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3 Legislative Setting and Strategic Grounding of Migrant Integration Policies in the Czech Republic (Marie Jelínková)

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3. Legislative Setting and Strategic Grounding of Migrant Integration Policies in the Czech Republic

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3.1 Statistical data

In the last twenty years, the Czech Republic has clearly established itself as a destination for migration, and the number of migrants in the country has been growing for a long time. At the end of 2021, the proportion of migrants reached 6.2% of the total population, which means 660,849 people (Czech Statistical Office 2022). Citizens of other European Union countries make up slightly less than half (42%) of the migrants in the Czech Republic, although several expert studies (e.g. Krejčí and Leontiyeva 2012) have indicated that in addition to the official statistics, a large number of EU citizens live in the Czech Republic without officially registering as resident, despite their legal obligation to do so.¹

As Chart 1 shows, the Czech Republic is one of the few EU countries where there has been a significant increase in the number of migrants over recent years but where, at the same time, the number of migrants granted international protection remains very low (for further details on the Czech Republic's attitude towards refugees, see Jelínková 2019). The increase in migrant numbers thus primarily reflects the arrival of economic migrants, followed by those arriving for the purpose of family reunification. The growing number of permanent residence holders broadly copies the trend in the number of newcomers, which indicates an increasing number of long-term settled migrants. In terms of the representation of men and women, male migration still dominates but

¹ Registration is mandatory for EU citizens who stay in the Czech Republic for longer than 3 months, but the violation of this obligation is not sanctioned.

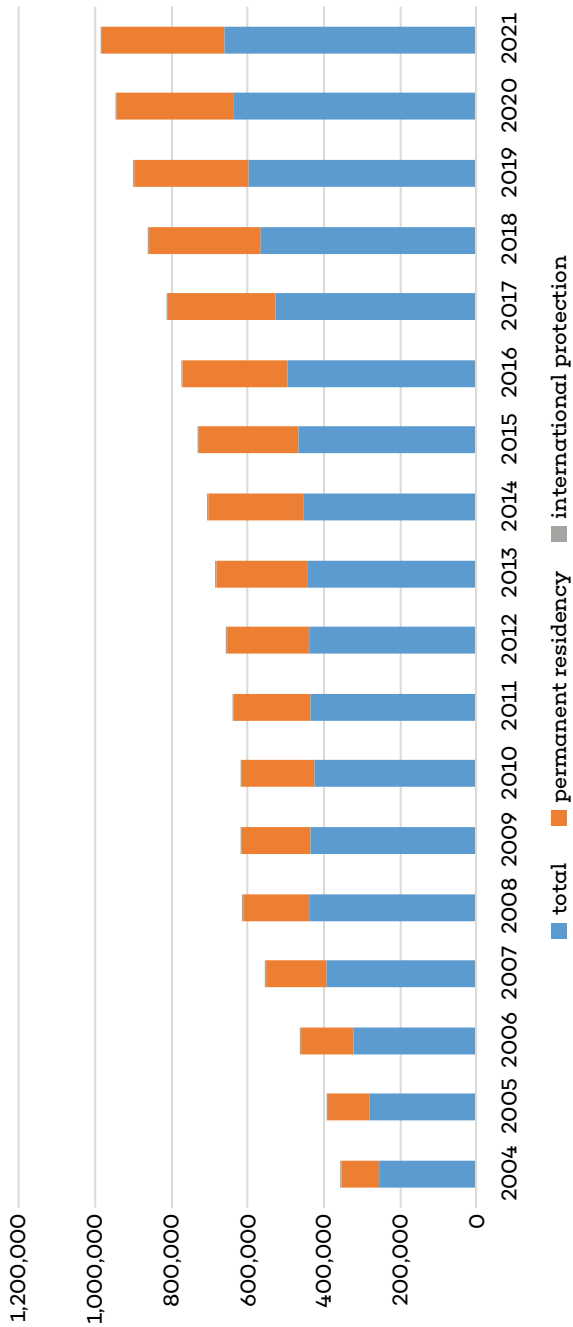


Chart 1 Development in the number of migrants in the Czech Republic between 2004–2021 by type of residence
Source: Ministry of the Interior 2022, Czech Statistical Office 2021

the number of migrant women is, slowly, increasing over the long-term; women currently (2021) account for 43% of migration.

The structure of migrants' nationalities in the Czech Republic is unique: approximately 20% of registered migrants (i.e. 114,630 people) in the Czech Republic are Slovaks (data as of 31. 12. 2021, Czech Statistical Office 2022) and the real number of Slovak citizens resident in the Czech Republic is much larger, because many have not officially registered their stay in the Czech Republic. Thanks to the fact that the Slovak language is closely related to Czech and the countries were historically both part of a single state, Slovaks enjoy an exceptional position in the Czech Republic: although they are legally speaking migrants, most Czechs do not perceive them as such and have long considered Slovaks the most likeable foreign nationality (CVVM 2020). The other most common nationalities among migrants in the Czech Republic are Ukrainians (196,875 people) and Vietnamese (64,851 people) (data as of 31. 12. 2021, Czech Statistical Office 2022). The significant migration flow from Ukraine is, among other things, influenced by the country's relative geographical proximity and by the linguistic relationship between Czech and Ukrainian, which enables Ukrainians to relatively rapidly acquire the basics of the Czech language, which is otherwise considered rather complicated. The reasons for Vietnamese migration are, among other things, historical ties between the countries in the socialist period. The Vietnamese population occupies a fairly specific position in the Czech Republic because, unlike migrants from Ukraine, they are largely entrepreneurs and have acquired a reputation for adapting seamlessly and investing in their children's education. However, research shows that the Vietnamese diaspora in the Czech Republic is very closed, with very diverse integration strategies, and that the image of "seamless" integration often associated with the majority of Vietnamese migrants does not entirely reflect the reality (Freidingerová 2014).

The ethnic composition of migrants significantly influences the setting of national integration policies. Leaving aside the 40% of EU citizens (including Slovaks), who have not been considered a target group for integration in the Czech Republic for a long time, the two most important groups of migrants (Ukrainians and Vietnamese) are generally perceived as hardly visible and easy to integrate. This supposed "invisibility" of migrants might contribute to the fact that migrant integration has not yet become a significant topic in the Czech Republic.

