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## **Migrant women in the Czech Republic. Introduction to the issue.**

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## 1. Introduction

The globally expanding phenomenon of migration is already affecting the Czech Republic very strongly. The number of migrant men and women is growing in this country. Czech society is thus forced to come to terms with living with the newcomers. It is just as important to ensure that the issue of feminisation of migration is reflected in research, legislation, and practice and to take into account the fact that women comprise a notable group experiencing situations connected to migration and integration into a new society. The number of women migrants is growing, and women are parties to this process as are men. This means that women are not only persons accompanying men passively, but also persons with their own specific needs and interests. They are subject to gender-specific risks, choose difference strategies, and may face different obstacles and problems.

This publication aims to provide an overview of topics that relate to important areas of life and situations specific to women when leaving their home country and when integrating into a new society. When drafting this report, a number of qualitative sociological surveys carried out in the Czech environment as well as some quantitative research, especially to describe the general migration situation and the various aspects of migrants' lives in the Czech Republic (to date there is a lack of quantitative representative surveys that deal with this issue and that also take greater account of gender aspects), have been used. The practice and experience of non-governmental non-profit organisations (NGOs) working with migrants have also been looked at. This publication also refers to foreign studies, Czech legislation, and conceptual (policy) documentation. The publication does not aim to provide a complete picture of the experiences of groups of migrant women in the Czech Republic, but to outline certain significant facts and issues that migrant women in particular face and that touch upon important areas that affect the status of migrant women in society and the quality of life of these women in the host country.

The publication focuses on the target group of migrant women living in the Czech Republic and coming from so-called third countries (i.e., countries outside the EU). Each chapter will be devoted to an important part of the integration process: a bilateral process where both the newcomers and representatives of the Czech majority take an active part in the inclusion of newcomers in the social structures and life of the host country. Integration process factors comprise the following: knowledge of Czech, an understanding and awareness of the living conditions in the new country, economic integration (becoming a participant in the job market), social integration (which includes housing, healthcare, social security, building of social relationships and ties, including family ties), political and civic integration (which includes access to public services), and cultural integration (knowledge of the language, cultural norms, customs, and differences; maintenance of traditions, religious affiliation, and ethnicity). Some topics are mentioned only marginally; others are addressed in detail in the topic-specific chapters. The publication also addresses the gender aspects of the migration process (especially gender roles and relationships and their manifestations in migration; the family and private life of migrant women in the Czech Republic; and parenthood), and the risks and threats often associated with integration: irregular migration, illegal employment, and human trafficking.

At this time, almost 400,000 foreigners live in the Czech Republic legally. As at 31 December 2007, records showed 392,315 foreigners in the country, of whom 261,409 were of third country origin (from outside the EU) – this group comprises 107,562 women (i.e., 41.1%). Permanent residency permits were held by 104,916 individuals, of whom 48,702 were women ([http://www.czso.cz/csu/cizinci.nsf/tabulky/ciz\\_pocet\\_cizincu-001](http://www.czso.cz/csu/cizinci.nsf/tabulky/ciz_pocet_cizincu-001)). As at 31

December 2006 (more current data sorted according to sex is not available), 1887 people were granted asylum (international protection), of whom 790 were women ([http://www.czso.cz/csu/cizinci.nsf/tabulky/ciz\\_pocet\\_cizincu-006](http://www.czso.cz/csu/cizinci.nsf/tabulky/ciz_pocet_cizincu-006)).

Where do migrant women stand in Czech society? The living conditions, position, and experience of women are influenced by a number of factors: the formal and structural conditions of the pertinent legislation and the migration policy of the state, in particular residency status and the rights and obligations associated with it. Residency status depends on the causes and nature of the migration. The situations in the country of origin and the motives for leaving have an affect on the subsequent life in the target country, particularly in the beginning. The form of the migration, i.e., whether the migration is individual or collective (family migration, women following their husband/partner, women migrating independently, women departing with their children, separation of family, and so on), also has a decisive influence on the conditions and assessment of life in the new country. Social and cultural factors – namely the socio-cultural environment, ethnicity, religious affiliation, nationality, age, marital status, and so on – also have a marked effect. The immigrants' social and cultural ties to the host country and a functioning base in the Czech Republic (social network, contacts, family ties, community, etc.) play a significant role especially in facilitating integration.

As the other chapters show, formal status is not the only decisive factor for successful integration that has an influence on the position of migrants in the Czech Republic. The living conditions and opportunities provided to migrants greatly influence the stance and behaviour of the Czech majority towards foreigners. A number of research projects have demonstrated the Czech majority's stance toward foreigners and this group's stereotypical perception of foreigners as second-class persons, especially as regards "immigrants from the East" (Grygar, Čaněk, Černík 2006), which behaviour is manifested by discrimination and unequal treatment.

### ***Legal framework of migration***

Act No. 326/1999 Coll., on the Residence of Foreigners (the "Residence of Foreigners Act"), and Act No. 325/1999 Coll., on Asylum (the "Asylum Act"), comprise the basic legislation governing the status, rights, and obligations of foreigners living legally in the Czech Republic. The Residence of Foreigners Act distinguishes between three types of residency in the country (within the group of foreigners of third country origin, i.e., from outside the EU): short-term residence, long-term residence (both being types of temporary residence) and permanent residence (granted after five years, sometimes sooner). The basic law on refugees is the Asylum Act, which has been valid since 1 January 2000. In the Czech Republic, proceedings on granting international protection (formerly asylum) have been in place since the country's establishment (1993), at which time the Czech Republic also adopted the Convention relating to the Status of Refugees (the so-called Geneva Convention). The Czech Republic applied to be a participant in this convention as early as 1990.

Asylum legislation governs some gender-specific measures. In certain cases, women (applicants for international protection) are deemed threatened or vulnerable persons, a group that should receive greater care especially during proceedings on granting of international protection (international protection proceedings) and when residing in asylum facilities. These measures are, however, defined only vaguely and are not based on an approach that is sensitive to gender or culture; they are also difficult to implement in practice (e.g.,

an interview being conducted or interpretation being provided by a person of the same sex is not a rule and an obligation, but takes place only if the applicant so requests). The following excerpts from the Asylum Act concern interviews that applicants undergo during asylum proceedings and the definition of vulnerable person.

*“For reasons worthy of special consideration or at the express request of the international protection applicant, the Ministry shall ensure that the interview be conducted, and, if it is in its possibilities, interpretation be provided, by a person of the same sex.”* (Section 23 of the Asylum Act)

*“The operator of an admission or accommodation facility shall take into account the international protection applicant’s special needs if such person is: a minor without a guardian; a person under 18 years of age; a pregnant woman; a person with a medical handicap; a person who has been tortured, raped, or subject to some other serious form of psychological, physical or sexual violence; and, in cases worthy of special consideration, some other person. After completing the tasks under Section 46(1), a minor without a guardian is on the basis a court ruling placed in an educational facility for institutional upbringing or placed in the care of the person designated in the court ruling.”* (Section 81 of the Asylum Act)

### **Political and institutional framework for the integration of foreigners in the Czech Republic**

The method used to integrate migrants and the integration conditions are to a significant degree defined by the state’s (target country’s) policies. The government’s fundamental conceptual document defining the integration policies of the Czech Republic is the *Koncepce integrace cizinců* [Foreigner Integration Policy (the “FIP”)] of 2005 (the updated FIP came into force in 2006).<sup>1</sup> The target group of the state’s integration policy, to which the FIP applies, is foreigners settled long-term in the Czech Republic and living legally in this country for at least one year. This definition includes foreigners who have been granted residency (i.e., permanent residency or temporary residency based on a long-term visa or long-term residence permit) and foreigners who have been granted asylum (the state Integration Programme is, however, designated in particular for them – see below). Conversely, the target group does not include citizens of the Member States of the European Union and asylum seekers (applicants). In 2005, “Specific Targeted Measures”, which should serve as key conditions for successful integration under conditions prevalent in the Czech Republic, were laid down: knowledge of Czech, economic independence, ability to get by in society, and relationships to members of the societal majority (<http://www.mvcr.cz/clanek/integrace.aspx?q=Y2hudW09MQ%3d%3d>).

The Ministry of the Interior of the Czech Republic (Moi) (since 2008; previously the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs of the Czech Republic) is in charge of coordinating the implementation of the FIP. In addition to the Moi, other ministers (particularly the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs; Ministry of Youth, Education, and Sport; Ministry of Industry and

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<sup>1</sup> This document, which lists priority areas and activities for the successful integration of long-term resident foreigners, forms the basis for the creation of legislative provisions. Based on this document, each ministry creates its own Integration Policy Plan and then announces its programmes for promoting the integration of foreigners (Krchová, Víznerová 2008: 18). No special legal regulation exists in the Czech Republic that would deal exclusively with the issue of the integration of foreigners, i.e., a regulation enacted mainly to address the integration of foreigners (updated Foreigner Integration Policy 2006: 9).

