

Marie Jelínková (ed.)

**Local Migrant
Integration Policies
and Their Structural
Mechanisms**

Local Migrant Integration Policies and Their Structural Mechanisms

A Comparative Study of the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Germany and Belgium

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List of Abbreviations

AGABY	Working Committee of the Integration Councils of Bavaria / Arbeitsgemeinschaft der Ausländer-, Migranten- und Integrationsbeiräte Bayerns
AMIF	Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund
BAMF	Federal Office for Migration and Refugees (Germany) / Bundesamt für Migration und Flüchtlinge
BBFP	Bureau of Border and Foreign Police (Slovakia) / Úrad hraničnej a cudzineckej polície Prezídia Policajného zboru
BZI	Federal Immigration and Integration Council (Germany) / Bundeszuwanderungs- und Integrationsrat
CDU	Christian Democratic Union of Germany / Christlich Demokratische Union Deutschlands
COLSaF	Centre of Labour, Social Affairs and Family of the Slovak Republic / Ústredia práce, sociálnych vecí a rodiny Slovenskej republiky
CSU	Christian Social Union in Bavaria / Christlich-Soziale Union in Bayern
CGRS	Commissioner General for Refugees and Stateless Persons (Belgium) / Commissaris-generaal voor de Vluchtelingen en de Staatlozen
CVEK	Centre for the Research of Ethnicity and Culture (Slovakia) / Centrum pre výskum etnicity a kultúry
CZ	Czech Republic
DAMP	Department of Asylum and Migration Policy of the Ministry of the Interior of the Czech Republic / Odbor azylové a migrační politiky Ministerstva vnitřní České republiky
DVZ	Immigration Department, Federal Public Services Home Affairs (Belgium) / The Dienst Vreemdelingenzaken, Federale Overheidsdienst Binnenlandse Zaken
EEA	European Economic area
EMN	European migration network
ERDF	European Regional Development Fund
ESF	European Social Fund
EU	European Union
HR	Human resources
HRL	Human Rights League / Liga za ľudské práva

IOM	International Organization for Migration
IMC	Integration and Migration Council (Germany) / Ausländer-, Migranten und Integrationsbeiräte
MEKOMIC	Expert Interdepartmental Commission on Labour Migration and Integration of Foreigners (Slovakia) / Medzirezortná expertná komisia pre oblasť pracovnej migrácie a integrácie cudzincov
MIPEX	Migration Integration Policy Index
MI SR	Ministry of the Interior of the Slovak republic / Ministerstvo vnútra Slovenskej republiky
MLSAF	Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs and Family of the Slovak Republic / Ministerstvo práce, sociálnych vecí a rodiny Slovenskej republiky
MOI	Ministry of the Interior of the Czech Republic / Ministerstvo vnitra České republiky
MPG	Migration Policy Group
MPI	Migration Policy Institute Europe
NGO	Non-governmental organization
NP	National Priorities
PESD	Programme of Economic and Social Development (Slovakia) / Program hospodárskeho a sociálneho rozvoja
SIMI	Association for Integration and Migration / Sdružení pro integraci a migraci
SMIR	Successful Migrant Integration in Regions (project)
SPD	Social Democratic Party of Germany / Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands
SK	Slovakia
SR	Slovak Republic
UN	United Nations
VVSG	Flemish Association of Cities and Municipalities / Vereniging van Vlaamse Steden en Gemeenten

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Introduction

Migrant integration is a long-term process. Whether and how quickly migrants accept a new country as their own does not depend on them alone. The situations in which they find themselves (their residence status, employment status, etc.) and their immediate environment substantially condition their integration process. While this is not an entirely new topic, as early sociological studies were already interested in how newcomers integrate into society (Jelínková and Valenta 2022), the mechanisms through which the place where migrants live, work, do their administrative tasks and meet other people influences their integration have received more attention in recent years. This growing interest in the local migrant integration is due not only to an increased recognition of the importance of this aspect of integration, but also to the fact that significant changes are currently (2021) taking place in this area, especially in terms of actions taken by local institutions.