From the geographical point of view, one third of all migrants are settled in the capital city, Prague, or its immediate vicinity. Substantial,

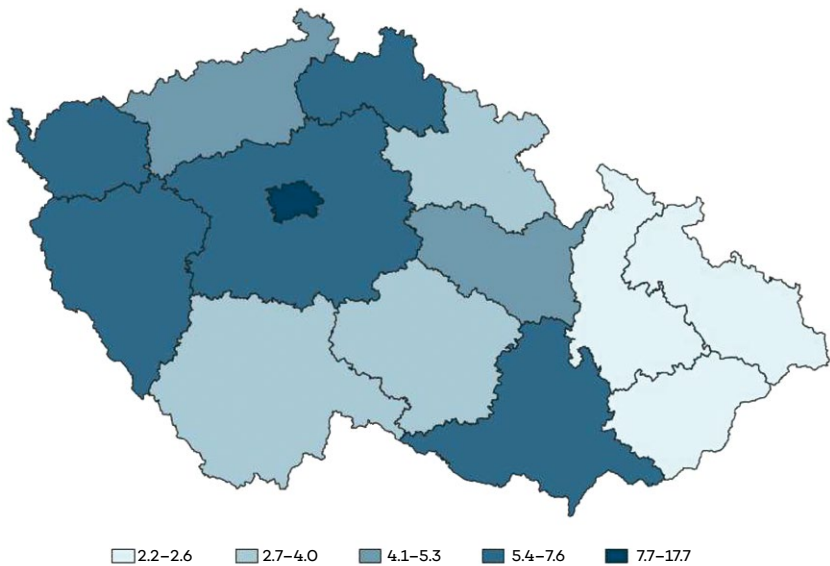


Plate 1 Proportion of foreigners in the Czech regions in 2021

Source: The European Migration Network, Czech Republic, 2022, <https://www.emncz.eu/reference/podil-cizincu-na-poctu-obyvatel-v-kraji-k-31-12-2021-2/>

albeit much smaller, percentages are also resident in the country's second largest city, Brno, and in the border areas, in particular close to the western border with Germany. Map 1 shows the share of migrants in the total population by region. Data on numbers of migrants in individual municipalities exist but this data is not easily accessible², so it is not unusual for municipalities to have no idea how many migrants reside within their territory, or what status those migrants have.

The acquisition of citizenship is a separate issue in the Czech Republic and, from the perspective of Czech law, represents an imaginary end point in the integration process (Bařšová 2010)³. This is also one of the reasons why the Czech Republic does not monitor naturalized persons in its statistics. In turn, this makes it difficult to monitor the long-term impact of integration policies on migrants: many studies (Hradečná et al. 2016) have pointed out that people with migration histories often face similar problems in many key areas as migrants do, even after they

2 For example, for the purposes of this study, we requested data from the Directorate of the Alien Police Service of the Ministry of the Interior and obtained them only after an appeal.

3 See also Act No. 186/2013 Coll. on Citizenship of the Czech Republic.

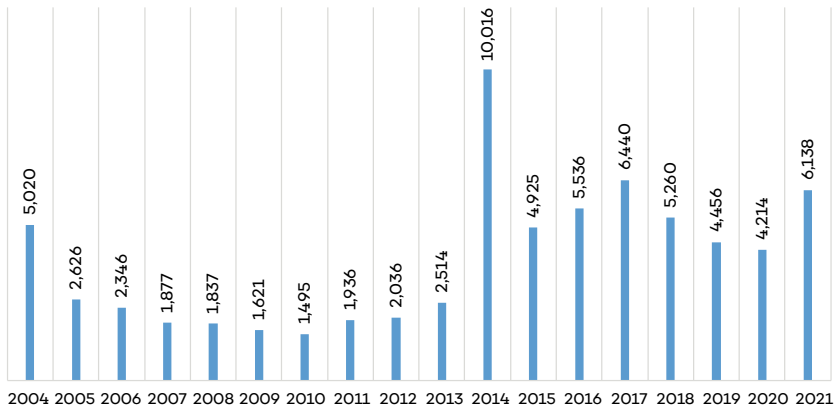


Chart 2 Acquisition of Czech citizenship between 2004 and 2021

Source: Czech Statistical Office 2021

have received Czech citizenship. Chart 2 shows that the trend in the number of citizenships granted clearly does not correspond to trends in the number of newly arrived migrants or the number of permanent residences granted, and that the number of acquired citizenships is very low (around 5,000 persons per year). The presented data thus document that theoretical completion of integration, at least in terms of data regarding the granted citizenships in the Czech Republic, is achieved by very few migrants.

3.2 Migrant integration strategies at national, regional and local levels

National integration framework

The *Principles of Policy for the Integration of Foreign Nationals in the Territory of the Czech Republic* (hereinafter the Principles), adopted in 1999, is a general document that defines the key principles of the Czech integration policy. From today’s point of view, the Principles were conceived quite generously and are “pro-foreign” (Pořízek 2018). A year later, the Government produced its first strategic material following from these Principles, entitled *The Concept for the Integration of Foreigners in the Czech Republic* (hereinafter the Concept), which specified the general principles

in the form of objectives, necessary measures, and tasks for the individual ministries affected by the agenda. In later years (2006, 2011 and 2016) the Concept was revised: the latest version is *The Updated Concept for the Integration of Foreigners – In Mutual Respect*⁴ from 2016. In 2022, no new Concept is currently being prepared, although, from the point of view of periodicity, a further revision is due.

As for other key documents, the Ministry of the Interior (hereinafter referred to as the MOI), as the country's integration coordinator (and in a certain area also administrator), submits a *Report on Migration and Integration of Foreigners in The Czech Republic* each year to the Government for approval. This report is supposed to present an evaluation of how the Concept has been implemented during the previous year. Following this, the government annually approves tasks and resources for individual ministries in its *Procedure for The Implementation of the Updated Concept for the Integration of Foreigners* (hereinafter the Procedure) for the following year. The Procedure thus sets out an annual, national action plan for the integration of migrants, including specific objectives and the necessary financial support.

The Concept's primary target group consists of migrants from third countries who have been legally residing in the Czech Republic for a long time. Since 2011, integration measures have also partially included citizens of other Member States of the European Union, although major restrictions for this group were only removed in 2020. The expansion of the Concept's target group continued in 2016 to include holders of international protection, partly due to the then-emergent situation connected with the mass inflow of migrants to the EU. Given that there has been no substantial increase in the number of people granted international protection in the Czech Republic, and that the Ministry of the Interior implements specific integration programmes for applicants and recognized holders of international protection, this change was merely cosmetic.

