the legal order, economic self-sufficiency of migrants and the protection of the cultural identity of Czech society.

Introduction

The issue of minorities and migration is one of the most sensitive political and social topics in Europe today. Since 2015, the dispute over the shape of migration policy and the future of European societies has become one of the main dividing lines, fundamentally changing the political map both in Western democracies such as Great Britain, France and the Nordic countries, as well as in other EU countries, where the importance of this topic is growing.

For most of the second half of the 20th century, the Czech Republic was a state with a relatively high degree of cultural and linguistic homogeneity. This state of affairs was objectively the result of historical turning points, especially the disintegration of the Austro-Hungarian Empire (the restriction of the nobility and the full political emancipation of the Czech element), the Second World War (the murder of Czechoslovak citizens of Jewish, Roma or Sinti origin by Nazi Germany), the subsequent post-war expulsion of almost the entire German population, international isolation during the communist regime and finally the disintegration of Czechoslovakia. After 1989, the Czech Republic gradually opened up to Europe and the world, which led to a transformation of its population and, above all, ethnic structure.

Initially, it was mainly labor migration from Slovakia, followed by the migration of citizens of Ukraine, Vietnam, Russia and other post-Soviet states. However, there has been a fundamental change in recent years due to the war in Ukraine, the demographic ageing of Czech society and the growing demand for foreign labor. Migration has thus become not only a security and cultural issue, but also a question of economic sustainability, the labor market and social cohesion.

Historical Development of Minorities in the Czech Lands

The Czech lands have historically been a multinational area. In addition to the Czech population, Germans, Jews, Poles, Roma, Slovaks, Hungarians and other groups have lived here for centuries. However, imagining mutual coexistence as idyllic would be far from the historical truth. Ethnic frictions were no exception during the Middle Ages and the Modern Age. For example, the rivalry between the German and Czech intellectual elites gave rise to the Hussite Reformation movement, which during the Hussite Wars often took the form of ethnic cleansing between Czechs and Germans, when the religious dispute between Catholics and reformists was only a flimsy cover for settling scores between neighbors (e.g. the conquest of Chomutov and the subsequent massacre in 1421). This, moreover, in many ways confirms the old primordialistic belief (e.g. Edward Shils or Clifford Geertz) that nations have been part of human history since time immemorial, and that language and shared culture are a deeply rooted part of individual members' own self-identification, in many ways superior to universalist ideas such as Christianity (cf. Gellner, 2003).

The First Czechoslovak Republic (Czechoslovakia) was established as a state with significant national minorities, especially German, Hungarian, Ruthenian, Polish and also Jewish. The national question was one of the key problems of interwar Czechoslovakia, especially due to the aggressive pan-German nationalism and disintegration tendencies of the Sudeten German Party (Sudetendeutsche Partei; SdP). The inadequate resolution of national frictions by the Czechoslovak state was one of the factors that contributed to the destabilization of the republic in the 1930s.

After the Second World War, the ethnic structure of the Czech lands changed fundamentally. The displacement of the majority of the German population and the political centralization of the communist regime led to the creation of a society that was relatively homogeneous compared to many Western European states. After May 1945, the Czech borderland was settled mainly by Czechs

from the interior (the vast majority of arrivals). In much smaller numbers, there were Slovaks (about 9% of immigrants), then re-emigrants (e.g. Volhynian Czechs, citizens of Czech origin from Romania, Hungary, Austria, Germany, Poland, etc.), Hungarians, Greeks (mainly after the civil war 1946-1949; about 12,000 people) and other nationalities. We must not forget the German population, of which 180-200 thousand people remained in Czechoslovakia despite the expulsion (mostly anti-fascists, industry experts or people in mixed marriages; Čapka, Slezák, Vaculík, 2005). The exception was the Roma minority, whose social integration has remained (and remains) problematic for a long time.

After 1989, a new legal framework for the protection of minorities was created, based on liberal-democratic principles, civil rights and international obligations. Today, the Czech Republic recognizes traditional national minorities, which include, for example, Slovaks, Poles, Germans, Roma, Hungarians, Ukrainians, Ruthenians, Russians, Bulgarians, Croats, Serbs, Greeks, Belarusians and Vietnamese (Act No. 273/2001 Coll.). This system is based on the protection of cultural identity, language, education and the participation of minorities in public life – i.e. the building of a common Czech state by ethnically and culturally different groups together with the majority.