Larger cities were the first to initiate their own integration measures and later their own integration policies, primarily thanks to their openness and relatively large shares of incoming migrants. After cities, various regions began to formulate their own integration policies. Local governments have an unquestionable role to play in integration policy, since integration takes place at the local level, i.e. where people of different backgrounds live, go to school, are employed and build their circles of friends (Caponio and Borkert 2010, 9). It is therefore at the local level that both the positive and negative aspects of diversity are the most visible (Scholten and Penninx 2016, 98–99). Research also shows that people with migration history identify more with the city than the country they live in (ibid.). However, local integration policies do not appear in isolation; on the contrary, they reflect many other influences. Moreover,

neither regions nor municipalities are usually able to influence who settles in their area or under what conditions and they are often bound by national integration policy frameworks. There are numerous other aspects at play, too, from the inclusivity of the local authorities' own set-up to their capacity to implement various local integration activities (Van Breugel and Scholten 2020).

In the European context, migrant integration is very diverse. It is influenced by historical, geographical and socio-economical aspects; local and national policies; and the local authorities' and host societies' openness, willingness and intercultural understanding in shaping integration processes. The importance of involving active migrants, via various organizations, cannot be underestimated either: their work contributes to greater mutual understanding. However, despite the vast number of structural differences between EU member states, local authorities (and migrants) often face similar challenges when it comes to migrant integration. This opens the door to possible cooperation within and between European states. Of course, not all good incentives or promising practices are transferable, but understanding other stakeholders' approaches and experiences can be inspiring and often helps to bring about needed change. The purpose of this monograph is thus to identify opportunities for mutual inspiration, mutual learning and exchange of ideas.

This monograph is part of the SMIR (Successful Migrant Integration in Regions) project implemented under the Erasmus+ programme by partners from the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Belgium (Flanders) and Germany (Bavaria). The partner organizations were selected on the basis of their potential contributions to the project. They were deliberately selected from countries and entities that are at different stages and positions within the integration process. This is related to their competencies and scope of influence leading to finding real and proven problem-solving practices. The following partners in particular brought long-term experience in the field of local integration to the project: (1) the Belgian city of Mechelen, which has managed to become an inclusive city over the last 15 years, and (2) AGABY¹, the German umbrella organisation of the municipal democratically elected integration and migration councils. The other two partners are (3) the Czech non-governmental organizations (NGOs) Association for Integration and Migration (SIMI), which

1 AGABY' is an abbreviation for: "Arbeitsgemeinschaft der Ausländer-, Migranten- und Integrationsbeiräte Bayerns" ("Working Committee of the Integration Councils of Bavaria"). With 31 communal members, AGABY represents more than 90% of people with migration and / or ethnic minority backgrounds in Bavaria.

leads the project and which has focused in recent years on new ways of grasping integration at the local level, and (4) the Slovak Human Rights League (HLR), which deals with similar issues in Slovakia. In the last few years, the Czech and Slovak partners have established closer cooperation with local and regional authorities in the field of migrant integration and created several tools that are now successfully used by local institutions. Although the situations in the Czech Republic and Slovakia with regard to migration trends are developing differently, these two partners face similar challenges, share information about successes, and pursue similar goals in the long run.

Each of the participating countries offers a different experience of migrant integration. In this monograph, we will examine the local integration policy settings in these four countries, aiming to understand their specific contexts and to identify opportunities for mutual learning and exchange of best practices. We will place particular emphasis on a comparison of Czech and Slovak experiences, about which there is less existing information available. After presenting the primary input information, the chapters on Belgium and Germany then focus on areas that currently (2021) present certain challenges for the Czech and Slovak partners.

