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Original research article

Selected areas of immigrant integration in the Czech Republic

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ABSTRACT

This article presents the results of the project: “Social determinants of health and their impact on the health of immigrants living in the Czech Republic”. During the project, quantitative data were collected in 2013 and 2014 from 994 immigrant respondents from Ukraine, Vietnam, Russia, Poland, and Slovakia living in the Czech Republic. Data interpretation relied on the theory of social determinants of health. The key areas of integration were analysed using SWOT analysis with recommendations drafted for overcoming the identified barriers to integration, not only with respect to the selected nationalities, but also with regard to common characteristics. Our research suggests that integration of the selected groups of immigrants was affected by three basic aspects, specifically: active participation in the labour market, degree of fluency in Czech language (both spoken and written), and social support as prevention of social exclusion. These aspects coincide with the current priorities of integration in the Czech Republic. The research results and the SWOT analysis served as the basis for formulating recommendations aimed at improving the immigrant integration process within the Czech Republic, i.e. increase fluency in Czech language for immigrants, matching of previously acquired qualifications with jobs in the Czech labour market, improvement of working conditions for foreign nationals, better preparedness of employment offices to deal with foreign nationals; personal assistance in cooperation with employers, effective participation of successful foreigners within the integration process, training for government agency employees in dealing with foreign nationals, and increased understanding of integration and intercultural empathy issues.

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Introduction

The issue of integrating foreign nationals, particularly in connection with the refugee crisis, is presently one of the very important problems being addressed in the Czech Republic (CZ). Following a slight decrease in 2010 (associated with the economic crisis), the number of foreign nationals with a (long-term or permanent) residence permit has been moderately increasing each year. This applies to both EU and non-EU nationals. In 2016, the number of legally residing EU nationals increased by 5.5%, with the number of non-EU nationals growing by 1.6%. As of 31 December 2016, the Czech Statistical Office [1] registered 496 413 foreign nationals living in the Czech Republic (including recognized refugees), with the following nationalities being the most common: Ukrainians (110,245), Slovaks (107,251), Vietnamese (58,080), Russians (35,987), Germans (21,216), and Poles (20,305).

Integration can be viewed as a gradual process of settling into a society. This process has been described by various assimilation models/theories that describe the nature of cohabitation of immigrants/minorities, both static and dynamic. From the perspective of development, “classic assimilation” may be considered the original model/theory [2], where, according to Barša [3], the minority unilaterally adapts, while the host majority remains unchanged.

World War I and World War II contributed to the development of multiculturalism, as a counterbalance to the positivist perception of total assimilation [4]. The “core culture,” as the “sole identity” for assimilation, has been redefined into many subcultural identities differentiated by, for example, social status (i.e. upper, middle, and lower class), by gender (i.e. women vs. men), etc., meaning that the “core culture” no longer represents a monolithic structure [5]. According to Baršová and Barša [6], individual autonomy, with an emphasis on group culture and its preservation within multiculturalism, has resulted in segregation and insufficient integration of immigrants into socioeconomic, civil, and political areas. Therefore, new assimilation tendencies have been emerging, with the so-called “new assimilation” being the predominant one [7]. However, in addition to the “new assimilation,” there are other theoretical concepts that try to avoid the term “assimilation” for pragmatic reasons [8] and view it as a subcategory of integration theory. Esser [9] focuses on structural social integration, i.e. *de facto* inclusion of immigrants into social systems as individual actors, thereby increasing the similarity of ethnic groups, irrespective of who actually adapts; therefore, it is called “pluralist assimilation”. Bosswick and Heckmann [8] extended Esser’s theory [9] by adding (1) a structural dimension (integration within an economic area), (2) an interactive dimension (establishing new social relationships within target countries), (3) a cultural dimension, and (4) an identification dimension. They define social integration as the inclusion and acceptance of immigrants into the core institutions of the majority and establishment of relationships and positions in host countries. According to Bosswick and Heckmann [8], immigrants view integration

as a process of learning a new culture, acquiring rights and obligations, gaining access to socially significant positions and social status, building personal relationships with members of the host society, and forming a feeling of “belonging to” and “identifying with” the society that accepted them. In principle, integration is perceived as a two-way process/state (i.e. it comprises both dynamic and static aspects).