From the institutional point of view, the integration of migrants (primarily citizens of non-EU countries) was, from 1999, under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of the Interior; five years later, the agenda was transferred to the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs⁵; it was once

4 Resolution of the Government of the Czech Republic of 18 January, 2016, no. 26 on the Updated Concept for the Integration of Foreigners – In Mutual Respect and on the Procedure for the Implementation of the Updated Concept for the Integration of Foreigners in 2016; more on the website of the Ministry of the Interior: <http://www.mvcr.cz/migrace/clanek/integrace-cizincu.aspx?q=Y2hudW09Mg%3d%3d>.

5 By Government Resolution No. 1252/2003, the transfer took place on 1 January 2004.

again returned to the Ministry of the Interior in 2008. In contrast, the integration of persons granted international protection has always been under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of the Interior (Chmelíčková et al. 2018). The shifts in the agenda initiated critical discussion at the time, and even today, the representatives of civil society express disagreement (Čerychová et al. 2020) with the fact that the integration of migrants falls under the Ministry of the Interior, which has a general tendency to emphasize security-focused approaches.

The concept of migrant integration in strategic documents and key shifts in their emphasis

What appears to be more important than which Ministry is responsible for the integration agenda, however, is the extent to which the Concept has changed in concept: there has been a clear departure from the ambitious emphasis on the rights and freedoms of settled migrants seen in the original Concept (Pořízek 2018). Similarly, the original idea of mainstreaming integration, which was supposed to be done whilst taking into account the impacts of accepted public policies on migrants, has gradually been abandoned. This approach should have been supported by the fact that relevant ministries were to develop their own integration policies focused on legislative, organizational, methodological, and practical aspects of the Concept's implementation in practice. However, this vision was never fulfilled. The 2006 Concept placed greater emphasis on the social integration of migrants and defined what it referred to as priority areas of integration and key preconditions for migrant integration, which were primarily focused on individuals (Concept, 2006). A careful reading of the subsequent Concepts (2006, 2011, & 2016) reveals that requirements for newcomers were given increasing weight while, conversely, the emphasis on integration mainstreaming gradually disappeared from the documents. The priority areas related to the requirements for migrants (knowledge of the Czech language, economic self-sufficiency, orientation in society and information, and mutual relations between foreigners and the majority society) have become a generally accepted standard set by the Concepts in the Czech Republic. Only narrowly defined specific tasks for relevant ministries concerned have remained of the original ideas about sectoral integration strategies. For most ministries, the integration of migrants is not an important issue: failure to fulfil those set tasks is not uncommon, and there is sometimes a complete lack of follow-up infor-

mation on whether and how the tasks have been completed, or whether they have been completely abandoned (cf. Pořízek 2018). Leaving aside the task of appointing a departmental integration coordinator to seven ministries⁶, the tasks given to other ministries remain few and the Ministry of the Interior's expectations of those ministries remain low, with the partial exception of the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports.

It must however be said that, at least on a rhetorical level, the Concept views the notion of migrant integration as a two-way process into which both migrants and the majority society enter. The role and involvement of the country of origin in the integration process, which we will consider later and which is referred to in EU documents, has not as yet been reflected in the Czech concept (Jelínková and Valenta 2022).

Local aspects of the national approach

The fact that local institutions, especially local governments, need to participate in integration was already evident in the 1999 Principles, which emphasized the role of local governments when creating and implementing the concept and policy of the migrant integration (Principle 11). The Concept from 2006 then directly referred to *The Common Basic Principles for Immigrant Integration Policy in the European Union*, citing from it that the integration process takes place primarily at the local level (Concept, 2006, p. 8). However, despite an attempt to set up so-called District Advisory Bodies for the Integration of Foreigners, which were closed down in 2002 during a reform of the country's public administration and legal territorial division, the role of territorial self-government was emphasized in strategic documents without any more visible overlap in practice. Changes were only made in the following Concept (2011), which, albeit briefly, mentions the active role to be played by local or regional self-governments, but when it comes to local integration focuses on the role to be played by Centres for the Support of the Integration of Foreigners (hereinafter Centres). These Centres were built from European resources in all 14 regions of the Czech Republic between 2009 and 2019. According to the Concept from 2011, the Centres were to become: (a) information centres, (b) implementers and initiators of integration

6 The Ministry of Industry and Trade, the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs, the Ministry of Health, the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports, the Ministry of Regional Development, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and the Ministry of Culture.

measures, and (c) together with other integration actors, an effective partner to the regions in the creation of regional strategies.

Establishing these Centres in each of the 14 regions of the Czech Republic can certainly be considered a major milestone in support of local integration. Together with NGOs in the regions, the Centres perform a number of important roles, especially in the provision of services ranging from language courses to legal or social counselling. However, in the broader sense, although the original document (see Concept, 2006) set the goal of involving each region and its municipalities, this has not yet happened, either in terms of the activities implemented, or in terms of the topic of migrant integration being considered more generally in local conceptual documents (for a few exceptions, see below). Beyond the goals set in the 2006 Concept, the 2011 Concept briefly discussed the potential for local governments to cooperate in shaping integration policy, and clearly expressed the intention to anchor the cooperation of regions and municipalities in the implementation of the state integration policy in the Czech legislation (*ibid.*). Nevertheless, with the exception of the capital city of Prague and to some extent the South Moravian Region, these visions remained unfulfilled and were subsequently abandoned without any apparent reflection.

So far, the latest Concept (2016) makes frequent mention of the role of the Centres in individual regions and their supporting role, of the importance of the MOI grant programme for municipalities, and of the importance of NGOs and their project-based support. The local (or regional) integration of migrants is described on a much more general level and leaves out the former vision of the legal anchoring of integration activities without explanation. Moreover, the previously anticipated creation of local integration strategies associated with the regional Centres, which was originally closely detailed (Concept, 2006) and later more loosely outlined (Concept, 2011) is left entirely to the local governments in the latest version of the Concept (2016). It is newly associated with a grant programme run by the Ministry of the Interior, which can provide “impetus and support for the creation of municipalities’ own integration strategies” (Concept, 2016, p. 30).

It is also evident that the latest Concept has given up on the previously envisioned role to be played by regional (or local) governments. The Concept (2011, p. 10) earlier acknowledged the absence of any regional integration policy, especially with regard to a lack of scope for migrant integration coordinators in the individual regions, where such coordinators exist at all, and their insufficient skills. However, the latest

Concept (2016) does not address this issue and does not outline any tasks involving work with regional or municipal authorities. In terms of local integration, the subsequent Procedures (2016, 2017, 2018, 2019, 2020 and 2021) only mention tasks such as supporting and developing of Centres, supporting the grant programme for municipalities, supporting the work of NGOs (again through grant programmes) and research projects focused on possible segregation and the possible negative impacts of mutual coexistence (see e.g. Procedure, 2016, p. 38). The fundamental shift is that the Concept (2016) views the Centres as the primary local integration tool and makes almost no mention of cooperation with regional governments (or municipalities).