1. Focus of the Monograph and Methodology

Marie Jelínková

The growing attention paid to the migrant integration in the EU has led to an increased number of studies systematically comparing integration models. Initially, these focused on national models of integration (Brubaker 1992; Castles and Miller 2009). Latterly, interest in the local dimension of migrant integration policies has been growing (Dekker et al. 2015). Many studies have indicated that local governments do not merely implement national policies but that they increasingly formulate their own policies as well (Penninx 2009; Scholten 2013). The extent to which local integration policies diverge or converge with national policies varies widely (Scholten 2013) and often depends on the specifics of the given country and the situation in specific cities and regions. In all cases, however, the national integration policy framework and the availability of resources play an important role. Integration policies and models are also significantly influenced by differences in social and political systems, in the organization of social security and in the host countries' historical and cultural characteristics (Gregurović and Župarić-Iljić 2018), as well as by the extent of migration and the ethnic composition of the migrant population. As a result, in order to compare (a) what works for local integration, (b) how it works and (c) where to turn for inspiration when disseminating good practice to other countries we must first gain a deeper understanding of all these above-mentioned factors. However, this need for a deeper understanding of national and local contexts should not hinder the transferability of specific successful measures and activities in the field of local integration.

As mentioned above, this monograph is part of the SMIR project, which focuses on the difficult situations in which local authorities find themselves in the four participating countries: the Czech Republic, Slo-

vakia, Germany and Belgium. Although national and local integration policies and the composition of the migrant flows in these countries differ, the ways that local institutions approach the migrant integration present major challenges in each of these countries. Even though many local authorities are aware of the importance of migrant inclusion into local communities and the need to establish functional integration measures and mechanisms, they often lack the tools, expertise and resources to work effectively with migrants.

The primary objective of this monograph is to build a better understanding of the potential for transferring integration approaches between the four SMIR partner countries. The need for this monograph is based on the project partners' recognition that best practices from one country cannot be systematically developed or transferred to other environments without a deeper understanding of the local context. It is necessary to understand how integration approaches are anchored within legislation and public policy in the given country, by what mechanisms integration policies are financed, which entities are responsible for this agenda at the national level, how the legislation enshrines the competencies and obligations of local and regional authorities (or federal states) and how migrants are represented at the local level.

The information gathered in this monograph is intended not only to educate the project partners, but also to encourage cooperation with the local authorities within the participating countries. It is designed to provide municipalities with guidance and the opportunity to better envisage what they can expect from national authorities when implementing local integration measures, which topics or sectors they should prioritize in their integration policies, how they might shape policy at local level or how to gain a better overview of possible sources of funding.

The books's focus on the various local integration policies and practices in the four selected countries necessitates a number of simplifications. These stem, for example, from the fact that the monograph works with methodological nationalism and the logic of nation states (Wimmer and Glick Schiller 2002) and does not sufficiently emphasise the processes of inclusion and exclusion that can affect other key variables, such as transnational ties (see Charmillot and Dahinden 2022). Similarly, the authors are aware of the fact that, to achieve successful coexistence of newly arrived migrants and previously settled populations, there is much more at stake than can be captured in national descriptions of local policy settings. Indeed, social cohesion, mutual respect, shared experiences and an overall sense of reciprocity can only be achieved on the basis

of a whole range of mechanisms, some very subtle (such as feelings of acceptance), that cannot easily be incorporated into the description of a country's integration initiatives and policies. These mechanisms can, nevertheless, often be captured within micro studies or very specific accounts of local practices. Thus, while this monograph does not aspire to present any deep insight into these mechanisms, it does not wholly ignore them: many of them are reflected, for example, in the descriptions of inspiring case studies in chapter 7. The most pertinent example among those is the description of Mechelen's transformation, which must, as the description points out, be understood in its broader context and not "merely" through the lens of local policy settings.

Similarly, it is worth bearing in mind that apparently similar measures adopted at local level can yield varied results depending on whether they emphasise aspects that divide or unite society, e.g. social ties or cultural differences (cf. Glick Schiller and Çağlar 2016). These differences arise in the implementation of particular types of policies and measures and are not easily captured when describing local practice.

This publication was compiled shortly before the war broke out in Ukraine and describes developments only up to the beginning of 2022. It does not, therefore, contain any data on the numbers of Ukrainians who have fled to the countries described since the war began, nor any information about how those countries have adapted to the presence of the newly arrived Ukrainians (especially women and children). It does, nevertheless, point out: how prepared the countries described were, in particular as concerns local integration policy; what they might build on; and areas in which they could draw inspiration from one another.