The current challenge, however, lies in the fact that the original model of minority protection was created primarily for historically settled communities. Today's migration, on the other hand, is more dynamic, economically motivated and often temporary. Therefore, the state must distinguish between traditional national minorities, legal migrants, asylum seekers, people arriving as a result of economic hardship, or invaders who are motivated to come by a distorted vision of a better life in the heart of Europe, economic benefits, or purely criminal motives.

Development of migration to the Czech Republic after 1989

Migration to the Czech Republic went through several stages after 1989. The first stage was associated with the opening of borders, the transformation of the economy and the creation of new job opportunities. Citizens of Slovakia, Ukraine, Vietnam and the countries of the former Soviet Union came to the Czech Republic. Most of the immigration was of a labor nature and was concentrated in industry, construction, services, and small businesses (especially the Vietnamese community). On the other hand, about 113 thousand Soviet citizens (approximately 73 thousand Soviet soldiers and about 39 thousand family members) who were part of the occupying force of the Soviet Union on the territory of Czechoslovakia (Novotná, 2023) headed to the other side.

The second stage occurred after the accession of the Czech Republic to the European Union in 2004. The Czech Republic became part of the European area of free movement of persons, which facilitated the movement of EU citizens, but at the same time strengthened the link of Czech migration policy to the European legal and institutional frameworks. It is here that the tension between national sovereignty and common European rules begins to emerge.

The third stage is related to the migration crisis after 2015. Although the Czech Republic was not the main destination country for migrants from North Africa and the Middle East, it was politically involved in the European debate on quotas, asylum policy and the protection of the EU's external borders. We must be aware that in the critical years of 2015 and 2016, around 1,256,000 people applied for asylum in EU countries (Eurostat, 2016: 2). Tens of thousands to hundreds of thousands of people entered the EU without registering and therefore completely illegally. To give you an idea, this is the total population of the three smallest Member States (Malta, Luxembourg and Cyprus) combined. Czech political representation, including the ANO movement, has long emphasized

the rejection of mandatory redistribution of migrants, the need to address migration outside the territory of the European Union and the consistent protection of the borders of the Schengen area.

The fourth stage began after February 2022 in connection with the Russian invasion of Ukraine. The Czech Republic has accepted a large number of persons with temporary protection, which has significantly changed the number and structure of foreigners in the country. As of the 29th of December 2025, the Ministry of the Interior reports that 396,076 people have obtained a residence permit in connection with the war in Ukraine (Ministry of the Interior of the Czech Republic, 2025a). This process showed the solidarity of Czech society, but at the same time revealed the limits of public services, education, healthcare, housing and the integration capacities of the state (Ministry of the Interior of the Czech Republic, 2025b).

The result is a situation where the state formally has the legal instruments to control migration, but in practice faces pressures that it does not fully control. These include European legislation, international obligations, employers' pressure on labor imports, humanitarian crises, insufficient capacity of administrative institutions and, last but not least, lax border protection of other EU Member States.

Why the state does not fully control migration

The idea that the state can decide completely autonomously on every migration movement is difficult to implement in a globalized and legally interconnected world. The Czech Republic is a member of the European Union, the Schengen area and other international regimes. This means that part of migration policy is influenced by decisions outside the exclusive framework of the national government.

From the point of view of the sovereignist approach, the problem is that European migration policy may weaken the powers of member states to decide who is allowed to enter their territory and under what conditions. It is this argument that appears especially among European political currents that stand outside the government majority in the European Parliament (especially Patriots for Europe, but also, for example, the ECR) and that reject mass migration, which, according to their proponents, weakens the security, cohesion and identity of European societies (Patriots for Europe, 2025: 2).

A similar attitude is evident in the policy statement of the Government of the Czech Republic from January 2026. In it, the government of Andrej Babiš declared that it would reject the European Union's migration pact and adopt a new law on migration and asylum. This point is crucial because it shows the desire to restore a greater degree of national control over migration and asylum policy (PPV 2026:6).