We should emphasize that in pointing out these shifts we make no criticism of the Centres' work; in accordance with their mission and in cooperation with local NGOs, they perform a number of necessary service tasks. However, it should be noted that the Concept (2016) essentially abandons the previous goal of a strategic approach at the regional and local level, as only two Centres fall under regional authorities: in the capital city of Prague, the Centre operates as a community interest company established by the region; in the South Moravian Region, the Centre is directly managed by the regional authority. In these two regions a greater emphasis on mainstreaming migrant integration is evident, as well as a significantly more conceptual grasp of the topic in relevant regional strategic documents. The other 16 Centres (14 established by the Refugee Facilities Administration, which is a contributory organization of the Ministry of the Interior, and 2 established by NGOs) have organized a variety of meetings, but cannot directly intervene in regional conceptual documents or participate in the regions' management of their agendas.

The following section is briefly devoted to local level conceptual materials in the Czech Republic and demonstrates that closer connection between the Centres and the relevant regional authorities leads to the latter gaining a significantly more strategic grasp of the topic. It is no coincidence that this is most visible in the two regions (the Capital City of Prague and the South Moravian Region), where there was already partial interest in the agenda at the time when the Regional Centres were first established.

Strategic documents concerning the integration of migrants in regions and municipalities of the Czech Republic

There are to date still relatively few conceptual materials that address migrant integration at the local level; these are essentially limited to documents from the two previously-mentioned regions: Prague and the South Moravian Region. In some other regions, the topic of migrant integration is touched upon marginally in conceptual documents related to security and, more recently, education (this applies especially to regional School Inclusivity Concepts). Documents of various kinds drawn up by regional capitals are another exception: several address the specific situation of migrants in the given area. Valentová (2018, 16) notes in this regard that “In the absence of local integration strategies, it has often happened that local governments became active only after urgent reasons arose on their respective territories to change the situation between the local, majority society and foreigners”. However, local governments’ specific, targeted initiatives are rarely supported by subsequent, long-term, conceptual activities.

Prague is the most advanced city in the Czech Republic, both in terms of its migrant integration activities and as far as strategic materials are concerned. It began work on its first local integration strategy in 2012. In 2014, *The Concept for the Integration of Foreigners in the Capital City of Prague*⁷ was created, followed by two-year action plans for its implementation.⁸ Thanks to these strategic documents, the development of the integration agenda within Prague is constantly monitored, experts meet regularly, funds are allocated to NGOs for integration projects, and integration-specific roles have been established within Prague City Hall (Valentová 2018). It is worth noting that Prague’s measures in the field of integration are, in principle, supported by the city’s political representation and that although integration is not perceived as a major priority, it is an established agenda that has long been undisputed by the city’s management. Although Prague is only very gradually mainstreaming its integration agenda at the institutional level, it is necessary to appreciate how

7 The full text of Prague’s Concept for the Integration of Foreigners is available on the integration portal of the Capital City, Prague: https://www.praha.eu/public/1e/ad/85/2181317_660642_Koncepce_HMP_pro_oblast_integrace_cizincu.pdf.

8 The Action plan relating to the Concept for the Integration of Foreigners in the Capital City, Prague for 2020-2021 is available here: <https://metropolevsech.eu/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/Ak%C4%8Dn%C3%AD-pl%C3%A1n-Koncepce-hl.-m.-Prahy-pro-oblast-integrace-cizinc%C5%AF-na-roky-2020-2021.pdf>.

clear a vision the city's officials have established for its future direction in this agenda, as well as its cooperation with various actors, and the city officials' willingness to critically reflect on their own work.

The second of the more active regions, the South Moravian Region, is not currently (2021) developing its own independent concept for migrant integration, but the topic is gradually being mainstreamed into its existing documents⁹. In particular, both the *Human Resources Development Strategy of the South Moravian Region 2016–2025* and *The Short-term Implementation Plans of the Human Resources Development Strategy of the South Moravian Region*¹⁰ pay substantial attention to integration, setting out the region's priorities in this area and specific steps that will lead to their implementation. The strategy is primarily focused on migrants from third countries, but also reflects the needs of migrants from EU countries. In addition, these regional documents make an attempt to share contexts with the documents of the regional city of Brno, where the first *Strategy for the Integration of Foreigners in the City of Brno 2020–2026*¹¹ was adopted in 2020. Besides noting the favourable quality of the Brno strategy's content, it is necessary to appreciate the participatory, creative process by which it was drawn up, which is relatively non-standard in the Czech environment and enabled the city to involve a number of actors who had previously not been involved. Closer cooperation between the South Moravian Region and the city of Brno seems promising, both in terms of the topics it will gradually open up and in terms of stabilizing the agenda (in the form of shared collaborators, joint projects, etc.).

Among the remaining Czech regions, the Liberec Region stands out. The topic of migrants began to appear in regional conceptual materials here in around 2019, thanks to active efforts on the part of the regional coordinator. His work was supported by the Liberec Region's participation in the Cities and Inclusive Strategies project¹², which, among other

9 An example is the joint strategic document of the South Moravian Region and the statutory city of Brno for the implementation of a policy to support competitiveness, entitled the Regional Innovation Strategy of the South Moravian Region 2014–2020, which focuses on support for highly qualified migrants. Even in this region, mainstreaming the integration of migrants is a significant challenge, however, the authorities are gradually moving towards this goal.

10 Both documents are available here: <https://www.kr-jihomoravsky.cz/Default.aspx?ID=291054&TypeID=2&origin=mobile>.

11 Available at: https://socialnipecce.brno.cz/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/MMB-Strategie-integrace-cizincu%CC%8A-ve-me%CC%8Cste%CC%8C-Brne%CC%8C_FINAL-2.pdf.

12 Three regions participated in this project after being approached by the implementers: the Capital City of Prague, the South Moravian Region and the Liberec Region. For more on this project see: https://www.esfcr.cz/projekty-opz/-/asset_publisher/ODuZumtPTtTa/content/mesta-a-inkluzivni-strategie?inheritRedirect=false.

things, aimed to take the integration of migrants into account in the participating regions' conceptual materials.