In our approach, we naturally lean towards integration in the form of a dynamic two-way process of mutual assimilation, open to all immigrants, involving both foreign nationals and the host society [10,11]. This approach is most similar to the “individual integration model,” i.e. transition from group diversity (plural multiculturalism) to individual civil integration [4]. It is a comprehensive process that has political, legal, economic, social, cultural, psychological, and religious aspects [12]. Integration is the key precondition to any successful immigration policy in our country [13]. Consequently, the Concept of Foreign Nationals’ Integration was created for the Czech Republic [14]. It is based on the principles of the Concept of Foreign Nationals’ Integration within the Czech Republic of 1999 and the national legal regulations governing the status of foreign nationals in individual areas, as well as international documents adopted by a decree of the Czech Government in 2000 [14]. This concept was subsequently revised and adopted in 2016 [15]. The current priorities for integration in the Czech Republic are as follows: knowledge of Czech language, social and cultural navigation of the society, economic self-sufficiency, and non-conflicting relationships between communities [16].

From our literature review, we identified key aspects of integration that need to be monitored and evaluated. However, it is safe to assume that the level of integration relative to these key aspects (i.e. evaluation of integration in selected areas from a subjective point of view) could differ among individual nationalities.

Selected aspects of integration were also addressed under the project: “Social determinants of health and their impact on the health of immigrants living in the Czech Republic” (reg. no. LD13044) conducted by the Ministry of Education, Youth, and Sports during the period of 2013–2015, with financial support from COST (Cooperation on Scientific and Technical Research) [17]. The main objective of the aforementioned project was to ascertain whether the selected social determinants impacted the selected health aspects. The paradigm of social determinants of health, published by Wilkinson and Marmot in Copenhagen in 2003 [18] and in the CZ in 2005 [19], became the conceptual framework for the research. It concerns ten selected determinants: social gradient, stress, early life, social exclusion, work, unemployment, social support, addiction, food, and transport. Although the “determinants of health” concept is rather broad [20–22], the framework of the ten selected characteristics solidifies the key areas of immigrant life very well. If we were to look for connections between the determinants and integration models, it is absolutely clear that they can all be used. However, in this article, we only selected those findings that were corroborated through testing (i.e. significant relationships were proven, together with the direction

of such relationships based on an analysis of adjusted residuals).

In summary, the objective of this article, which is based on the aforementioned project, was to describe and present recommendations for drafting a strategy that would impact the most important groups of immigrants living in the Czech Republic, particularly with regard to the relationships under review, for which statistical significance (SS) was demonstrated (to differentiate selected nationalities participating in the research).

Materials and methods

This study uses a quantitative research methodology, specifically a questionnaire (the research instrument comprised 270 questions divided into individual areas based on the above mentioned “social determinants of health”). The questionnaire was translated into the respondents’ native language (using a two-stage translation to minimize misunderstandings). Additionally, blood samples and anthropometric data (e.g. height and weight for BMI calculations) were collected from selected respondents. The overall project was anonymous, i.e. data were only recorded using a numeric code, thereby preventing later identification of individual respondents.

The research dataset included 994 immigrant respondents from five nationalities: 235 Ukrainians (23.7%), 185 Vietnamese (18.6%), 188 Russians (18.9%), 194 Poles (19.5%), and 192 Slovaks (19.3%). There were 568 females and 426 males. Respondents were contacted via partnership organizations engaged in integration and migration in the following regions of the Czech Republic: South Bohemia, Central Bohemia, Pilsen, Ústí nad Labem, Moravia-Silesia, South Moravia, Hradec Králové, and Prague. In this research, it was unrealistic to define a representative set of immigrants. The selection process was thus deliberate, and based on four stratification criteria: nationality, gender, age (≤ 30 , 31–50, and ≥ 51 years of age) and period of residence (≤ 5 , 5–10, 11–15, and > 15 years).