The methodology used includes a comprehensive literature review, especially with regard to the development of integration policies towards migrants at the EU level and in the individual participating countries. The content of the monograph was drawn up on the basis of discussions between the partner organizations and after the partner organizations had been given the opportunity to learn more about the situation and needs of migrants and local institutions in the participating countries. The chapters that present country profiles follow a predetermined structure established by the researchers to ensure comparability and relevance to the project. Each of these chapters presents case studies using available quantitative data, an analysis of legal and strategic documents, interviews with local politicians, and the authors' own practical experience.

1.1 Terminology and definition of key concepts

In the following chapters, we work with many concepts that are specific to the area of migrant integration. As a rule, we explain these directly within the individual texts. However, for a better understanding we also define some key terms at the outset, as their use may differ in the four countries compared. This concerns in particular the terms *migrant* and *integration*. In the chapters that describe the situation in a particular country, we always use that country's terminology. In the other chapters, we highlight terms that might be subject to different perceptions where we consider these relevant.

The four studied countries all make use of similar terminology to describe their migrant populations; however, the term *migrant* is used differently in the national statistics of these four countries. In this respect, there is a significant similarity between the Czech and Slovak Republics, which is not surprising given their shared history, and some similarity exists between the usage in Germany and Belgium.

Czech official documents use the expression *foreigner* (in Czech: *cizinec*). As in English, the term is derived from the word *foreign* (in Czech: *cizí*). Scholars and civil society stakeholders usually prefer to use the term *migrant* rather than *foreigner*. Although the difference between who uses the term *migrant* and who uses the term *foreigner* is usually apparent, there is sometimes an overlap. In general, neither of these terms is perceived as problematic. This monograph uses the term *migrant* when describing migrant integration policies in the Czech Republic, but maintains the more official term *foreigner* when citing official documents or statistics. Czech statistics only contain information about migrants who do not have Czech citizenship. Once migrants acquire Czech citizenship, they are no longer included in statistics on migrants. It is thus impossible to trace Czech citizens of migrant origin in the official statistics. This complicates the evaluation of integration policies from a long-term perspective.

Slovak laws and strategic documents mainly use the term *foreigner* (in Slovak: *cudzinec*). Scholars and civil society stakeholders use the terms *foreigner* and *migrant* interchangeably, but very often also use the term *third country national*, which most accurately expresses the legal status of a foreigner. Slovak statistics primarily contain information about migrants who do not have Slovak citizenship. As in the Czech Republic, once migrants acquire Slovak citizenship they are then dropped from all migration data. In official data, it is then impossible to trace Slovak citizens based on their migratory origin.

In its statistics, **Germany** uses the term *inhabitant with migration background* (in German: *die Bevölkerung mit Migrationshintergrund*), which it defines as follows: “a person has a migration background if he/she or at least one of his/her parents was not born with German citizenship”. As a result, “all those who immigrated to what is now the territory of the Federal Republic of Germany after 1949, as well as all foreigners born in Germany and all Germans born in Germany with at least one parent who immigrated after 1949 or was born as a foreigner in Germany” are also classified as inhabitants with migration background¹. Nevertheless, the attribution of a “migration origin” solely on the basis of the nationality of the individual or of one of his/her parents does not adequately reflect the social reality (e.g. because of so-called patchwork families and single-parent households). Experts suggest avoiding the term *migration background* if possible, in favour of more specific terms. This publication uses the term *people with migration history* in the German chapter.

The Belgian/Flemish statistics distinguish between a *person of foreign origin* (or *of migration background*) (in Flemish: *personen van buitenlandse herkomst*) and a *foreigner* (or *a foreign national*). A *person of foreign origin* is a person lawfully residing in Belgium for a long period of time, who did not possess Belgian citizenship at birth or at least one of whose parents did not possess Belgian citizenship at birth. A *foreigner* (or *a foreign national*) is defined as a person who does not have Belgian citizenship (a non-Belgian citizen).

The data we present in the following chapters is as comparable as possible. However, in some cases, identically defined categories are not available. In these cases, we state which of the above-mentioned definitions is used.

We find it useful to approach the concept of *integration* (or *migrant integration*) and its content in the four countries studied. It nevertheless remains true that the term *integration* is itself ambiguous and takes on a variety of different meanings in different contexts.