As for other municipalities besides Prague and Brno, these do not have any separate documents dealing with migrants, even in the larger cities. Where local strategies mention migrants at all, it is mostly in descriptive sections and most often in documents related to security and social services. The number of municipal documents that outline or recommend specific activities focused on migrants can be counted on two hands. One example is a measure supporting integration courses and other services for migrants in *The Community Plan for the Development of Social and Related Services in the City of Pardubice for the Period of 2017–2020*¹³. Such documents are almost always created in response to higher numbers of migrants in the related cities and to associated challenges.

For the sake of completeness, let us add that the grasp of the topic in conceptual documents on the integration of migrants only partially reflects the current reality in Czech municipalities and that the list of activities that municipalities implement in the field of integration is, in fact, slightly more optimistic (see below).

3.3 Institutional framework and competencies of key actors including municipalities

In the Czech Republic, **The Ministry of the Interior** is responsible for coordinating national policy on migrant integration. It is responsible for creating a national integration policy in the form of the above-mentioned *Concept for the Integration of Foreigners in the Czech Republic* and for coordinating the activities of entities involved in implementing those policies. The specific integration-related tasks assigned to public administrative bodies result from the Concept and, as mentioned above, the tasks of individual bodies are determined each year by the *Procedure for The Implementation of the Updated Concept for the Integration of Foreigners*. The Procedure proposes specific measures by which the relevant departments responsible for the implementation of integration policies are to support the successful integration of migrants in the Czech Republic during the year, along with the relevant financial resources.

The Ministry of the Interior is thus, in the Czech Republic, a factually and legally decisive body acting in the integration of migrants. It was

13 Available at: <https://pardubice.eu/komunitni-planovani>.

entrusted with a coordinating role in the preparation and implementation of the Concept, and its role is also legally established. Based on the adopted government resolutions, the MOI is obliged to engage in the field of integration and to implement the principles of the Concept. Čerychová et al. (2020) emphasized that the MOI is therefore endowed not only with the role of implementer, but also with conceptual and analytical powers. There is much debate in the Czech Republic about the suitability of the MOI fulfilling this primarily non-executive, coordinating role in relation to the integration of migrants (ibid.). As Veselý points out (2013), in the Czech Republic, as in many other Central European countries, the accountability of national authorities is controversially low. This, combined with a setting in which the migration agenda lacks any primary administrator and the MOI views its role as primarily one of coordination, means that other relevant ministries, as we will see elsewhere, do not pay much or any attention to the topic of integration. It can thus be assumed that (a) the combination of relatively low accountability in public policies, (b) the lack of interest from a number of ministries which lack the necessary pressure or incentive to implement policies, and (c) the low visibility and seemingly trouble-free nature of the majority of foreign migrants in the Czech Republic, combine to limit the development of a complex integration strategy in the Czech Republic.

The Department of Asylum and Migration Policy of the Ministry of the Interior (hereinafter DAMP) exercises powers as defined by The Ministry of the Interior in the field of international protection, refugees, entry and residence, and Schengen cooperation, as well as the Concept and the State Integration Programme (an integration programme for recognised asylum seekers). The DAMP¹⁴ is thus responsible for implementing particular activities in the field of integration, such as training programmes for Centre and NGO employees and activities designed to raise awareness among migrants and the general public. In addition to its integration policy agenda, the DAMP also has a wide range of competencies in relation to migration, which make it a key creator and implementer of migration policies in the Czech Republic (Valentová 2018). The DAMP is also the so-called National Contact Point of the European Migration Network, which collects and analyses information, and which

14 The Ministry of the Interior also set up an immigration portal (www.imigracniportal.cz) and an information line for migrants; together with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, it is in charge of pre-departure measures, i.e. information intended for migrants who plan to remain in the Czech Republic for longer periods.

then serves to support the formulation of European Union policies in the areas of asylum and migration.¹⁵

The Legislative and Legal Regulation Coordination Department of the Ministry of the Interior also participates in the creation of regulations in this area, as does the **General Administration Department of the MOI**, or rather its **Sub-department of Citizenship and Registries**, which, as its name implies, decides on the granting of citizenship. In addition, the role of the **Independent Unit for EU Funds in the Area of Internal Affairs** must be mentioned, as most integration measures are funded from European Union resources (for details see Jelínková and Valenta 2022). The integration of migrants is also affected by the work of the **Security Policy Department** and the **Crime Prevention Department of the MOI**, which, among other things, oversee the work of the liaison officers for minorities, activities addressing the negative aspects of migration, and the collection and analysis of data relating to police work with minorities¹⁶.

Border protection and security issues related to migrants are dealt with by the **Police of the Czech Republic – Alien Police Service**, which is subordinated to the Ministry of the Interior within the Czech Republic's police force. The Alien Police Service performs both civil-administrative tasks (e.g. most decisions about entry to and residence in the country) and its own policing work (e.g. border protection, residence checks). The liaison officers for minorities, who are supposed to mediate contact between the police and members of minority communities, also deal with migrant issues within the regional directorates of the Czech Police; however, as older available activity reports show¹⁷, they are not engaged at all substantially in migrant integration.

Organizationally, the **Refugee Facilities Administration**¹⁸ also falls under the Ministry of the Interior. Fourteen of the above-mentioned

15 More information on EMN activities in the Czech Republic is available at: www.emncz.eu.

16 *The Strategy for the Work of the Police of the Czech Republic in Relation to Minorities* considers all migrants within its understanding of minorities.

17 Available at: <https://www.mvcr.cz/clanek/prace-policie-ve-vztahu-k-mensinam.aspx?q=Y2hudW09Mg%3D%3D>, see also: <https://www.databaze-strategie.cz/cz/mv/strategie/strategie-pro-praci-policie-cr-ve-vztahu-k-mensinam-do-roku-2021?typ=download>.

18 Other activities of the Refugee Facilities Administration include the operation of Reception Centres for applicants for international protection, Residential Centres, Integration Asylum Centres and Facilities for the Detention of Foreigners. The Refugee Facilities Administration is also a general provider of integration services within the State Integration Programme, which is intended for individuals who have been granted international protection.

Centres for the Support of the Integration of Foreigners (out of a total of 18) are managed by the Refugee Facilities Administration.

Several other central public bodies are also legally obliged to implement the Concept. These include: the Ministry of Culture; the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs; the Ministry of Regional Development; the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports; the Czech Statistical Office; the Ministry of Foreign Affairs; the Ministry of Health; and the Ministry of Industry and Trade. The MOI coordinates integration policy across these ministries and as such is obliged to convene an inter-ministerial meeting at least once a year attended by representatives of the ministries involved in implementing the Concept or, if necessary, to conduct bilateral negotiations with the ministries concerned.