Data were collected in 2013 and 2014 and processed using descriptive and analytical statistics, with the use

of the SPSS statistics software, version 23.0. Statistical processes involved the following: Pearson’s chi-squared test (agreed level of significance $\alpha = 0.05$; no cell had an expected frequency below 1, and no more than 20% of cells had an expected frequency below 5); analysis of adjusted residuals that specifies the significance of variations between data and the expected values. Concerning the topic of this article, 2-year-old data doesn’t mean less evidence due to long-term aspects such as language knowledge, accommodation, work and social support, etc.

Statistically significant results were subsequently analysed using SWOT analysis, i.e. a strategic analysis that can be used to identify strengths and weaknesses, opportunities and threats, which can then be used to formulate directions, activities, strategies, and strategic objectives [23], as well as to analyse and draft policies [24]. Based on the SWOT analysis (and subsequent identification through statistical relationships) areas were selected that formed the basis for recommendations for drafting a strategy/concept for integrating immigrants into Czech society.

Results and discussion

Integration of foreign nationals should be viewed as a dynamic, two-way process of mutual interaction and dialogue among the citizens of the immigrant group and the host society. The dialogue should focus on ways to improve communication and promote sociocultural standards that respect human rights and avoid those elements that lead to social exclusion [25].

It is clear that all ten social determinants of health must be included in the process of integration. Two of the most important areas of integration involve “time” (i.e. length of residence in this regard) and “language skills” (also see Chart 1 and 2).

Our research suggests that integration of the selected groups of immigrants was affected by three basic aspects (Chart 1), specifically: labour market success (active participation), degree of fluency in Czech language (both spoken and written), and social support as prevention

Chart 1 – Selected preconditions for integration of immigrants within the host society in the Czech Republic [17]

Chart 2 – Impact of length of immigrant residence in the Czech Republic on selected aspects of integration [17]

of social exclusion. These aspects, where testing pointed out partially significant findings, coincide with current priorities of integration in the Czech Republic, which are the degree of fluency in Czech language, economic self-sufficiency, and non-conflicting relationships between immigrant and host communities [16]. Social and cultural navigation within a society represents an area that was only addressed marginally in the course of this research and certainly deserves further research.

Chart 1 shows individual parts of the three selected aspects of integration that were found to be significant for the selected nationalities (i.e. Slovaks, Ukrainians, Vietnamese, Poles, and Russians). Other areas, with no statistically significant relationships, were not included in the chart. Individual findings and their interpretations are discussed in the subsections that follow (labour market success; knowledge of Czech language; and social support).

Labour market success

Our research demonstrated that there was a significant relationship between immigrants' nationality and the subjective assessment of their economic status in the Czech Republic (i.e. low, middle, and high). Vietnamese immigrants view their economic status in the Czech Republic statistically significant (SS) as low, while Poles believe their status is high ($p = 0.000$). No statistically significant relationships were proven for other nationalities (or for the below mentioned significances).

We also found a SS relationship between immigrant nationality and the utilization of their qualifications with regard to employment in the Czech Republic. We found (with SS) that Slovaks and Poles were able to use their qualifications with regard to employment in the Czech Republic; on the other hand, Vietnamese and Ukrainians did not feel their prior qualifications were effectively utilized ($p = 0.000$). Furthermore, a significant relationship was also found between length of residence in the Czech Republic (interval: <5 years, 5–15 years, and >15 years) and the use of their qualifications with regard to employment in the Czech Republic. It was demonstrated (with SS) that immigrants residing in the Czech Republic <10 years did not use their qualifications; on the other hand, immigrants residing in the Czech Republic >15 years used their qualifications ($p = 0.000$).

The relationship between immigrant nationality and their highest completed education was also demonstrated (with SS). The statistically significant results were as follows: Ukrainians and Russians reported basic elementary educations, Vietnamese and Slovaks reported secondary educations, and Russians and Poles reported university educations ($p = 0.000$). Naturally, the aforementioned distribution of the research set may have been affected by the respondent selection process, which was subject to other stratification criteria (length of residence, gender, and age). The selected dataset is a non-representative sample of the immigrant population, since it was not possible to define a representative sample for the Czech Republic.

When examining the relationship between immigrant nationality and the number of work hours per day, certain correlations were found ($p = 0.000$). A sign scheme showed (with SS) that Russians spent 7 h or less at work per day, Slovaks and Poles 8 h a day, while Ukrainians and Vietnamese immigrants worked from 9 to 10 h per day.