Trade; Ministry of Health; Ministry for Regional Development; and Ministry of Culture) and other partners (regions, municipalities, NGOs, and others) are involved in the implementation.

In its policies and concepts, the Czech Republic has not adopted any specific gender-sensitive measures. The FIP touches upon gender issues in some areas; it does not, however, deal with specific problematic areas and situations, nor does it propose the exact procedure to follow to remedy any shortcomings in promoting equal opportunities in the integration of foreigners. The FIP does not provide a comprehensive overview of specific measures that would lead to an equal standing between migrant men and migrant women; it only refers very generally to problematic areas of which it is aware (Krchová, Víznerová 2008: 27).

The State Integration Programme (the "SIP"; Chapter IX, Sections 68-70 of the Asylum Act) is a state-run integration effort for asylum holders (i.e., migrants who have been granted asylum in the Czech Republic pursuant to the Asylum Act). The programme promotes activities in the following areas: free Czech language courses; acquisition of accommodation; and, partially, employment. This programme is voluntary and is offered to asylum holders at the moment that they are granted asylum. If they decide to take part in the SIP, they undertake to fulfil the obligations connected to it.

Restricted and unequal opportunities and positions in Czech society change for the migrants during the course of their life in the host country as do their perception of inequality and experience with being treated unequally by the majority. The fundamental moment (and the migrants' expectations associated with it) is the receipt of the permanent residence permit. The legal status tied to this type of residency (even asylum holders granted asylum/international protection in the Czech Republic receive it) provides migrants with most of the same rights and obligations as Czech citizens, the exceptions being not having passive and active voting rights and not being able to work in the armed forces or at any state institutions. Compared to temporary residency, permanent residency provides migrants with greater rights and privileges and broader access to services and support (e.g., in healthcare, social security, or employment). Certain obligations and administrative restrictions fall away.

## **2. Gender aspects of migration and integration**

Gender aspects in migration and integration of foreigners into a new society are reflected in all spheres of human life, which are to a certain extent defined by the circumstances and conditions connected to the migration. The following chapters focus on each area where it is necessary in both research and practice to take into account the specific needs, problems, and obstacles arising from a migrating person's gender.

The starting point for examining the position of the individual in society is the so-called intersectional approach, i.e., awareness of the fact that the position of, and opportunities available to, each and everyone is determined by the mutual influence of acquired and inherited statuses or categories (age, gender, nationality, social group/class, ethnicity, race, and others). The accumulation of those categories that are perceived in the given socio-cultural environment as disadvantageous (or become a reason for discrimination) put this individual in a position that is disadvantageous many times over, and his/her

chance to become active in society is to a great extent restricted or unequal. This aspect affects migrant women in particular.

This chapter will focus particularly on the manifestations of the organisation of gender roles and relationships in the context of migration in private life and how this is tied to the public and work life of migrant women. The role that parenthood – or, more precisely, motherhood and a mother's parental and family obligations – plays will be addressed briefly.

## 2.1 Gender roles and relationships

Already at the beginning of the migration process – in the motives for and causes of departure from the country of origin and when deciding to migrate to a different country – the structure (and content) of gender roles in the relationship and family and, potentially, the role and status of men and women in society in general have a significant influence. These roles, which are tied to expected behaviour and which prescribe to men and women various work, obligations, demands, responsibilities, positions, power in hierarchical relationships, etc., are determined socially and culturally and, as such, differ at various times and in various societies and cultures.

Current theories differentiate between various forms of international migration, namely between two basic ones: voluntary and forced migration (Janků 2006). The main starting point for this categorisation is the extent that the departure from the country of origin to a different country is voluntary, i.e., the extent that force is applied. Nevertheless, this view appears to be (not only) a simplification if one focuses on migrant women. Often even in cases that are not forced migration (refugeeism) but, for example, work or family migration, the departure need not be based on the individual's autonomous decision. Especially in the case of women following their partner does the hierarchical division of positions and power in the relationship and family manifest itself, this being the traditional division (inequality in the relationship) where the man makes the decisions to which the woman succumbs, as the following citation from an interview makes apparent:

*“Nothing really led me to it, only the fact that my husband came here, and, naturally, I had to come here to be with him. I lived in (a city in Ukraine, author's note), so I had a pretty good job.”*

Migrant woman from Ukraine (Víznerová 2008)

“Voluntary migration” – individual and collective – is often a necessity forced by outside circumstances and, for women, can be closely tied to family obligations, e.g., the obligation to take care of the children or parents and provide for them (economic security). When examining in greater detail the reasons that lead a woman to migration, it becomes apparent that it is often a combination of personal, family, economic, and structural factors connected to the economic, social, and political situation in the given country that have a decisive influence (Víznerová 2008).

*“My daughters no longer want to be in Ukraine because they are here. And my husband, he simply had no work there. And for two years, I was there alone. For thirty years we were a family, and then I was alone, and that period was a sacrifice to my family, simply a responsibility, as I had a normal job there: I was a manager in an insurance company, a regional branch, which was a good job, the salary I would say. (...) It was difficult because*

*I could not get used to being alone. I had everything: a flat – a four-room flat on the eighth floor. I had everything there, a salary, but no family.”*

Migrant woman from Ukraine (Na rovinu 2007)

The experience of migrating to, and residing in, a different country often changes one's way of life fundamentally, which can also be seen in connection with the structure of gender roles and the position of the man and the woman in relation to the family. Publications and articles devoted to the inclusion of the gender aspect into migration studies (such as Jolly, Reeves 2005; Boyd, Grieco 2003) describe the effect of (e)migration in two ways in particular:

First, traditional gender roles tied to the division of work and responsibilities, inequality in the relationship, and the position of women and men become greater and stronger in emigration. An example is the situation where a man in the target country remains the breadwinner and the woman a housewife; however, without the traditional support network and social ties, the woman becomes more isolated and marginalised and dependence (not only economic) on her partner increases.

Conversely, the second effect can be observed in cases where the structure that had existed until such time changes. This is caused, for example, by a change in, and the effect of, the socio-cultural environment in which one lives (i.e., a society with different norms and behaviour than the country of origin) or economic factors, specifically the need to have both partners enter the job market to obtain funds to support the family (one possible reason for this being the fact that migrants tend to work in the secondary job market, which is characterised by work that requires little or no qualifications and is poorly paid). The form of the relationship between the man and the woman begins to be renegotiated, and it becomes necessary to come to terms with the change in gender roles and identity.

The consequences of the change in the structure of the roles that had existed to such time and the work, responsibilities, control, and access to resources connected thereto can be negative – conflicts or violence leading to the break-up of the relationship occurs in cases where it is difficult (for both men and women) to come to terms with the situation where it is not possible to fulfil the expectations coming from the life that they had been used to living. At other times, these expectations are re-evaluated and the relationship becomes equal, and the new roles and responsibilities are accepted.

The possibility for a woman (or man) to choose the sphere in which to fulfil herself (himself) is limited in the conditions of life in emigration. The following citation from an interview (with a mother of very young children) illustrates the situation where one refuses to assume a different role and change one's identity (the persistent traditional perception of the division of gender roles), but also the impossibility to fulfil one's idea of the correct structure and functioning of one's own personal and family life.

*“Of course you want to stay home with the children and manage the household, to clean, cook, and look after the children, with only the husband going at work. That's how I always feel about it, and now, sometimes, I blame myself for not staying home with the children, that I don't give them more time, because when you come home from work, they cry with such joy that only a child can show and don't want to go to bed at all because they want to be with their mother. I am also surprised that, for example, both my husband and I work the whole day in shifts, and when he comes home, they only want their mom, only their*

*mom, so I feel guilty... as I think that as a mother I have more responsibility over the children, that I should look after them."*

Asylum holder from Belarus (Na rovinu 2007)

The other issue is the extent of emancipation of migrant women by their being given paid work outside the home, which gives them access to economic resources and independence (especially in comparison with the position and opportunities given to women in the country of origin in terms of paid work). In the conditions prevalent in the Czech Republic regarding employment of migrants, which is characterised by the migrants' unequal and disadvantageous position, the economic activity of women alone cannot be seen as an opportunity for emancipation, self-fulfilment, etc.