However, when we look at the work of these various ministries in the field of integration of migrants, it is largely rather marginal. The one exception among them is **the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports**, for whom an increased emphasis on inclusive education in recent years has resulted in greater consideration for the needs of pupils with different mother tongues.¹⁹ The activities of **the National Pedagogical Institute**, which, as a contributory organization, is subordinated to the Ministry of Education, also represent a significant step towards integration. Its priority topics include support for teachers who work with foreign children/pupils.²⁰ Despite this increased consideration for the specific needs of foreign pupils and the notable financial support that schools in some regions were able to receive (see Jelínková and Valenta 2022), this agenda is only partly tabled at the Ministry of Education. Many schools benefit from cooperation with the NGO **Meta, o.p.s.**, which fulfils the role not fulfilled by the Ministry of Education in many aspects concerning education for pupils with different mother tongues (cf. Richterová 2018).

The Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs deals primarily with matters relating to the labour market and also administers the redistribution of funds from the European Social Fund (ESF), whose target groups also include migrants²¹. Together with the DAMP, the Ministry of Labour also runs the web portal www.cizinci.cz, which aims to col-

19 The term “children with a different mother tongue” includes both some foreign children/pupils and children who have the citizenship of the given country but have no, or limited, knowledge of the local language.

20 More information available in Czech can be found here: <https://www.nidv.cz/prioritni-temata/podpora-pedagogu-pro-praci-s-detmi-zaky-cizinci>.

21 An overview of ESF-funded projects aimed at the integration of migrants is available at www.esfcr.cz or www.cizinci.cz.

late comprehensive and up-to-date information on migrant integration in the Czech Republic. Although the Ministry of Labour implemented a number of interesting projects in the past focused, for example, on preventing labour exploitation of migrants, its activities in support of migrant have long been weak. However, since around 2020, the Ministry of Labour has become more actively involved in establishing labour migration into the Czech Republic, a step which could strengthen its role in the long run. Employers and trade unions are so far rather uninvolved in the integration of economic migrants, and the Labour Offices, which fall under the Ministry of Labour, are similarly minimally engaged. In the past, there were some interesting projects with promising potential, but they did not last long.²²

In contrast, where labour migration is concerned, employer associations are fundamental. Together with the Ministry of Trade and Labour, they form a very strong lobby in negotiations with the MOI regarding increased quotas for the number of foreign employees. The loudest among them include the Czech Chamber of Commerce and the Confederation of Industry and Transport. The Ministry of Trade and Labour is also a key player in establishing quotas for migrant workers and all fast-track programmes.

The role other ministries play in the integration of migrants remains marginal, which complicates the effective implementation of the Concept. The **Public Defender of Rights** does however play an important role, as it oversees compliance with migrants' rights, comments on legislation, and very often names key problems faced by migrants in the Czech Republic within its reports.

Since the beginning of the integration policy, **non-governmental, non-profit organizations** have been heavily involved in the implementation of its measures. Not only do they provide a wide range of services; they also try to shape migrant integration policy. By carrying out research (together with academic institutions) and proposing specific measures, they address important topics that the national integration policies neglect (such as ageing migrants, domestic workers or gender in migration). The non-governmental sector is gradually becoming substantially more professional, and this trend has given rise to a number of inspiring projects and meta-projects. Most NGOs active in integration are affiliated to a **Consortium of NGOs working with migrants**, through which they formulate common positions on specific measures and conceptual devel-

22 These were, for example, projects supported by the Further Education Fund.

opments in individual areas. The Consortium thus acts as an intermediary between NGOs, the government and academics. Nevertheless, the non-governmental sector is limited by its very uneven distribution within the Czech Republic and high dependence on project-based activities.

The initiatives taken by civil society and academia in migrant integration include most notably, in 2020, a very comprehensive *Manual on Local Integration of Migrants in the Czech Republic*²³, which in comprehensive chapters introduces individual aspects relevant to the lives of migrants and acquaints municipalities and regions with the relevant legislation, and information on what can be done in this field.

With regard to the local aspect of integration, the above-mentioned **Centres for the Support of the Integration of Foreigners** play a very important role, as they are established in each of the 14 regions of the Czech Republic²⁴. In cooperation with local NGOs, they are supposed to provide their services (e.g. social and legal counselling, language courses) across the territory of the given region and to cooperate with relevant partners in the region, including by organizing regular meetings.

Likewise, the role of **school facilities** should not be neglected at the local level. These, mainly due to the activities of some teachers or executives, actively participate in particular in the integration of migrant children.

As far as **regional authorities** are concerned, their role is very weak, with the exception of Prague and the South Moravian Region. As we pointed out above, although the importance of local integration is emphasized in the Concepts, the regional authorities' role is gradually fading out of the conceptual documents. The regions' weak position is also demonstrated by the fact that the regions are not consultants in the Concept – the Regional Governors only receive the finalised document for information, and the regional authorities do not receive any targeted for the integration of migrants.

Although regional coordinators in charge of migrant integration (among other things) have been appointed in all regions of the country,

23 The entire manual is available for free in Czech; several chapters are also available in English at: https://www.migrace.com/en/regularization/mesta-a-inkluzivni-strategie/integracni_manual.

24 In ten regions, these centres are managed by the above-mentioned Refugee Facilities Administration of the Ministry of the Interior. Two Centres are run by non-governmental organizations (the Counselling Centre for Integration z.s. in the Ústí nad Labem region and the Diocesan Catholic Charity of Hradec Králové in the Hradec Králové region). Prague's Centre was established by the Prague City Hall, and the Centre in the South Moravian Region is run by the Regional Office of the South Moravian Region.

the agenda assigned to these staff is too broad and often linked to other areas. In particular, these coordinators focus on the ethnic minorities' agenda, which is different in nature than (and often wrongly confused with) the migrant integration agenda, and act as coordinators for Roma affairs. Thus, while these regional coordinators do exist, they do not have the necessary capacity to adequately manage the migrant integration agenda (for more, see Čerychová et al. 2020).