Statistically significant relationships were also shown between immigrant nationality and their experiences dealing with Czech state and local authorities. Vietnamese immigrants reported bad experiences, while Poles reported good experiences ($p = 0.000$). Furthermore, our research demonstrated statistically significant relationships between the immigrant length of residence in the Czech Republic and their experiences dealing with Czech state and local authorities. Immigrants residing in the Czech Republic <10 years reported bad experiences; immigrants residing in the Czech Republic for 10–15 years reported average experiences, while immigrants residing in the Czech Republic for more than 15 years reported good experiences ($p = 0.000$). It is thus clear that experience of immigrants with Czech authorities improves with increasing length of residence in the Czech Republic. The very different experiences reported by the Vietnamese and Poles (bad vs. good) can certainly be attributed to the language barrier of Vietnamese immigrants, the seclusion of the first generation of Vietnamese immigrants, and the tendency to use intermediaries. According to Martínková et al. [26], such intermediaries, referred to as “dich vu” by Vietnamese immigrants, include businesses or individuals that arrange certain matters for their fellow-countrymen at Czech authorities for specific fees (such

as trade certificates, taxes, insurance coverage, driver's licenses, translations, etc.), provide consulting services and information about the Czech business environment, look for accommodation, provide interpretation services during doctor's visits and at their children's schools, etc. A survey concerning the use of such intermediary services by Vietnamese immigrants in Chomutov revealed that the average expenditure on such services amounted to about CZK 2500 per month. The network of such services is quite extensive, with a considerable number of people profiting from it [26].

Our research demonstrated a statistically significant relationship between immigrant nationality and the steps they take when they lose their job (options – they contact an agency, Czech Employment Office, intermediary, friends, look for a job on their own, or take other steps). Vietnamese immigrants reported (with SS), that they contact an intermediary if they lose their job. Ukrainians reported (with SS) that they contact an intermediary or friends if they lose their job. On the other hand, Poles contact (with SS) the Czech Employment Office if they lose their job ($p = 0.000$). Slovaks were least likely to contact intermediaries, while Russians were least likely to go to a Czech Employment Office (relative to other nationalities).

Furthermore, we found a statistically significant relationship between the length of residence in the Czech Republic and the steps immigrants take when they lose their job. Immigrants residing in the Czech Republic <5 years stated (with SS) that they contacted an agency or used other options after they lost their job; immigrants residing in the Czech Republic 5–10 years contact intermediaries (with SS). Immigrants residing in the Czech Republic >10 years contacted the Czech Employment Office ($p = 0.000$). It seems that immigrants tend to use free institutions intended for citizens of the Czech Republic with increasing length of residence.

Knowledge of Czech language

Our research demonstrated a statistically significant relationship between immigrant nationality and the assessment of their satisfaction of their own fluency with Czech language (i.e. not satisfied, generally satisfied, and satisfied). Vietnamese immigrants reported (with SS) dissatisfaction with their fluency in Czech language. Ukrainians and Russians showed (SS) general satisfaction with their fluency in Czech language. Slovaks and Poles were (SS) satisfied with their fluency in Czech language ($p = 0.000$). Therefore, the results clearly indicate the impact of language similarity and geographic proximity (particularly for Slovak and Polish immigrants).

Social support

Another SS result was demonstrated in the assessment of relationships between immigrant nationality and Czechs; this was reported as average (neither good nor bad) for Ukrainians and very good for Slovaks ($p = 0.000$).

There was a SS relationship between the length of residence of immigrants in the Czech Republic (divided

into time intervals: <5 years, 5–10 years, 11–15 years, and >15 years) and their subjective assessment of acceptance by their neighbours (i.e. poor acceptance, average acceptance, and good acceptance). Immigrants residing in the Czech Republic <5 years felt poorly accepted by their neighbours (with SS). Immigrants residing in the Czech Republic 5–15 years felt average acceptance, and immigrants residing in the Czech Republic >15 years felt well accepted by their neighbours ($p = 0.000$). The effect of the length of residence on the perception of relationships with neighbours was unambiguously demonstrated, i.e. positive subjective perceptions of relationships with neighbours improve with increasing length of residence.