The need to combine work obligations with caring for the children and the home remains problematic (or becomes even more complicated). Childcare and unpaid housework remains the woman's responsibility. Therefore, the woman continues to have to handle a "double burden". The division of roles and the sharing of the housework have been the subject of quantitative and other research whose target group was "economic migrants" from the Ukraine, Russia, Vietnam, and China, and asylum holders. In the group of surveyed migrants, housework is the domain of the women in 74% of cases and of both partners in 25% of cases; cooking and shopping is done by women in 74% of cases and by both partners in 24% of cases; making money is the domain of men in 37% of cases and of both partners in 60% of cases (Analýza přístupu 2007: 50).

## **2.2 Parenthood and family**

Parenthood – or, more precisely, motherhood and the obligations tied to it – affects the migration and the residential and life plans and strategies of women, i.e., how they organise their life. During migration and integration, parenthood plays a significant role in each period and phase of these processes. Women weigh and take into account their motherhood and the obligations and commitments tied to it when considering and deciding to migrate (leave to go abroad), when residing in the Czech Republic, and when considering returning or deciding to remain in the host country and settle there permanently (Víznerová 2008).

As mentioned above, the obligations and commitments tied to parenthood are often a part of the complex set of motives and reasons leading to the decision to migrate abroad (especially in the case of work-related migration). The necessity to secure their children (or parents or other family members) financially leads to their departure to another country to find work. Another motive is uniting the family in the case that a different member (or members) of the family left sooner (partner, husband, parents, children, etc.) or the migration of the whole family together.

Migration and living conditions in another country affect the family life and parenthood of migrant women. The limited possibilities for women to fulfil their role as mothers as a result of economic pressure to have women (mothers) work have been mentioned. Also complicated is the need to combine work responsibilities with childcare in the absence of traditional social networks and sources of assistance (grandparents, siblings, and other kith and kin in the country of origin).

A very burdensome situation for women is the separation of the family, separation from their children who remained in the country of origin (care being entrusted most often to



grandparents or other relatives). A marked restructuring of private and family life occurs, as does a change in gender and family roles and relationships. This so-called transnationalisation of parenthood is fulfilled only in the form of financial and material support.

Separation of the family is often the result of circumstances that women cannot influence. The complicated and costly administration and legalisation of residence, the financial burden of the entire family living together in emigration, the time demands related to working conditions on the job in the Czech Republic, the lack of time for a private life, the workload of immigrant women, and the loss of private sources of assistance and support with the care of their children in the Czech Republic are obstacles to the joint migration of the entire family. In some cases, conditions for the later arrival of the children are achieved, such conditions including acquiring a job and accommodation and creating a foundation and a feeling of safety and security (Víznerová 2008).

The negative consequences on the family life of women appear in particular in the case of forced migration, as in this case contact with the original family that remained in the country of origin is severely restricted.

*“...just seeing my mother or father or sister once, even if only to see them and talk to them for an hour. I am just like a child: my family means everything to me.”*

Asylum holder from Chechnya (Na rovinu 2007)

Various situations related to parenthood and children affect women also when considering returning to the country of origin or deciding to settle permanently in the Czech Republic. Such situations include, for example, giving birth in the Czech Republic, marrying a Czech and giving birth, building a family, wishing to have the children grow up and study in the Czech Republic (due to the living conditions in the country of origin), and taking account of the fact that the children have integrated into Czech society (Víznerová 2008).

Interviews with migrant women have shown that the presence of other family members or other kith and kin from the country of origin who have lived in the Czech Republic for an extended period of time already is fundamental to assessing in particular the start of a women's life in the Czech Republic. The existence of functioning family ties provides incoming women with material, financial, emotional, and psychological support as well as practical information and advice, and helps them to settle into their new life and environment and manage the related problems and obstacles. The existence of a family base also contributes to their perception of the host country as a society where they feel “at home” (conclusions from the research project Na rovinu 2007).

The presence of children in emigration or the birth of a child significantly influences the decision to remain in the Czech Republic. It is becoming apparent that a strong family base means a strong integration factor and is one of the conditions necessary for full integration (Analýza přístupu 2007).

### 3. Information and education

Acquiring information and learning to understand the new country in terms of the cultural and social system (customs, norms, behaviour, and social relationships), the legal and institutional system, the job market, the healthcare and social security system, and other spheres of social life are a prerequisite to successful integration in the host country. What is the access of women to information like? Do migrant women's level and scope of knowledge and understanding of the new society differ from migrant men's? Do incoming women and men have equal educational opportunities?

The updated Foreigner Integration Policy (2006) mentions so-called specific targeted measures leading to meeting the state's integration policy's objective of support in improving foreigners' understanding of, and ability to get by, in society. Another objective of the state's integration policy is to increase the Czech majority's, including public administrators', level of awareness.

Generally, it is necessary to differentiate between the possibilities of access to information according to category of foreigner and in relation to the form of migration and residency status in the Czech Republic. For asylum applicants and asylum holders, access to information is to a certain extent ensured, more so than for other groups of migrants that find themselves in greater "isolation" from institutions and organisations that offer assistance to foreigners and are rather reliant on informal and non-institutionalised sources (family, community, residency agents, and others). Nevertheless, the State Integration Programme for the Support of Integration of Asylum Holders [Státní integrační program na podporu integrace azylantů/tek] includes only support for accommodation, education in the Czech language, and, to a certain extent, employment. Although some residential and integration asylum centres (at the initiative of the Ministry for the Interior in cooperation with NGOs) and some NGOs organise courses on Czech life and society (for example, understanding the Czech job market), the state does not provide obligatory and systematic support for the integration of asylum holders.

Even what information the migrant has about the target country before migrating has a significant influence on subsequent residency in the Czech Republic. Research shows that migrant women are overall less informed than men about the conditions in the target country, which under certain conditions can lead to certain dangers, such as human trafficking, abuse, or forced labour (Analýza přístupu 2007: 54). Economic migrants obtain information from family and friends or from future employers. Men tend to make use of a wider group of friends and family; women focus significantly more on the immediate family (especially younger women coming from Chinese or Vietnamese communities). These can be women who travel to the Czech Republic for work and to gain experience, who are sent by their families to close relatives, or who follow their husbands who are already working in the Czech Republic (Analýza přístupu 2007:17-19).

*"I came alone because my boyfriend was here, and then we got married here. (...) I would not have come if he weren't here; I came because he was here. (...) It was like this – He told me: 'You know what? Come here and we'll be together.' He saw how people lived here and how people lived at home. I had no idea, so he made the decision."*

Migrant woman from Ukraine (Víznerová 2008)

Migrant women face the problem of a lack of knowledge and difficulty in understanding the social and institution system in the Czech Republic, which can differ substantially from that

of the migrant woman's country of origin. In addition to practical information necessary for day-to-day contact and dealing with the authorities, employers, etc., women are missing a general understanding of the social and cultural system, which includes norms, behaviour, methods of communication, and interpersonal relationships. The absence of necessary information makes access to services and communication in day-to-day life more difficult. The language barrier further complicates access to information and overall awareness and understanding of the new environment.

*"It's because of everything, not just because you are a women. It's also because you are black and a foreigner. Some offices are good here. I study Czech because it's very difficult for me to explain myself when I go to the authorities. And for my son, for school, because nobody speaks English at his school. So I have to learn. (...) The language and the system, Czech, because it's different, it's totally different. But now I am adapting, to the language and to the people. I have never had any bad experiences in my life with Czech people, only with the Labour Office."*

Asylum holder from Sierra Leone (Na rovinu 2007)

Insufficient, incomplete, or inconsistent information (concerning for example the rights and obligations connected to residency status) both on the part of immigrants and on the part of the Czech majority (employers, public administrators) is one of the causes of discrimination and unequal treatment. Even in cases where migrants are aware of their rights and entitlements, it is difficult for them to defend themselves against such treatment. They, by definition, find themselves in an unequal relationship, whereas the representatives of the Czech majority treat and approach them from a position of power.

When having to deal with the authorities, some women display low self-esteem, which stems from, among other things, their way of life in the country of origin (specifically the traditional roles of women and men, where the private sphere is the woman's domain and interaction with public institutions – responsibility and obligations towards and communication with – is the man's domain). This lack of self-esteem is enforced by the approach and treatment of the representatives of the Czech majority. Discriminatory treatment by them stems from a lack of information, knowledge, and understanding of the migrant's situation and from the resulting prejudices and stereotypical perception of foreigners.

Interviews<sup>2</sup> with migrants have revealed one successful strategy used by them when dealing and communicating with the Czech majority, the basic prerequisite being an understanding and knowledge of their rights and obligations related to their residency status. The effective strategy is communication based on own initiative and specificity of the requests (which means having sufficient information, knowing basic legislation, knowing where to go and who or what to refer to, etc.).