Another reason for the limited control is the economic dependence of some sectors on foreign workers. The Czech labor market has long been facing a shortage of employees in industry, construction, transport, social services and healthcare. Employers' pressure to hire foreign workers may thus contradict the political demand for a more restrictive migration policy.

The third factor is the administrative capacity of the state. Migration policy is not only a question of laws, but also of the ability of the state to make quick decisions on visas, stays, asylum, returns and expulsions – and most importantly to carry them out effectively. If administrative proceedings take too long, there is room for legal uncertainty, the shadow economy and abuse of the system.

National minorities and the question of integration

The future of national minorities in the Czech Republic depends on the ability of the state to distinguish between the protection of legitimate minority rights and the uncontrolled expansion of group claims, with which Czechs have historically had a very unfortunate experience (see the Karlovy Vary Programme of the SdP). Traditional minorities have their place in the Czech constitutional and legal system. Their protection is part of a democratic state governed by the rule of law and does not threaten national identity if it is based on loyalty to the state, respect for the rule of law, and civic cohesion.

The situation is different with newly arrived migrants. For them, the main goal should be integration, not the creation of parallel societies. Integration must include knowledge of the Czech language, economic self-sufficiency, children's schooling and acceptance of the basic values of the host country. Cases where an immigrant with Czech citizenship has not learned Czech well even after 30 years are simply a spit in the face of the majority that provided the newcomer with a second home. This is different from the multiculturalist model, which assumes the long-term coexistence of separate communities without a sufficient shared basis.

In the Czech environment, this requirement is particularly important, because the Czech Republic does not have much experience with large-scale non-European migration. Integration cannot therefore be left to NGOs, schools, or municipalities alone. It must be a coordinated state policy that combines rights and obligations, especially their effective enforcement.

Sustainability of the current system of minority protection

The current system of minority protection in the Czech Republic is relatively stable from the point of view of traditional minorities. The problem, however, is that it was created at a time when minority issues were supposed to concern primarily historically settled communities. The current migration reality exceeds this assumption in many respects.

Nor can we ignore the situation where the asylum procedure is often abused by people who are simply not asylum seekers in the true sense of the word. These are illegal migrants who are trying to circumvent the asylum procedure by simply crossing the border illegally, hoping that due to the overburdening of state institutions of the affected EU states, they will eventually be allowed to stay in one of the Member States in some way - just as happened recently in Ceuta, Spain. Any pardon or retroactive granting of refugee status is just another in a series of failures that literally line European immigration policy. On the one hand, we are supporting other illegal migrants and organized smuggling gangs in further illegal activities, and on the other hand, we are literally humiliating those immigrants who have complied with the rules and applicable laws in their immigration process. When you see that your compatriots are settling in the destination country without having to meet the requirements that you honestly had to accept, it simply confirms that circumventing the rules or even criminal behavior pays off in today's EU.

The long-term sustainability of the system will depend on several factors. The first is a clear legal distinction between a national minority, a foreigner with long-term residence, a person with temporary protection, an asylum seeker, and an illegal migrant. If these categories are mixed, there may be (and almost certainly will be) a loss of public confidence in minority politics as such.

The second factor is social cohesion. Minority rights cannot be seen as a unilateral privilege, but as part of a broader civic framework. Every citizen, even a legally residing foreigner, must respect the laws, public order and the basic cultural rules of the society to which he or she comes. The freedom

of the individual (even in today's globalized society) still results from the existence of the nation state, so it is crucial for the newcomer to meet the requirements of the host country.

The third factor is the capacity of public services. If migration increases the pressure on schools, healthcare, social benefits and housing, without the state providing adequate infrastructure, the risk of conflicts between the majority society and minorities increases. Pay-as-you-go social systems are simply not built to handle the influx of new people in need and are very sensitive to increased demands and a decrease in belonging. Therefore, it is necessary to combine immigration policy with housing, education, health and security policies. If we do not have enough opportunities for citizens of the Czech Republic, for example on the housing market, we can hardly demand the arrival of other people without secured accommodation. Otherwise, the state deliberately worsens the living conditions of its own citizens.