Our research demonstrated a statistically significant relationship between immigrant nationality and their subjective assessment of whether they agreed that they had enough Czech friends (respondent choices: strongly disagree, disagree, neither agree nor disagree, and agree). Vietnamese immigrants stated (with SS) that they either strongly disagreed or disagreed that they had enough friends. Similarly, Ukrainians also stated that they did not have enough friends. Slovaks stated (with SS) that they neither agreed nor disagreed. Poles stated (with SS) that they agreed with having enough friends ($p = 0.000$).

Our research found a statistically significant relationship between immigrant nationality and their subjective assessment of how satisfied they were with the number of people from their home country that would be able to provide them with non-financial assistance (options: not satisfied, generally satisfied, and satisfied). The Vietnamese stated (with SS) that they were not satisfied with the number of people from their home country that would provide them with non-financial assistance; on the other hand, Slovaks and Poles expressed their satisfaction (with SS) with the number of people from their home country that would be able to provide them with non-financial assistance ($p = 0.005$). We also found a statistically significant relationship between immigrant nationality and their subjective assessment of how satisfied they were with the number of people from their home country that would be able to provide them with financial assistance (options: not satisfied, generally satisfied, and satisfied). The Vietnamese (with SS) reported that they were not satisfied with the number of people from their home country that would be able to provide them with financial assistance; on the other hand, Slovaks and Poles expressed satisfaction (with SS) with the number of people from their home country that would be able to provide them with financial assistance ($p = 0.005$).

When examining the relationship between immigrant nationality and their assessment of their overall health, Ukrainians reported that their health was bad (with SS); Vietnamese and Ukrainian immigrants reported their health was satisfactory, whereas Slovaks and Poles reported their health was good ($p = 0.000$, Table 1). The disparity in health assessments involves many factors, e.g. individual social status, gender, and ethnicity [27–29]. The aforementioned findings regarding immigrants are not new by any means; however, the problems in the mentioned areas are being continuously underestimated or downright ignored [30].

Table 1 – Subjective assessment of health – by nationality [17]

	How do you rate your overall health?		
	Bad	Satisfactory (average)	Good
Nationality			
Vietnamese	o	++	---
Ukrainian	+	++	---
Russian	o	o	o
Slovak	–	---	+++
Polish	o	--	+

Explanations: +/- (for confidence level of $\alpha \leq 0.05$); ++/-- (for confidence level of $\alpha \leq 0.01$); +++/-- (for confidence level of $\alpha \leq 0.001$).

No effect, relative to the length of residence, was found regarding subjective perception of health within our research dataset ($p = 0.132$), i.e. we cannot confirm the healthy immigrant effect, as described by Escobar et al. [31], Abraído-Lanza et al. [32] and Hosper et al. [33].

Strengths and weaknesses – opportunities and threats of integration – SWOT analysis

SWOT analysis relies on statistically significant differences between individual national groups of immigrants, as identified by research and categorized as strengths or weaknesses, opportunities or threats in line with SWOT methodology. Table 2 gives an overview of strengths and weaknesses/opportunities and threats for individual national groups of immigrants that must be taken into account when drafting an integration strategy.

Chart 2 shows statistically significant relationships between the length of immigrant residence in the Czech Republic and other characteristics under review. It is clear that selected aspects of integration improve with increasing length of residence – based on the subjective assessment of immigrants.

Recommendations for improvement of the immigrant integration process in the Czech Republic based on the above research results

The research results and SWOT analysis led to the following recommendations aimed at improving the immigrant integration process in the Czech Republic:

- Improvement of immigrant knowledge of Czech language, particularly for nationalities that show significant sociocultural differences (e.g. the Vietnamese).
- Use of foreign nationals' qualifications (i.e. education and experience) or education to improve their success in the Czech labour market (Vietnamese, Ukrainians, and Russians).
- Improvement in working conditions for foreign nationals as a way to improve health issues (Ukrainians).
- Improvement in the readiness of Czech Employment Offices with regard to dealing with foreign nationals (use of interpreting services, training of personal assistants for specific jobs – these assistants may also

be very helpful for other target groups, such as people returning to the labour market after brain injuries, for example) as part of an active employment policy (Vietnamese, Ukrainians, and Russians).