*"But I just simply knew how it worked and never requested just something in general. I always asked for something specific. 'Excuse me. I don't know how to arrange from this parental allowance. Please help me.' Or 'I don't know what the form looks like. Could you please show me?' If you ask a specific question, then you get a specific answer."*

Asylum holder from Belarus (Krchová, Víznerová 2008)

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<sup>2</sup> For example, the ECG research project entitled "Diskriminace azylantů a azylantek v ČR z genderové perspektivy" ["Discrimination of male and female asylum holders in the Czech Republic from a gender perspective"].

Access to information is related to a significant degree to gender roles and division of labour in immigrant families. In families with a traditional division of roles (strict separation of private and public spheres), women have limited access to information and are in a way “dependent” on the man (Krchová, Víznerová 2008: 47).

For women who have recently arrived, one of the sources of assistance with, and support in, understanding and getting by in the new society or the job market is family, friends, or relatives who have been living in the Czech Republic already for some time. NGOs are another source of information, support, and assistance, especially (but not exclusively) in the case of asylum applicants (as are social workers at accommodation and integration asylum centres).

### **Education**

This topic does not only include the issue of education to acquire information about living conditions in the new country and language skills, but also the issue of professional education and retraining and the recognition of original qualifications and education obtained in the country of origin. This is closely tied to success on the job market.

The obstacles to further education and increasing qualifications are: language barriers, low motivation (especially for working migrants), other priorities (for asylum holders, a place to live is in first place, followed by employment, and only then education), a lack of funds for retraining courses (for asylum holders), a lack of knowledge and information on the part of migrants, or an unequally distributed network of NGOs offering educational services in the Czech Republic. Economic immigrants whose main migration objective is temporary residence for financial gain are active on the secondary job market where high qualifications are not necessary; they are also not motivated economically or in some other way to increase their qualifications (Analýza přístupu 2007: 36-37).

Migrant women more often than men face the problem of their original qualifications not being accepted. Women also make use of their qualifications less often than men. This is caused by segmentation of the job market, where women take on jobs in professions where specific qualifications are not required, namely in the service sector (e.g., cleaning services) (Analýza přístupu 2007: 56).

Also in the case of increasing education or retraining does the problem of limited and disadvantaged access and opportunities arise in connection with the issue of structure of gender roles in relationships and in the family and in parental obligations and commitments.

*“... because we thought we would stay here, he (author’s note: the husband) received money for his studies, and I was promised that when he completed his studies, I would be able to complete my studies, and so on. It turned out, however that he finished his studies and I ended up alone, without anything, with a child to care for, and without a practically normal education. For example, I wanted to attend English courses, but then again, if you work, you don’t have time. And because my child was still too young for me to travel somewhere or to attend courses full time, there was no way for me to manage it.”*

Migrant woman from Ukraine (Víznerová 2008)

For single mothers, who are the lone breadwinners, it is essentially unrealistic to study and take part in, for example, retraining courses. An asylum holder mentioned her situation, where she has no choice but to juggle childcare and work (a part-time job); however, she has no opportunity to practice her profession because she lacks the required retraining in the field to be able to enter the Czech job market.

*"I don't like my work because it's cleaning, cleaning somebody's house. (...) I am a hairdresser but they need me to go to school, to study how to do it the European way here, how to change hair-colour and how to do it. And I have to study for this before I start working in a hairdressing salon here in Prague. So, that's why I chose cleaning jobs for now because they can't take me anyway. I can't work for more than five hours, six hours because I have to take care of my son. So, I like cleaning for now because I don't have a choice."*

Asylum holder from Sierra Leone (Na rovinu 2007)

#### 4. Language integration

Knowledge of the language of the society of which the immigrants want to become a part is integral to the entire integration process. One of the priorities of the government's Foreigner Integration Policy is to ensure knowledge of Czech. At this time, however, it is the state's policy to organise language courses only as part of the State Integration Programme intended for asylum holders. Since 2002, language courses have been provided by the NGO Sdružení občanů zabývajících se emigranty (Citizens Association for Emigrants - SOZE).

Research<sup>3</sup> has revealed in particular the following deficiencies of the language courses being provided:

1. Organisation of the courses differs depending on the size of the location where the courses are held. Availability of, and access to, courses is greater in bigger cities than in small towns. Asylum holders are not sufficiently informed about individual courses.
2. Hourly subsidies are not sufficient. At this time, group courses in the scope of 150 hours and individual courses in the scope of 100 hours are taking place, which is showing to be insufficient however.
3. Courses are organised at the general knowledge level, i.e., knowledge necessary for general (day-to-day) understanding and communication. Courses that allow command of the language in specialised areas are missing, which leads to highly qualified asylum holders working in positions requiring only low qualifications.
4. Courses under the SIP suffer from the problem of low motivation on the part of some of the asylum holders – some do not attend the courses, others do not complete them (Analýza přístupu 2007:35). This can be explained by a number of reasons: childcare is not arranged during group courses (e.g., those courses that take place in asylum centres), which fact precludes the participation of women with small children, especially in families with tradition division of roles, where raising and caring for children are the woman's do-

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<sup>3</sup> ECS project entitled "Diskriminace azylantů a azylantek v ČR z genderové perspektivy" ["Discrimination of male and female asylum holders in the Czech Republic from a gender perspective"]. Uherek, Z. 2005. *Integrace azylantů a efektivita státního integračního programu [Integration of asylum holders and effectiveness of the state integration programme]*. Prague: Etnologický ústav AV ČR [Ethnological Institute of the Academy of Sciences of the Czech Republic].

main; conversely, men are often precluded because already at such time (i.e., shortly after being granted asylum) they are trying to be economically active. The time that courses are held does not take into account working hours, which in the majority of cases is longer than normal.

5. Courses are attended by people with different levels of knowledge of the language, demotivating and slowing down all those present. "Some respondents from the former Soviet Union expressed the opinion that it would be useful to modify courses with regard to the language environment which the asylum holder came from. Respondents whose native language or language of communication is a Slavic language learn Czech faster and the courses can thus be more difficult than for students who know no Slavic language." (Uherek 2005:86).

The question remains whether Czech language courses should be provided at the time of application for international protection. Many of those surveyed<sup>4</sup> stated that if they could have changed something in the past to feel better integrated, it would be attending Czech courses while they were waiting for the decision on granting of asylum. This is a time when applicants have enough time to study the language. Not everyone is aware of this, and there is no motivation to learn.

For economic immigrants, there are courses provided by non-profit organisations that are financially supported by the government through grants. People who have previous ties to the Czech Republic are in a simpler situation in this case and their entrance possibilities are also more favourable. For example, it is easier for them to understand and get by in the job market.

Often among economic migrants are people who see their residency as temporary and their return to their country of origin occurring sooner or later. "These people often live in closed groups that are homogenous language-wise and in which their native language is sufficient to get by. Contact with institutions with which it is necessary to speak Czech is then arranged through an agency" (Analýza přístupu 2007: 34) or a third person. Such practice leads to dependence on the intermediary of any sort of service and to the complete isolation of the person who does not know how to communicate in the host country. Migrant women often find themselves in this position, dependent on their husband's knowledge of Czech, which is common practice in traditional families. As research has shown, these are usually persons from the Vietnamese or Ukrainian communities. "Immigrants from Southeast Asia often do not feel the need to learn the language in the new place of residence because they live and work in closed communities; therefore, in most situations, their native language is sufficient to get by, hiring an interpreter when it becomes necessary" (Analýza přístupu 2007: 35).

Non-profit organisations organise Czech language courses, but their attendance by immigrants is not very high. One of the reasons for this is the immigrants' heavy workload. Migrant women<sup>5</sup> often cite the fact that in order to survive, they must work under difficult conditions, in shifts, and very often for periods that exceed usual working hours. They then have no time leftover to attend language courses. This also applies to Vietnamese entrepreneurs who operate shops with opening hours that do not make it possible for them to

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<sup>4</sup> ECS project entitled "Diskriminace azylantů a azylantek v ČR z genderové perspektivy" ["Discrimination of male and female asylum holders in the Czech Republic from a gender perspective"] (15 women and 14 men took part in the study).

<sup>5</sup> Conclusions from the ECS research project entitled *Na rovinu* (2007).

attend courses. They then deal with situations using their own resources: "Although upon arriving in the Czech Republic most Vietnamese attend a three-month language course organised by their compatriots, the courses are not taught by good teachers and suitable learning materials are not provided, so those who complete the course are not able to use the language actively." (Analýza přístupu 2007: 35). When organising a language course, it would therefore be appropriate to take into consideration the needs and possibilities of the people who are to attend such course.

The motivation to have a better command of Czech could be to implement stricter tests in the process of applying for permanent residence permits. However, only practice will show if this measure will have the intended result.

Language is a basic component for the integration of migrants, as the inability to communicate and get by in ordinary, day-to-day situations leads to frustration on both sides. Unpleasant situations that could be avoided thus arise both on the side of the immigrants and on the side of the Czech majority.