A glance at the **municipalities** reveals that, with the exception of Prague and Brno, there are roughly thirteen municipalities that have been dealing with the topic of migrant integration for a longer period of time. They implement projects under the subsidy title Municipal projects to support the integration of foreigners at the local level (commonly known as “municipal projects”)²⁵, a grant programme provided by the Ministry of the Interior. Such projects have been implemented by local governments in, for example, Havlíčkův Brod, Teplice, Brno, various Prague districts (Prague 4, 7, 12, 13, 14 and Praha-Libuš), Pardubice, and Pilsen. These projects support, for example, language teaching in primary schools or in suburban camps, the work of intercultural workers, surveys of migrants in the municipalities, and the creation of strategic materials. Although this grant programme is relatively modest in terms of the amount of money spent on the integration of migrants in the Czech Republic, it is the only stable source of funds that is open to municipalities in this area. Unfortunately, interest in this programme is growing rather slowly, and the programme is still used by the same, limited group of a few exceptionally active municipalities. Apart from this programme, there is no more comprehensive, systemic support for municipalities in their approach to migrant integration.

Some municipalities make use of services and consultancy from the Centres, but most of these meetings concern the resolution of a specific situation.

Čerychová et al. (2020) point out that Czech cities have long struggled with a significant rate of growth in newly arriving foreign workers. This often happens in the vicinity of industrial zones, where the small-

25 This programme was created in response to the effects of the economic crises, when some cities with higher numbers of foreign workers dealt with crisis situations in their populations. In order to find a solution, the MOI provided support in the form of emergent projects, which offered a set of integration activities and measures (e.g. language and communication courses for migrants, officials and police officers; intervention and field work, etc.), leading to mapping and improving the critical situation in a given locality. Subsequently, this subsidy programme was renamed „Municipal projects to support the integration of foreigners at the local level“.

town infrastructure is not at all prepared for a jump in population and coexistence acquires a very problematic dimension. In such places, migrants live in larger groups in hostels, far from civic amenities and from their families. The best-known example of this phenomenon is the municipality of Kvasiny and indeed the whole Rychnov region, where dissatisfaction grew to an unsustainable level, which had to be addressed by the state authorities. Increases in the number of migrant workers cause pressures due to insufficient capacity as regards accommodation, general practitioners and health specialists and other services in the vicinity of the migrants' work. In cases that involve higher numbers of reunited migrant families, municipalities also have to cope with increases in the number of children requiring places in their kindergartens and schools. The city of Pardubice (*ibid.*), for example, has faced these challenges in recent years.

3.4 Setting the initial legislative conditions and goals of migrant integration

The legal basis for the integration of migrants in the Czech Republic is relatively weak, as this issue is primarily addressed in non-binding government policy outlines (so called “concepts”) (The Government of the Czech Republic, 2018, p. 39). Legislative measures thus focus exclusively on migrants' obligations. However, from the broader interpretation of some laws, it is also possible to derive the municipal and regional authorities' obligations towards migrants residing in their territories.

The most important legal regulation concerning the integration of migrants in the Czech Republic came into force relatively recently, in an amendment to the Aliens Act²⁶, which from 01.01.2021 established the obligation for most migrants from third countries to complete a four-hour, paid, adaptation and integration course during their first year of residence in the country. These adaptation and integration courses cost CZK 1,500 and are implemented either in regional Centres, or at the workplace. They primarily provide information about life in the Czech Republic. These courses require the migrants to participate in person, but they do not involve a test. The courses have raised a number of questions, mainly regarding their settings: their duration (although the total

26 See Act No. 176/2019 Coll., which amends Act No. 326/1999 Coll., on the Residence of Foreigners in the Czech Republic

duration is 4 hours, the time used for language interpretation and video instruction mean that the real contact time is only 1 hour 40 minutes), price (CZK 1,500), and availability.

For completeness, let us point out that the conditions for obtaining permanent residence require, among other things, that the applicant pass a Czech language exam. The required level of language knowledge for this purpose was raised from A1 to A2 in 2021. This proposal provoked some discussion among the professional public, especially with regard to the extremely limited availability of Czech language courses at A2 level in many regions of the Czech Republic, and the fact that the number of people passing the A1 level exam for permanent residence had been declining for a long time even though the number of migrants who could apply for permanent residence was growing (Davydov 2019).

Looking further at the conditions for **acquiring Czech citizenship**, those interested must, among other things, pass a Czech language exam at B1 level and an exam on Czech life and institutions²⁷. Since 2010, these exams have been standardized. However, the law on citizenship (Act No. 186/2013 Sb., on Citizenship of the Czech Republic) also contains other provisions which, for example, require that the applicant's residence during the three-year period prior to their application did not burden the welfare system, and that the applicant prove his/her integration into Czech society, especially in terms of family, work and social integration. This last provision concerning proof of integration into Czech society is often interpreted very rigidly by the Ministry of the Interior. This, according to legal experts (cf. Körbl 2019), may be one of the primary reasons for the low number of citizenships granted, together with the fact that there is no legal right to citizenship even when all the conditions are met (see Section 12 of the Act).

It should be noted that political involvement is a key element in migrants' integration. Only EU citizens have the right to vote in the Czech Republic, and this only applies to municipal elections. Permanently settled migrants from outside the EU do not have this right in the Czech Republic, unlike in neighbouring Slovakia. The resulting impossibility for migrants to influence politics even at the local level (often after decades of residence) not only leads to their lesser interest in what is happening in the municipalities, but also results in a lack of motivation

27 These conditions are regulated by Act No. 186/2013 Sb., On Citizenship of the Czech Republic and on Amendments of selected other laws (The Czech Citizenship Act).

for municipal politicians to take migrants and their needs into account in their election programmes.

To summarize, as far as the legal anchoring of migrant integration in the Czech Republic is concerned, the only explicit measure is the requirement, since 2021, for migrants to complete a short, paid adaptation and integration course. However, there is a broader legislative framework that fundamentally shapes the integration agenda, which consists mainly of the aforementioned Aliens Act, the Asylum Act, employment laws, and a whole range of laws that regulate the conditions of access to social security, health insurance and care, housing or education in general terms, together with other laws that touch on the subject (e.g. the Anti-Discrimination Act). If we look at the **legislation concerning local governments**, there are no provisions that establish general or specific conditions for municipalities' and regions' treatment of migrants.²⁸ However, it is possible to rely on the provisions of Section 4 of Act No. 500/2004 Sb., Administrative Procedure Code, which stipulates that the public administration is a service to the public, and that its executors have a duty to treat the individuals concerned with courtesy and, if possible, satisfy their needs. In a broader sense, it is in many cases also possible to apply the somewhat vague, but widely discussed, principle of good administration (see e.g. Section 8 of the Administrative Procedure Code), which is often interpreted as defining levels of responsibility, openness and helpfulness in public administration (Černín 2006).