- Personal assistance in cooperation with employers, i.e. preparation of foreign nationals for specific jobs based on qualifications obtained in their home country (personal assistants can help overcome specific barriers to foreign national integration).
- Effective participation of successful foreign nationals within the integration process as good examples of integration – replication of guidelines for overcoming barriers between and within nationalities (document the successes of those that have achieved this in the Czech Republic).
- Training for employees of Czech government offices that deal with foreign nationals, increased training in the area of integration and “intercultural empathy” method [34].

Our research uncovered three key areas that must be addressed as part of any integration effort aimed at overcoming barriers to inclusion of immigrants within the Czech society. It concerns the following areas: 1. Labour market success, including the use of qualifications obtained in the immigrant's home country; 2. Degree of fluency in Czech language; 3. Social support to prevent social exclusion.

Immigrant's success in the labour market

We must emphasize that foreign nationals “fill in the gaps” in the Czech labour market; as such, some of them work in occupations that do not correspond to their qualifications. Although they meet their employers' needs, they often do not maximize the use of their skills, which could otherwise be capitalized on. There are clear opportunities for great savings to the Czech economy in the area of preparing active employees and matching education with job requirements [35]. Taking into account the population prognosis for the Czech Republic [36], and Burcin and Kučera [37] who, like the Czech Statistical Office [36], offered three projection alternatives. However, in the long term (2003–2065), the employment of foreign nationals has real potential for resolving this situation. This is inherent in consideration of the pro-population policy of our country and other potential solutions; however, the analysis of such solutions would require further study.

The government is faced with a significant task, i.e. profiling of Czech Employment Offices and other services or institutions (e.g. Centers for promotion of integration) that can assist foreign nationals in finding jobs for which they are best qualified. This could take the form of personal assistants and/or regional integration programs; including the integration of immigrants (or asylum seekers) within necessary operations.

We can only guess what barriers confront foreign nationals who do not use the Czech Employment Office, since it is the key gateway employment institution. From an immigrant's perspective, a client system may appear to be very beneficial since it reduces problems with visa

Table 2 – SWOT analysis in terms of national groups of immigrants under review and statistically significant relationships [17]

	Strengths (S) with statistical significance	Weaknesses (W) with statistical significance
Vietnamese	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Secondary education – Satisfactory health 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – More than 9 or 10 hours at work – Low economic status in the Czech Republic – Not satisfied with their own fluency in Czech language – Bad experiences when dealing with the Department of Asylum and Migration Policy as well as other state and local authorities – Strongly disagree or disagree with “having enough friends” – Not satisfied with the number of people from their home country that would be able to provide financial or other assistance to them – They contact intermediaries when they lose their job
Ukrainians	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Relationship between their national group and Czechs is average (neither good nor bad) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – More than 9 or 10 hours at work – Primary education – Generally satisfied with their own fluency in Czech language – Poor health – Strongly disagree with “having enough friends” – Contact intermediaries or friends when they lose their job
Russians	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – University educations – Satisfactory health 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – 7 or less hours at work – Primary education – Generally satisfied with their fluency in Czech language
Slovaks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – 8 hours at work – Secondary education – Satisfied with their fluency in Czech language – Good health – Average experiences when dealing with the Department of Asylum and Migration Policy – Relationship between their national group and Czechs is very good – Satisfied with the number of people from their home country that would be able to provide financial or other assistance to them 	
Poles	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – 8 hours at work – High economic status in the Czech Republic – University education – Satisfied with their fluency in Czech language – Good health – Good experiences when dealing with the Department of Asylum and Migration Policy as well as other state and local authorities – Satisfied with the number of people from their home country that would be able to provide financial or other assistance to them – Agree with “having enough friends” – Contact the Czech Employment Office if they lost their job 	
	Opportunities (O)	Threats (T)
Vietnamese	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – More effective use of work qualifications in employment – Improve the readiness of the Czech Employment Offices with regard to dealings with foreign nationals (use of interpreting services) – Personal assistance in cooperation with employers – i.e. preparation of foreign nationals for specific jobs corresponding to their qualifications obtained in their home country (personal assistants help overcome specific barriers to foreign nationals’ integration) – Effective use of successful foreign nationals – as good practice examples in the area of integration – replication of guidelines for overcoming barriers between and within nationalities – Use of Czech Employment Offices as part of active employment policy 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Use of a client system and employment intermediaries as illegal gainful activity (uncontrolled payments from wages to intermediaries) – Misunderstandings resulting from the language barrier (e.g. unfamiliarity with Czech laws, rules for first generation immigrants, i.e. relying on intermediaries – someone from the Vietnamese minority who communicates on their behalf) – Seclusion of the Vietnamese minority caused by barriers to integration