The fourth factor is public legitimacy and uncensored discussion of the benefits and negatives of immigration in its entirety. It is not possible to select one positive factor (e.g. filling low-demand jobs with immigrants) and downplay the negative ones (pressure on housing prices, crime, parallel societies, etc.). Migration policy must first and foremost be understandable to ordinary citizens. If citizens get the impression that decisions are taken outside of democratic control (or even against them) – for example, at the level of the EU institutions – such a state of affairs inevitably reinforces distrust of one's own nation-state, but especially in European integration as such. This is one of the reasons why the government's 2026 policy statement emphasizes the rejection of the EU migration pact and the new law on migration and asylum.

Immigration Strategy of the Czech Republic for the 21st Century

Based on the historical development and challenges that Czechs face today in the field of migration and migration policy, we can construct the basis of an effective immigration strategy of the Czech Republic in about five principles:

- 1) The first principle is national sovereignty. The Czech Republic must have the right to decide who it will accept, under what conditions and with what obligations. European cooperation can be useful in protecting external borders, return policy, and combating human smugglers, but it must not replace the decision-making power of the nation state. This is an uncrossable red line. Any demand that goes beyond this rule must be labeled as clearly anti-democratic.
- 2) The second principle is zero tolerance for illegal migration. Illegal entry and stay must have clear legal consequences. The state must strengthen the return policy, speed up the procedure and effectively expel people who violate the law or pose a security risk. If it is not possible to effectively deport the person concerned, effective detention should follow – not the undesirable situation where persons to be deported roam the EU member states.
- 3) The third principle is selective legal migration according to the needs of the state. The Czech Republic can hire foreign workers if they are needed for the economy, but this process must be managed, transparent, time-bound, and professionally defined. The goal is not a cheap, unqualified workforce that will wander through Czech meadows and groves after the end of the employment contract, but controlled migration.
- 4) The fourth principle is mandatory integration. Every long-term resident foreigner should meet the requirements for language skills, basic orientation in the legal system and economic self-sufficiency. Integration must not be a voluntary supplement, but a condition of long-term residence,

and the state must assess it, enforce it and, if necessary, punish those who do not meet their obligations.

5) The fifth principle is the protection of cultural identity and social cohesion. The Czech Republic has the right to protect its language, legal tradition, historical memory and way of life. This requirement is not contrary to the protection of minorities when applied within the framework of the rule of law and without discrimination against individuals.

Only such an immigration strategy can withstand the scrutiny of those who give legitimacy to the entire system of political representation – the citizens of the Czech Republic. Words about the impossibility of stopping migration flows from third countries to the EU, or speculation that xenophobic Czechs should finally taste the fruits of multicultural societies, are just poorly concealed defeatism or political extremism. Defeatism, shrugging our shoulders or the ostrich pose never solve or solves the problem, and in times of crisis, they are a luxury that we cannot afford. The Czechs have held this small but very nice piece of territory in Central Europe for a little over a thousand years. The legacy of our ancestors tells us to continue to hold it with the same zeal.

Conclusion

The Czech Republic is in a period when its previous experience with a relatively homogeneous society is confronted with a new migratory reality. Migration to the Czech Republic is no longer a marginal phenomenon, but a structural factor affecting the economy, education, social system, security and political debate.

The future of national minorities in the Czech Republic will depend on the state's ability to maintain a balance between the protection of minority rights and the protection of the cohesion of the majority society. The system of protection of traditional minorities is sustainable if it is not mechanically extended to all migrant groups, regardless of their relationship to the state, length of residence and degree of integration.

The Czech immigration strategy should therefore be based on control, sovereignty and integration. The state cannot abandon the protection of borders, public order and cultural identity. At the same time, however, it must offer a clear and fair path to those who come legally, work, respect the law, and want to become part of Czech society.

In this sense, it can be said that a long-term sustainable policy of minorities and migration consists neither in closure nor in uncontrolled multiculturalism. It consists of a responsible model that protects the nation-state, respects the rights of the individual and requires loyalty to a common legal and cultural framework.

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