The experience of many EU Member States has shown that the most effective teaching method for immigrants is connecting language courses with practical training aimed at integration in the job market. It is also beneficial if language courses are concluded with a generally recognised certificate that is known and respected by both language institutions and employers (Handbook on Integration for Policy-Makers and Practitioners 2004).

## **5. Social and cultural integration**

As already mentioned in the introduction, not only legislation and official documentation create the environment into which immigrants integrate. Informal ties and contact with the majority society creates the day-to-day life of migrants.

By leaving their country of origin, migrants often lose ties to the wider family and often find themselves completely alone here. The loss of their original social ties is irreplaceable, and it is no longer possible in the new environment to establish ties on the same foundations that each person does in his/her own environment. The social networks that a person creates throughout his/her life suddenly disappear from the migrant's life and he/she finds himself/herself alone in a new reality. The new situation leads to feelings of loneliness and isolation from the surrounding world.

If we look at this situation from the perspective of the traditional perception of gender roles in the family, it is the woman who raises and takes care of the children, often without contact with other adults. This problem exacerbates the issue of communication barriers due to the lack of knowledge of Czech, and the woman thus finds herself in isolation that is very difficult to get out of. Survey respondents with small children stated that they only had contact with their children and husband, so nothing motivated them to learn Czech, and even if they wanted to learn, they did not have the opportunity to do so, as they had very little chance of social contact during the day. Especially in Muslim communities it is the custom that women form an independent community – sisters (sisters-in-law) spend most of the day together, cook together, shop, and take care of the children. If they leave their original environment, it is difficult for them to find a replacement for their social contacts. On the other hand, women in their new life situation with school-age children have to

communicate with the educational facility, with the parents of their children's classmates, or in the framework of their children's extracurricular activities. These social contacts then create a new social network for the family.

### ***City versus country***

It is interesting to look at this issue from the theory of type of society according to the prevailing type of solidarity. Ferdinand Tonnies differentiated between two types of society: *Gesellschaft* and *Gemeinschaft*. The former "defines a society where the main integration relationships are formal, impersonal, and contractual." A *Gemeinschaft* "describes a system of solidarity based on similarities between people and on the feelings of mutual loyalty. This is a brotherhood in which there are personal and emotional ties between people ..." (Murphy 2001: 220).<sup>6</sup> It can be said that according to the first type, help during integration into the new environment in larger cities is also available as is a broad range of services for foreigners provided by non-governmental non-profit organisations; on the other hand, life in a big city is anonymous, friends are difficult to make, and a person meets hundreds of unknown people on a daily basis. In smaller towns or in the country, migrants do not have the possibility to make use of services to the same extent as in bigger cities, but here they meet the same people every day and develop ties to the environment quickly by making new social contacts. People know each other here, which is, on the one hand, a great advantage for the newcomer, as there is the possibility of receiving informal help; on the other hand, however, "everything is much easier to see", i.e., that foreigners have moved to town. The majority of migrants, however, believe that they have the best chance for integration in a big city, ideally Prague. "The research results show that foreigners find that they have the best chances in urban centres – social and economic centres – but majority society tends to push them out to the outskirts" (Uherek 2003: 333).

### ***Satisfaction with life in the Czech Republic***

One of the factors that influence the extent of integration in society is the migrants' satisfaction with life in the host country. Research<sup>7</sup> focusing on ascertaining foreigners' satisfaction in the Czech Republic dealt with the following topics: material satisfaction, private satisfaction, and satisfaction with the overall development of the Czech Republic. Material satisfaction was assessed the highest, with satisfaction with the overall development of the Czech Republic assessed the worst. "As regards the sex of the respondent, there were practically no differences in the level of satisfaction attained in each area; only with the situation in the family were men less satisfied than women" (Analýza přístupu 2007: 42). The research also arrived at the following conclusions:

- Working immigrants are generally more satisfied than asylum holders. The difference can be explained, however, by the low level of material satisfaction and diminished life style.
- The income of more than half of asylum holders is insufficient to pay for courses that would increase their qualifications.
- Housework is an important indicator of the family's integration, i.e., that the family

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<sup>6</sup> Translator's note: The definition of *Gesellschaft* and *Gemeinschaft* by Murphy is translated from Czech and will probably differ from the English original.

<sup>7</sup> Quantitative research was carried out by the company Společnost Ivana Gabala and the observed sample was economic migrants from Vietnam, China, Ukraine, and Russia, and asylum holders. The research took gender aspects into consideration (Analýza přístupu 2007).



has settled into its new Czech home. Women with permanent residency status in particular devote themselves to this kind of work.

### ***Cultural integration***

There is no objective indicator of how near or far apart cultures are from one another and it is not possible to determine which cultures are nearer to or farther apart from each other. Nevertheless, a certain similarity can be ascertained by how related the languages are. One piece of evidence is the responses of asylum holders who come from the countries of the former Soviet Union to the question why they chose the Czech Republic as their destination country. Their explanation was often that Czech and Russian are Slavic languages and, therefore, they believed that Czech culture would be more familiar to them than if they went to Germany or France for example.

### ***Coexistence with the majority society***

The ability to understand others is also reflected in relationships with the majority society. According to the respondents, day-to-day contact with the majority Czech society is usually not problematic. However, there do exist cases of xenophobic behaviour towards migrants that stems from a lack of knowledge and prejudice. The most common reasons for maliciousness stem from historic events (this applies especially to persons from countries of the former Soviet Union, where often it is not differentiated whether the discriminated person is from Russia or from some other country that was, like Czechoslovakia, under the influence of the USSR) or from persisting stereotypes. A successful way to integrate is to have intensive contact with the majority society through joint activities in the form of, for example, social events, cultural events, sporting events, volunteering/civic efforts in the place where one lives or in the neighbouring area, and so on.

“A highly successful integration strategy is integration through sport. There is an interest in able athletes no matter what the country of origin. It is remarkable how quickly local communities adapted the foreign model that they can be represented by athletes of any origin. At this time, the international composition of a team is deemed prestigious even in competitions at the lowest level. Integration into local society through inclusion in a sports team has been mentioned many times in research. Another form of integration into local structures includes offering skills or goods sought by the majority population. Tradesmen, tuckers, and shopkeepers often fill an important niche in local society, and friendly contact with the majority population takes place at the professional level, even though this route is often quite long. Less common is integration through hobbies or artistic activities; nevertheless, there exist positive examples from the field of art photography for instance” (Uherek 2003: 343).

Increasing the level of integration into local structures, i.e., creating associations where the idea of a multicultural society is fulfilled, is a task that is a big future challenge not only for migrants, but also for the majority society at all levels.

## 6. Healthcare and access to medical care

### *Health insurance*

In the Czech Republic, all legal migrants have access to health insurance. The residency status, i.e., the basis for the migrant obtaining a residency permit, determines the type of health insurance and medical care available.

Foreigners with permanent residency face the fewest problems. At the moment that a foreigner is granted permanent residency, he or she is included in the public health insurance register pursuant to Section 73 of Act No. 326/199 Coll., on Residency of Foreigners. Thus, theoretically, access to healthcare is the same as for the majority society. The same situation applies to persons who have been granted asylum and who are registered in the Czech Republic as permanent residents (Jelínková 2007: 3).

Migrants residing in the Czech Republic legally are obliged to conclude a health insurance policy, which is then used to cover any medical care provided. According to the type of residency, migrants have the possibility to conclude either public health insurance or contractual health insurance. Public health insurance is only available to migrants who have permanent residency or temporary residency based on a work permit (employed at an employer with its registered office in the Czech Republic), asylum holders, and foreigners with a visa for the purposes of temporary protection or for the purpose of tolerated residency. Contractual health insurance is a commercial product that allows even persons who remain in the Czech Republic only temporarily or only for a short period of time (and are not employed at an employer with its registered office in the Czech Republic) to receive medical care.

Migrants who do not fulfil the conditions for taking part in public health insurance can conclude health insurance at the public health insurance company Všeobecná zdravotní pojišťovna (VZP) and at certain commercial insurance companies. With regard to the extent of care paid from health insurance, the insurance policy is concluded either for the short-term (for emergency medical care) or the long-term, i.e., comprehensive contractual health insurance. Comprehensive health insurance can only be concluded with VZP; in this case, a choice of a health insurance in the Czech Republic is thus not possible. One becomes insured on the basis of concluding a policy and as of the day stated in the policy. The insurance premium is higher than the minimum public health insurance premium, and the insurance covers a narrower scope of health care than public health insurance. Long-term contractual health insurance is concluded with persons who are less than 70 years old based on a preliminary medical examination in a healthcare facility determined by the health insurance company. The amount of the health insurance premium depends on the age and sex of the applicant, which can be deemed discriminatory, as application of the equality principle would have the insurance premium in the same amount for both men and women. A certain complication is the fact that not all healthcare facilities provide care based on long-term contractual insurance. A public list of healthcare facilities that do provide such care is available at all VZP regional branches.