Table 2 (Continued)

	Opportunities (O)	Threats (T)
Ukrainians	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Improvement of working conditions (8hour workdays, improvement of working environment) leading to improvement in subjective perception of health – A chance to use work qualifications in employment more effectively – Personal assistance in cooperation with employers – i.e. preparation of foreign nationals for specific jobs corresponding to their qualifications obtained in their home country (personal assistants help foreign nationals overcome specific barriers to integration) – Effective use of successful foreign nationals – as good practice examples in the area of integration – replication of guidelines for overcoming barriers between and within nationalities – Use of Czech Employment Offices as part of active employment policy 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Use of a client system and employment intermediaries as illegal gainful activity (uncontrolled payments from wages to intermediaries) – Seclusion of the Ukrainian minority caused by barriers to integration
Russians	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Effective use of work qualifications in employment – Improvement of labour market involvement (use of full-time employment) – Increase fluency in Czech language, particularly in writing 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Misunderstandings resulting from the language barrier (particularly in the area of written correspondence in Czech)
Slovaks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Integration strategies that have proven successful for these nationalities – possibility to replicate them for use with other nationalities that are not as successful 	
Poles	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Use of knowledge and skills of integrated members of selected minorities – in order to reduce the period of integration into the labour market and as part of social support within the Czech society 	

arrangements and job searches, even if they pay fees for such services that seem to be excessive and thus are unethical from our point of view [38, 39].

Our research clearly suggests that foreign nationals, particularly Ukrainians, spend more than 9 or 10 h at work each day and feel (SS) their health is poor (relative to the other surveyed nationalities). Our research also found that reported health did not change relative to length of residence. Thus, it does not confirm the healthy immigrant effect described by those such as Ronellenfitsch and Razum [40], Vissandjee et al. [41], Newbold [42], Uretsky and Mathiesen [43], Brabcová et al. [44], Dobiášová and Hnilicová [45], and Malmusi et al. [46]. Relative to other immigrant nationalities, Ukrainians still spend a lot of time at work. Furthermore, Ukrainians performed more manual labour compared to other immigrant nationalities (SS). The combination of long hours and manual labour combined with the subjective assessment of the health of Ukrainian workers is an alarming discovery that requires further detailed examination to determine how it is connected with immigrant lifestyle; these results should then be used to recommend relevant preventive measures. It is clear that immigrant health represents an extensive area of study for future research.

Knowledge of Czech language and its interconnection with other aspects of integration

Our results clearly indicate that Vietnamese immigrants contact intermediaries, Ukrainians turn to friends, and Poles contact the Czech Employment Office, which shows a

pattern regarding the integration of selected minorities and provides insight into their strategies for addressing various integration issues. It is clear that Vietnamese immigrants have the most significant barriers to integration, this is mostly due to language barriers; however, they manage to circumvent these barriers using various strategies, for example, the use of “dich vu” intermediary services [26]. According to Kučerová and Tučková [47], Vietnamese immigrants use government sector assistance much less (compared to paid services) and often do not even know about the various governmental services and non-profit organizations because of the language barrier.