Both from the legal point of view and otherwise, then, the migrant integration agenda remains relatively fragmented; this is related to the cross-sectional nature of this topic, the lack of any broad “umbrella” and the partial extension of the topic to areas other than those where migrants are the primary target group.

28 As we have noted elsewhere, the extent to which individual Czech regions address the migrant integration agenda in practice varies. Some regions (Prague, South Moravian Region) work on the migrant integration agenda through their regional conceptual materials. The role of regional governments is more closely examined by Čerychová et al. (2020), who summarise that regional authorities largely play a role in the integration of foreigners through their involvement in coordinating and enforcing policies in social services, education, health, employment, culture and security.

3.5 Financing: funding mechanisms and grants schemes

Given that the integration of migrants in the Czech Republic is primarily financed through project financing from European funds (Jelínková and Valenta 2022), a relatively detailed analysis of funding sources can be made. In this respect, the Czech Republic has a unique Database of Integration Projects²⁹ at its disposal, which collects data from all available sources on projects supported in the field of migrant integration in the Czech Republic since 2010. In their study, Doomernik and Bruquetas-Callejo (2016) point out that integration measures in Central and Eastern Europe stem more from the availability of EU funds (e.g. the Asylum, Migration, and Integration Fund (AMIF), ESF) than from any real social or political demand. The results of the DIP show that this is no different in the case of the Czech Republic. Most of the funds (65%) come from the EU, and less than a third from domestic, national sources. Funds spent by regional and municipal governments are marginal (2%), which reflects the absence of any substantial national mechanisms directing integration funding to the local level.

Table 1 Financial volumes of integration projects in the Czech Republic by type of provider (2010–2019)

Type of financial support provider	Share of total expenditure
European and international level *	65.8 %
Providers at the domestic, national level	30.6 %
Regional and municipal self-governments	2.0 %
Private foundations	1.6 %
Total	100.0 %

Source: Jelínková, Valenta, 2022 according to the Database of Integration Projects

* The amount includes a mandatory contribution from the state budget, which is about 33% of this amount.

The significant share of European resources must of course be seen in the perspective of the Czech Republic contributing to the EU budget. Available data (Nguyenová and Kropáček 2020), however, show that the Czech Republic as a whole receives twice as much from EU funds as it spends. It remains questionable to what extent the Czech Republic

²⁹ More details about DIP can be found at: <https://www.migrace.com/cs/regularizace/mesta-a-inkluzivni-strategie/database>.

would financially support the integration of migrants if the EU were not to prioritize this topic.

Recently, there has been a fairly significant change in how the regional Centres for the Support of the Integration of Foreigners (see above) are financed: since the summer of 2020, these are now partly financed from the Czech Republic's state budget. Nevertheless, all other integration activities, especially those implemented by NGOs, schools and municipalities, remain dependent on project funding. The only exception is funding for social service providers. Despite a number of truly successful and extensive projects implemented in the Czech Republic in the past, current trends (2021) point to the difficulties of project financing for continuity in these activities.

Although the above-mentioned volume of finance (2%) that local governments allocate to topics related to migrant integration is small, there has been a gradual increase in this area. Some regions (i.e. Prague and the South Moravian Region) contribute to integration services for EU citizens that cannot be supported by the AMIF fund (which exclusively supports the integration of migrants from countries outside the EU and from which the operation of the regional Centres is funded), or allocate grants for integration initiatives (e.g. Prague funded such initiatives in 2020 to a total of CZK 4,000,000). In the case of small municipalities, many provide small contributions towards small-scale integration activities of various kinds (e.g. co-organizing social events).

In the Czech Republic, there is very little mention of the fact that within the budgetary rules for regions and municipalities, some available funding goes to local governments as a direct result of the fact that migrants live and work in the given regions and municipalities. Experience shows that many municipalities become interested in migrants residing within their territories for a slightly curious reason: the obligation to pay for municipal waste is imposed on all residents of the municipality, including any migrant who holds permanent residence, a long-term visa or long-term residence, or who has been granted international protection. Citizens of other EU Member States who hold permanent residence or certificates of temporary residence in the Czech Republic for residence longer than 3 months are also considered inhabitants of the given municipality. Fees for municipal waste in the Czech Republic are paid either directly by natural persons or by legal entities (e.g. housing unit owners' associations). The municipalities thus become interested in their resident migrants when they are liable to pay such fees directly and are either unaware of their obligation or ignore it.

Other topics that municipalities most often raise in connection with migrants' residence within their territory is migrant children's access to kindergartens and primary schools, especially when local capacity is full. Furthermore, the availability of housing (or rent price increases in the area) and health care becomes relevant when the number of migrants living locally increases. Topics related to the presence of migrants are therefore mostly framed by municipalities' and local entities' negative experiences, which, however, often stem from their initial unpreparedness to integrate or to address incoming migration, population growth and their new inhabitants' specific needs. However, given that the vast majority of migrants are also resident within municipalities, their presence is reflected positively in those municipalities' budgets (and in regional budgets), especially in revenues from shared taxes, whose allocation significantly reflects both the population size and the incomes of resident individuals (and legal entities) in the given territory³⁰. However, this positive influence that migrants have on municipalities' (and regions') budgets remains completely unspoken in the Czech Republic, even though very good estimates have been made in several studies (e.g. Valenta, 2019, for the Association for Integration and Migration) of how much migrants contribute to their local municipal budgets.

3.6 Conclusion

Given how little attention the Czech state pays to migrant integration, the number of projects and activities implemented by civil society and schools is very encouraging. More and more actors are becoming involved in this topic, including some institutions within the state administration. Know-how has been accumulated, a number of practical materials have been created, cooperation with the academic sector is being developed, and grassroots activity is evident, especially in the largest cities. The state has made an attempt to grasp the agenda conceptually and there is evident effort to support activities in the regions through the established regional Centres. Nevertheless, a number of defined visions have been abandoned without explanation and the tasks set out in conceptual planning are often not completed. At the local level there has only been a very gradual increase in the number of municipi-

30 See Act No. 243/2000 Sb., on Budgetary Allocation of Certain Tax Revenues to Territorial Self-governing Units and Certain State Funds.

palities making active efforts towards the integration of migrants; most activities are reactive and often associated with a specific actor or tied to a specific time-limited project. With the exception of Prague and the South Moravian Region, the integration-related activities undertaken by regional (and most municipal) authorities are still primarily the result of the will and perseverance of specific individuals, or arise in response to potential problems. In most regions, the agenda has not yet become a mainstream part of local policies, and municipalities are often unsure how to approach migrants. Where they do decide to address the topic, they face a lack of personnel and administrative capacity.

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