For many foreigners, contractual insurance is inaccessible for financial and sometimes even health reasons. Even if they pay for it, they are sometimes refused to be seen by the doctor (Tollarová 2006: 48).

*“The insurance (...) is quite expensive, especially for foreigners, and even though you find out that the doctor has an agreement with VZP – you verify it by telephone – you come there with your green card and they say: ‘Well, we do not accept that card here.’” (Viliana) (Tollarová 2006: 48)*

In the case of the birth of a child the situation is not entirely clear. After the birth of a child, it is necessary to conclude a health insurance policy, but the decision to insure the baby is entirely at the discretion of the insurance company, which can refuse to insure the child after the preliminary medical examination. The situation is different for migrants with permanent residency, asylum holders, applicants for international protection, foreigners with a visa for the purpose of tolerated residence and for the purpose of temporary protection where the child fulfils the conditions for public health insurance and the costs are covered by the state.

Foreigners who are excluded from public health insurance have two choices: they can purchase accident insurance, which is cheaper, is sufficient for the foreigners' police, but does not cover anything other than accidents; or they do not insure themselves at all and pay for each visit to the doctor in cash, which is in principle possible, but some respondents have told of being refused treatment in such cases.

*“Goranka: My daughter did not have insurance ... she cut herself and was bleeding. So we rushed off to Motol Hospital, to emergency, and she almost bled to death there. I went crazy. I had to argue with them because she had no insurance. I told them that of course I would pay in cash, that it was a matter of life or death, that it was really acute. They kept taking people who came after us. They kept taking them and we kept having to wait.*

*Sofie: Because you were foreigners?*

*Goranka: Yes, one hundred percent. Even if you pay, you wait because you don't have an insurance card. How dare we come just like that without insurance? I went completely out of my mind.” (Tollarová 2006: 49)*

Respondents who resided in the Czech Republic on a visa and were not from a developing country also had negative experiences with receiving medical care (Tollarová 2006: 49).

### **Provision of medical care**

According to “Průvodce systémem zdravotní péče České republiky” [“Guide to the Czech Healthcare System”] (2004), healthcare in the Czech Republic is based on the following principles: solidarity, extensive self-governance, multiple source financing with the prevailing share being from health insurance, freedom to choose a doctor and healthcare facility, freedom to choose a health insurance company in the framework of the public health insurance system, and the same access to services for all policyholders. From the above it is clear that some of the principles do not apply to some groups of migrants; for example, asylum seekers do not have the freedom to choose their doctor or healthcare facility.

Persons who take part in public health insurance have access to healthcare free of charge, i.e., under the same conditions as Czech citizens. As part of the interviews that took place as part of ECG research,<sup>8</sup> questions were asked about medical care. These interviews

<sup>8</sup> ECG project entitled “Diskriminace azylantů a azylantek v ČR z genderové perspektivy” [“Discrimination of male and female asylum holders in the Czech Republic from a gender perspective”]; ECG research project entitled Na rovinu (2007).

showed that women do not experience serious problems that would stem from certain legislative measures. Any unpleasant situations experienced by our female respondents stemmed rather from culturally or gender insensitive behaviour and were rather the exception.

The so-called “healthy migrant effect” does in fact exist. As research shows, migrants visit the doctor less than members of the majority society. This can be explained for one by the fact that migration is a difficult journey that is often undertaken by fitter and healthier individuals, those who do not suffer from chronic illnesses. Therefore, they visit the doctor less often. It can thus be said that migrants who come to the Czech Republic feel healthy and, thus, visit the doctor less than Czech citizens. The situation is more likely to change, however, the longer their stay. As women are for economic reasons forced to do physically more demanding jobs, often in not very good conditions, their state of health deteriorates rapidly, which leads to permanent health problems. As one of the female research<sup>9</sup> participants mentioned, her state of health significantly deteriorated after she began to work in shifts (the working hours of which often exceeded the standard) and in a cold and damp environment.

The research carried out by Institut zdravotní politiky a ekonomiky [Institute of Healthcare Policy and Economics] in 2001<sup>10</sup> showed that one of the most vulnerable groups in terms of access to healthcare is the Ukrainian economic migrant community. It was found that this group is the most poorly informed about how the Czech healthcare system functions. Ukrainian migrants often become victims of fraudulent health insurance companies and work in environments conducive to workplace accidents.

The most significant problem in healthcare appears to be insufficiently informed migrants in terms of how the Czech healthcare system works. Based on this lack of information, situations arise that make life in the new environment unpleasant. One attempt to resolve the situation is the publication of an information handbook for foreigners<sup>11</sup>; furthermore, a central information system (H.E.L.P.) run by Lékařský informační centrum [Medical Information Centre] exists. In practice, however, migrants are not properly informed and find it very difficult once they arrive in the Czech Republic to function in the Czech healthcare system.

## 7. Economic integration: work life of migrant women in the Czech Republic

The following text focuses on the work life of migrant women in the Czech Republic and on economic integration, which represents a significant part of the social integration of immigrants. The position of migrant men and women on the Czech job market, the job opportunities open to them, and the obstacles that they face in this area will be introduced briefly.

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<sup>9</sup> ECS (EKS) research project Na rovinu (2007).

<sup>10</sup> *Zdravotní stav a péče o zdraví občanů bývalého SSSR, pobývajících dlouhodobě v ČR a občanů ČR [State of health and care for health of citizens of the former USSR residing long-term in the Czech Republic and citizens of the Czech Republic]*. 2004. Kostelec nad Černými lesy: Institut zdravotní politiky a ekonomiky [Institute of Healthcare Policy and Economics].

<sup>11</sup> *Průvodce systémem zdravotní péče České republiky. Informační příručka pro cizince [Guide to the Healthcare System in the Czech Republic. Information Handbook for Foreigners]*. 2004. Kostelec nad Černými lesy: Institut zdravotní politiky a ekonomiky [Institute of Healthcare Policy and Economics].

The specifics of integration of migrant women at work, how women perceive their position at work, and their experiences with looking for work and working will be shown.

The importance that women in emigration and in the process of integration place on paid work, their relationship to work, and whether changes occur in their attitudes through (not only) their migration experience and in their gender roles in their families and relationships are also of significance in connection with women and men working and women entering the job market.

Participation in the job market and economic independence, as stems for example from the qualitative survey Na rovinu (2007), are very important for many women. They emphasise the significance of paid and legal work and consider it to be a significant component of a foreigner's successful integration into majority society. Work for women represents not only a means to make a living, but also a means to economic independence, making their personal independence possible. Women stress the importance of having their own income also in connection with refusing to be dependent on help and assistance from the state. This aspect is particularly apparent among female asylum holders who have experienced a period of uncertainty and passive waiting when applying for asylum (a period with limited opportunities for economic activity and a period of dependence on support from the state), and being granted asylum represented to them the beginning of a new "normal" life, with work being an important part of it.

*"...First, I consider work to be the best way to fit into society; second, I see money as confirmation of my independence, my ability as a woman, my ability to stand on my own two feet – it is significant in many ways. Work has a lot of importance for us refugees, for any person for that matter, but especially for us refugees."*

Asylum holder from Chechnya (Na rovinu 2007)

The area of economic integration and employment belongs to those areas where migrants find themselves in an unequal position. The subjective perception of their position in society as unequal compared to members of majority society is expressed by migrants in a number of surveys focused on this target group. Migrants (both women and men) have to come to terms not only with the issue of economic inequality and the issue of unequal distribution of tangible and intangible assets (access to sources, services, rights, etc.), but also with a lack of acknowledgement, recognition, and respect; degradation; and stereotyping that makes them, as foreigners, second-class individuals (Klvačová 2007: 59-60).

These situations are described mainly by migrants from third countries, especially eastern countries<sup>12</sup>. The described position of migrants in the job market and society in general is testified to by the fact that certain categories of migrants were formed in the Czech Republic, and these categories qualified them for certain positions on the job market, and freeing oneself from this position ("immigrants from the East") is not always simple (Grygar, Čaněk, Černík 2006: 17). It is being shown that even long-term residence in the Czech Republic and change in legal status (for example, obtaining permanent residency status, which provides the same legal status on the job market as Czech citizens) do not have to lead to a better position on the job market and work mobility.

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<sup>12</sup> Public opinion surveys illustrate the rather negative perception held in the Czech Republic of Ukrainians, Vietnamese, and Russians (Grygar, Čaněk, Černík 2006: 17).