Our results show that Vietnamese and Ukrainian immigrants prefer to use their contacts instead of the various other options available to them under the active employment policy of the Czech Republic, i.e. the Czech Employment Office. There may be several reasons for this, e.g. the lack of fluency in Czech language and the associated unpreparedness of Czech office personnel to address problems faced by foreign nationals and deal with deficiencies regarding jobs for foreign nationals based on their qualifications, even though this would be beneficial and useful for the Czech Republic. However, our results indicate that nationalities which experience a language barrier in the Czech Republic reported that the degree of difficulty is related to their length of residence (i.e. foreign nationals residing in the Czech Republic for <10 years), do not use the services of dedicated Czech institutions. Some reasons for this have already been mentioned above (such as the client system).

Poor fluency in Czech language represents a key hindrance for all selected integration components, not only in respect of various institutions, but also with regard to communities, i.e. where immigrants live and work. Language skills, with an emphasis on the key areas, such as work (i.e. in order for pedagogues to work as pedagogues; for physicians to work as physicians; for technical experts to work in their respective fields, etc.) and sociocultural navigation, represent investments that can considerably improve the integration process and serve as prevention mechanisms to minimize separation/isolation and social exclusion [48–50]. It is very important to deal with the possibilities of improving the language competence of foreigners. A good practical example is the international IMED-KOMM-EU project (Intercultural Medical Communication in Europe), which deals with the language education of foreigners coming to the host country. Their goal is to integrate themselves into the society and assert themselves in their professions [51].

Social support as prevention for social exclusion

Social exclusion represents a multidimensional phenomenon that presents itself in the form of poverty (unemployment, limited social contacts with members of the host nation) or partial segregation, with communities of excluded immigrants being referred to pejoratively [52–57]. Upon entering another society, immigrants experience the process of acculturation, i.e. adoption and adaptation relative to the host culture. This process is affected by a number of factors, such as education level, employment, use of media, extent of political participation, language skills, and social relationships [58]. Vroome et al. [59] wrote that integration of foreign nationals in Western European countries is associated with the renewal of the social environment, with the first and most important step to integration being education. Other important factors affecting the immigrant integration process are social support and other determinants of immigrant health [60].

Ukrainian and Vietnamese immigrants reported relatively fewer Czech friends (with SS). Moreover, Vietnamese immigrants reported not being satisfied with the number of their fellow-countrymen that would be willing to help them, both financially and otherwise. It is logical that the length of residence is a key aspect to assessing relationships with host nation neighbours as satisfactory; this applied to all nationalities surveyed. Only immigrants that had lived in the Czech Republic for more than 15 years reported feeling well accepted by their host nation neighbours.

Limitations

Naturally, the interpretation of results was affected by the selection of respondents, as already mentioned above. Consequently, these conclusions cannot be applied to all representatives of the minorities discussed in this article. Nevertheless, the selected integration parameters quite

logically correspond to the sociocultural characteristics of the selected nationalities, as described by Sulitka [61], Šišková [62], Šanderová [63], Dvořáková [34], Leontiyeva [64], Tóthová [65], Drbohlav [49], Drbohlav et al. [48, 50], and Kuřinová et al. [66]. The actual relationship between the sociocultural specifics and integration needs further research as a separate project.

Conclusion

The goal of our study was to identify and assess strengths and weaknesses in the area of integration of the largest groups of immigrants living in the Czech Republic. Our results were used to prepare a SWOT analysis, taking into account the unique characteristics of the individual national groups of immigrants (Vietnamese, Ukrainians, Russians, Poles, and Slovaks). We found that immigrants showed weaknesses in three areas of integration: labour market success, language skills, and social support. Furthermore, the impact of immigrant length of residence was also analysed as part of the research. Our results found that the subjective assessment of integration improves with increasing length of residence; immigrants residing in the Czech Republic for more than 10 years did not state any statistically significant negative experiences. The research results and the SWOT analysis served as the basis for formulating recommendations aimed at improving the immigrant integration process within the Czech Republic, i.e. increase of fluency in Czech language for immigrants, matching of previously acquired qualifications (education and experience) with jobs in the Czech labour market, improvement of working conditions for foreign nationals, better preparedness of employment offices to deal with foreign nationals; personal assistance in cooperation with employers, effective participation of successful foreigners within the integration process, training for government agency employees in dealing with foreign nationals, and increased understanding of integration and intercultural empathy issues.

Conflict of interests

The authors declare no conflict of interest regarding this article.

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