The position of migrants on the Czech job market and their work mobility are further affected by the motivation to migrate and its actual realisation with subsequent administration of stay, the immigrant's social and cultural capital, knowledge of Czech, family commitments, parenthood, and gender (Grygar, Čaněk, Černík 2006).

The gender category becomes evident upon segmenting the job market. The traditional division of work according to gender persists: women are prevalent in certain sectors and jobs, men in others (with the pay in feminised professions being significantly worse). The situation becomes even more problematic in the case of migrants who fulfil the demand of current economies for unqualified and cheap labour, which to a great extent takes place within the shadow economy and the secondary or illegal job market, outside of the state's control, without any social security, health insurance, or protection against discrimination and violation of human rights. "Gender inequalities are thus further strengthened by class, ethnic, national, and racial inequalities, and the oppression of women is reproduced through division of labour based on gender and race" (Uhde, Víznerová 2006).

Such unqualified and poorly paid work done by migrant women includes care giving and housework. This global phenomenon of hiring migrant women as caregivers (taking care of children, the aged, or the ill), who make up for insufficient public care, and maids can also be found in the Czech Republic. Paid care represents one form of uncertain, poorly paid, and inflexible employment often without basic social security and health insurance. As "employers" enjoy lower financial costs and the work permit process is complicated, this work often takes place on the illegal job market (Uhde 2008).

Gender inequality and sexual discrimination appear at the point of entrance into the job market (e.g., discriminatory job advertisement or job interview) and at work in terms of remuneration or discrimination when carrying out parental duties. Significant differences in pay exist between migrant men and migrant women. Research whose target group was economic migrants from China, Vietnam, Russia and Ukraine (i.e., the most numerous group of foreigners from third countries in the Czech Republic) found that women generally earn up to 3500 Czech crowns less than men. The difference in pay between the sexes exists even for the same jobs (Analýza přístupu 2007: 46).

Physically demanding work and the conditions and working hours in unqualified employment have a negative impact on the state of health of women. The result is that women become "unemployable". Due to the disadvantageous position of foreigners on the Czech job market and existing barriers, they often do not have the opportunity to find different jobs. They have to refuse vacant positions in manual professions, in unfavourable and demanding work conditions, and with demanding working hours (for example shift work), and thus remain unemployed for the long-term.

The job situation is specific for applicants for international protection (asylum). Legislation sets the conditions for their economic activity: applicants cannot work for the first year after filing their application for international protection. This fact has a number of negative implications (which appear even in the applicant's future life in the host country, provided they are granted asylum): illegal employment, which often takes on the form of exploitation and abuse of the applicants; loss of work habits; inability to attain work experience on the Czech job market; limited communication and contact with the Czech majority; low motivation to learn Czech; and the difficult economic and social situation of women and their families.

The results of sociological research in the framework of the project entitled “Proč mají zůstat stranou? -Komplexní využití potenciálu žadatelů o azyl” [“Why do they have to sit on the sidelines? – Comprehensive utilisation of the potential of asylum seekers”] (carried out in the period 2005 – 2006; 184 respondents involved in international protection proceedings for more than one year) point to the problematic situation for asylum seekers to find work (the results are not categorised according to sex): 46% of respondents do not feel that they are well informed about legislation; 89% looked for work before the one-year restriction expired; 76% found work before the one-year restriction expired; 62% would be illegally employed; 83% have had at some experience with working illegally (AEC presentation).

Applicants often work illegally under very unfavourable conditions (e.g., long working hours, low pay). Employment through agencies (of so-called clients) leads to abuse of migrants as cheap labour or their exploitation.

*“...when we were still applicants it was not possible as were asylum seekers ... but we worked nevertheless, under the table. In the beginning I worked eighteen hours a day. Until then I had no idea what it was like to work in the normal way for eighteen hours straight. The accommodation facility is five minutes down a hall from the factory. You come, fall into bed, to begin again in the morning. You don't know the language; you don't know anything. We worked for 20 days and didn't get a crown.”*

Asylum holder from Armenia (Na rovinu 2007)

## 8. Irregular migration and illegal work

The Czech Republic has been dealing with the issue of illegal or irregular migration for a relatively short period of time. Before 1989, the country's borders were impermeable to any undesirable migration flows, either in or out. In the area of irregular migration, two groups can be differentiated. People either cross the border without the necessary documentation and thus enter the Czech Republic illegally, or migrants enter the Czech Republic legally, but while residing here, they lose the necessary documentation and their stay becomes irregular.

“The expiration of documents and the related re-categorisation of the immigrant as an illegal immigrant takes place on the basis of a voluntary strategic decision or unawares. In the first case, the immigrant purposefully does not renew the validity of his/her documents, being prompted to do so for a number of reasons (e.g., some immigrants do not want to invest time and money into an uncertain administrative process; others count on the fact that they will be returning home soon). In the second case, the de-regularisation of the immigrant's stay is not intentional. It can happen that a lack of knowledge of the law leads the foreigner into a situation where he/she is not able to properly renew his/her documents; in the worst case, he/she is a victim of trusting the job provider who promised to procure the documents for him/her but reneged on this promise, the motivation being, for example, to strengthen the dependence of the immigrant on the employer or job intermediary” (Hofírek, Nekorjak 2008:10).

According to research carried out on irregular migrants by consultants, unsuccessful asylum applicants comprise a significant part of this group.<sup>13</sup>

### ***Impact of irregular stay on private life of migrants***

Irregular stay can affect a number of family situations that influence private life, such as the inability to enter into marriage, which can lead to certain complications for the family when dealing with various life situations. Another significant problem is then determination of the father.

In connection with the issue of gender, it is necessary to call attention in particular to the fact that being pregnant is an especially difficult and arduous position for women foreigners who live in the Czech Republic illegally to be in regardless of whether or not they decide to have the child, as neither option is optimistic. This situation is commented on the text by M. Jelínková “Když se dítě nehodí” [“When it’s a bad time to have a child”]: “At the moment when a women without a residency permit finds out she is pregnant, the current healthcare system does not give her a real choice for giving birth or getting an abortion, not even in the case where a women is able to pay the market price for all procedures.” (Jelínková 2008: 42). A woman who wants to give birth has no other choice but to apply for asylum or to give birth at home with the help of a midwife, who not only helps with the birth, but arranges for all of the necessary documentation for the baby.” However, as the author herself states, information about this possibility is not well known among women foreigners; therefore, in practice, it is used very little in practice. If a pregnant woman comes to a hospital to give birth, there is a good possibility that the hospital will report her to the foreigners’ police, although the law does not impose this obligation. In the Czech Republic, the law says that abortions may not be performed on women who are residing in the Czech Republic temporarily. For women who live here illegally, there is practically no chance of getting a legal abortion. Therefore, a woman is often forced to undergo an unprofessional procedure, thus putting her health at serious risk. In the current situation, pregnancy, be it wanted or unwanted, for a woman living in the Czech Republic without the required documentation is a very complicated situation that in many cases leads to home births with the fate of the newborn being uncertain, the best case being that the baby starts life without an identity.

Another significant problem that affects the life of families with irregular residence is school attendance. Although a law has been in place since 1 January 2008 that states that basic education is freely accessible even to foreigners from third countries, i.e., Czech legislation is thus compliant with the international Convention on the Rights of the Child, which states that basic education should be available for all children, in practice, however, school principles require residency permits from the children of foreigners, which means that such families face the risk of being detected and suffering the consequences thereof.

### ***Labour-law protection of irregular migrants***

Logically, the unauthorised stay of migrants in the Czech Republic leads to unauthorised employment. Irregular employment is one of the ways that can be used to resolve the leg-

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<sup>13</sup> Research as part of the project “Regularizace jako jeden z prostředků boje proti nelegální migraci” [“Regularisation as one of the means to fight illegal migration”]. The research project had 207 participants (mainly men) (Jelínková 2008).



relatively restricted access to the job market and employment itself, as the structure of opportunities for migrants leads to the secondary job market and the shadow economy. "The motivation to employ immigrants stems from a number of sources. Irregular employment decreases the costs of the work force for the entrepreneur by allowing him to save on social and health insurance contributions. Furthermore, the employer, thanks to the non-existence of an employment contract, is not forced to adhere to regulations stemming from the Labour Code" (Hofírek, Nekorjak 2008:12). For the employee, this situation means that he/she works in very poor conditions, without a contract, and without social and health insurance.

The risks associated with being detected can be avoided by outsourcing<sup>14</sup> and transferring responsibility for irregular work to the migrants' firms. In reality, it is evident that it is the foreigners who are most often persecuted for illegal employment and not the employers. Perhaps this is the reason that "work under the table" is still so popular among employers, as the sanctions for being found out come nowhere near to the savings made on wages and social and health insurance. "Irregular migration for work is a sign of the discord between an essentially unrestricted workforce provided by immigrants, the permanent interest of employers in the (irregular) workforce provided by migrants, and the restrictions applied by destination countries to certain groups of immigrants. The Czech integration policy is in this respect at the beginning and the instruments for integrating immigrants from economically less developed third countries are insufficient, that is unless the integration policy of the Czech Republic sees the integration of foreigners in the shadow economy as desirable" (Hofírek, Nekorjak 2008:12).

## 9. Women migrants and human trafficking

Human trafficking can be simplified to mean moving people by force for the purpose of exploiting them (Burčíková 2006). Exploitation that is the result of human trafficking can in essence occur in any kind of work. In the Czech Republic, trafficking in the sex business but also in construction, forestry, services sectors, food sector, and in small-scale production is known. The exact definition of human trafficking valid for the Czech Republic can be found in Section 232a of the Criminal Code, which deals with crimes against freedom.

Human trafficking is often mentioned together with the concepts of gender-based violence, feminisation of poverty and migration, and structural violence against women (Pearson 2000). Although the number of identified trafficked men is growing in the Czech Republic, women continue to comprise a significantly bigger group of known victims of this criminal activity. Women are most often identified as trafficked persons forced into prostitution (Národní strategie boje proti obchodování s lidmi – National strategy for the fight against human trafficking 2008).

The Czech Republic is both the country of origin of trafficked persons and a transit and destination country. The organisation La Strada Česká republika, o.p.s., which has been active in the area of prevention of human trafficking for more than ten years, says that its

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<sup>14</sup> Outsourcing involves the transfer of the management and/or day-to-day execution of an entire business function to an external service provider (<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Outsourcing>). In essence, however, this is often the practice of an illicit form of employment referred in the Czech Republic as "švarcsystém" (work usually performed by employees is performed by individuals under a trade license, i.e., no employment contracts are concluded).

clientele comprises mainly migrant women of foreign nationality. The first documented case in the organisation's files of a woman who was trafficked to the Czech Republic from abroad dates back to 1997.

One of the possible ways to look into the life of at least some trafficked persons is the experience of non-governmental organisations that cooperate with these people when trying to resolve their problems. La Strada Česká republika meets with migrant women in particular in the area of prevention and provision of social services.

Migrants coming from so-called third countries are, with regard to the many obstacles prevalent in the area of work migration, their lack of knowledge of the language and legal system of the Czech Republic, their uncertain residency status, and other circumstances, one of the significant groups of vulnerable people, particularly in the area of human trafficking. However, even people from the economically weaker countries of the European Union find themselves in a vulnerable position and subject to exploitation (cf. Social Inclusion Manual 2008: 14 et seq.). The vulnerability of women working in the sex business environment is also increased by the fact that many prejudices exist against this method of making a living and no labour-law protection exists (cf. Sex workers in Europe Manifesto 2005). An instrument of force can also be the threat to disclose in the woman's home country how she made a living in the Czech Republic. Some countries punish women for working as a prostitute.

Trafficked and exploited migrant women who have made use of the accommodation services provided by La Strada over the past five years most often came from Ukraine. The organisation's clients also included women from Bulgaria, Kyrgyzstan, Russia, Mongolia, Slovakia, Vietnam, Lithuania, Brazil, Turkmenistan, and China. Most of the women had been trafficked for the purposes of providing sex services.

The difficulties and problems that women turn to the organisation's social workers with can be divided up into three groups. Although it may first appear that these problems are only connected to resolving the consequences of human trafficking, they comprise only one part of the difficulties being resolved. The second group of problems relate to the fact that trafficked women are foreigners in the country. The third group comprises problems and difficulties that anyone can experience.

The consequences of human trafficking usually affect all spheres of a person's life. The vast majority of trafficked persons in the Czech Republic find themselves without a place to live and without the possibility to turn to someone close for help. Most have no money, and in some cases after they have escaped or been rescued, they only have the clothes on their back. Therefore, La Strada's clients make use of the possibility of secret asylum accommodation and the offer of financial assistance for food or basic clothing.

The consequences of human trafficking can also be seen in the health of the individual. At the beginning of the cooperation, most female clients need medical treatment for injuries suffered in the human trafficking environment and for other health problems tied to the experience, such as skin problems, back problems, and headaches. Women who have been forced into prostitution also often request treatment for sexually transmitted infections. International research has shown that more than a half of trafficked women suffer from post-traumatic stress disorders. In this respect, La Strada's clients mention insomnia, anorexia, nightmares, and moments when they relive their traumatic experiences. Especially at the

beginning of cooperation there are frequent feelings of fear when in public or in their flat. Many, however, refuse to visit a psychotherapist or recommended psychiatric outpatient clinic. As some clients later mention, these professions have a very bad reputation in their home countries and suffer from many prejudices (as in the Czech Republic).

Those clients that decide to cooperate with the authorities in criminal proceedings request assistance from social workers or lawyers when in contact with the police or the courts. Criminal proceedings against perpetrators often go on for a number of years. Cooperation with the police is a condition for applying for legalisation of stay if these women find themselves in the Czech Republic without valid documentation (human trafficking can be both the result and the cause of the irregular status) (cf. Burčíková, Kutálková 2008). It also happens that some women want to return to their home countries as soon as possible. Cooperation then focuses on filing an application for voluntary repatriation and, if required, organising assistance from non-governmental organisations in the country of origin (if there is one).

With regard to the essence of human trafficking, each social worker also offers to draw up safety plans and measures for the clients to decrease the risk of danger. It is impossible, however, to entirely eliminate the fear for one's own safety and not least for the safety of one's family or the feeling of being in real danger.

In many cases, trafficked migrant women also have to overcome *barriers tied to the fact that they are foreigners*. If they decide to stay in the Czech Republic, they have to learn at least the basics of the Czech language and gain an understanding of the legal system to be able to assert themselves on the job market. Many have to take on less qualified jobs than they had in their home country and repeatedly face discrimination on the job market and elsewhere. They often mention homesickness, the absence of social ties, and the impossibility to lead a private life or to celebrate holidays in the way they were used to in their home country.

La Strada's clients, however, together with the social workers, also deal with problems that *can affect many of us*. These problems pertain to relationships, divorces, contact with children or the family, money, or accommodation.

Human trafficking is a criminal activity. In many cases it is tied to organised crime and cross-border criminality. It is characterised by high latency. Exact number, statistics, or a true picture of where and under what conditions human trafficking takes place are, therefore, unavailable.

One cannot therefore claim that information at La Strada's disposal is indicative of the situation of all women who are trafficked to the Czech Republic. One can, however, with certainty point to the fact that persons who have been trafficked are affected by this experience for rest of their life.

Trafficked persons (women, children and even men) should be entitled to help and protection from the state and even to compensation for the damage inflicted by the perpetrators. At the same time, it is necessary for them to have the opportunity to make their own decision about the next direction their life should take. Women, be they exploited in the sex industry or trafficked and/or exploited in another sector or service, face many disadvantages connected to gender inequality.

The state's responsibility that arises from international commitments is to implement those measures that can help prevent human trafficking. In this way, the state should also expand and conceive strategies that will allow access to rights for all trafficked persons. Conceiving and implementing prevention strategies and the fight against human trafficking should also reflect reality in the area of gender.

## 10. Conclusion

Women represent a significant and large group of people who come to the Czech Republic from different countries for a variety of reasons. They, however, continue to find themselves in an "invisible" position. In the last few years, the gender aspects of migration and integration have begun to be taken into consideration in the Czech environment (in research, in integration and migration policy and legislation, and in efforts to integrate foreigners). This issue, however, continues to be perceived as marginal.

The fact that the effect of gender on the experience and position of migrants is not taken into account sufficiently also understandably affects migrant men. As a result, the policies and activities aimed at migration and integration of foreigners in the Czech Republic cannot be successful. The prevailing perspective is one that sees immigrants coming to and living in the Czech Republic as more or less a homogenous group and does not take into account the individual and group characteristics that stem not only from the migrant's gender, but also from his/her ethnicity, nationality, religious affiliation, age, and social and economic status.

The main aim of this publication is to call attention to the issues and topics that will arise should the life of migrant men and women and their efforts to integrate into Czech society be observed from the perspective of women and gender. This publication is in particular an introduction to an issue that is certainly not portrayed in full. The objective is to contribute to a greater understanding of the situation of migrant women and to call attention to certain areas that should be of further interest to those who are involved in carrying out research, drafting legislation, creating state policy, and applying them in practice. This publication is, however, also intended for the general public, as life with migrants affects them just as much in daily life.

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