The term *integration* (or *migrant integration*) is commonly used in the **Czech Republic**. Although it does not have negative connotations, many Czechs unfortunately perceive it as meaning assimilation. Although Czech integration policies in practice place much greater emphasis on the process of adaptation on the part of migrants, official documents view integration as a two-way process. Some scholars prefer to use the

1 For more, see: Statistisches Bundesamt (Destatis) “Migration und Integration”, available at: https://www.destatis.de/DE/Themen/Gesellschaft-Umwelt/Bevoelkerung/Migration-Integration/_inhalt.html.

term *inclusion*; however, this usually relates to integration in the context of school education.

Similarly, in **Slovakia** state institutions and other key actors broadly use the term *integration* (sometimes *inclusion* or *adaptation* in academic circles) in strategic and research documents. In the past, there were tendencies to incorporate the term *assimilation* into the official Slovak integration strategy, since this would more accurately express the state authorities' attitude towards migration and the lack of willingness to adapt society to migrants' needs as they strive for better participation. Several academic voices also raised views similar to those heard in Germany (see below) regarding the overlap between *integration* and *assimilation*. However, the Integration Policy of the Slovak Republic (2014) currently in force uses only the term *integration* and provides definitions of that term from various perspectives (target group, integration policy goals and principles).

The definition of integration used by the **German** Federal Office for Migration and Refugees² emphasizes migrants' involvement in German society. This is still, however, primarily associated with migrants and their descendants adapting and conforming to a certain "norm". This perception of integration has received significant criticism in the last few years and repeated calls have been made to replace the term *integration* with *inclusion* or other terms that emphasize participation, equal opportunities and equal access.

In Flanders³, Belgium, integration is understood as "a dynamic and interactive process by which individuals, groups, communities and organizations constructively relate to each other and cope with migration and its consequences in society, each in the context of enforcing the rights and obligations of a democratic constitutional state"⁴. The current Flemish integration policy (2021) is an inclusive policy focused on so-

2 The definition is as follows: "Integration is a long-term process. Its aim is to include in society all people who live permanently and legally in Germany. Immigrants should be able to participate fully and equally in all areas of society. It is their duty to learn German and to know, to respect and abide by the constitution and other laws". Source: The Federal Ministry of the Interior and Community. For more, see: <https://www.bmi.bund.de/EN/topics/community-and-integration/integration-integration-node.html>.

3 We use the Flemish (rather than the Belgian national) definition here because integration policy is the responsibility of the individual Belgian regions.

4 The definition is copied from the Flemish Integration Decree (Vlaams Integratiedecreet from 7-6-2016), available at: [_https://codex.vlaanderen.be/Portals/Codex/documenten/1023121.html#H1061524](https://codex.vlaanderen.be/Portals/Codex/documenten/1023121.html#H1061524). For changes since March 2022, see <https://www.agii.be/nieuws/wijziging-vlaams-inburgeringsdecreet-wat-verandert>.

ciety as a whole, paying special attention when necessary to persons of foreign origin or persons legally residing in Belgium (unfortunately, as of 1 January 2022, the Flemish integration policy is no longer intended to apply to foreigners without residence permits). Cities and municipalities implement the integration policy in various areas, mainly through general measures. Specific measures are only implemented when necessary.

Similarly, we must recall that the phrase “migrant integration” has become problematic in many countries because, rather than seeking to achieve maximally beneficial coexistence of those newly arrived with previously settled populations, many so-called “integration measures” have become instruments for immigration control. In the Czech Republic and Slovakia, whose practices are described in this monograph most extensively, this has so far happened only sporadically, but a few such examples are starting to emerge. For example, when the Czech Republic introduced mandatory adaptation and integration courses in 2020 (which are currently the only “integration obligation” for migrants to the country), the measure was cast in a very positive light (both by the state and certain NGOs). This made it very difficult to open up any discussion about the measure’s many possible negative impacts and to draw attention to the fact that those impacts are not only factual (e.g. in the Czech context, the high integration course fees) but also structural, since in introducing this measure the state laid the foundations for a system in which integration measures can also serve as instruments for the exclusion of migrants, if they fail, or are unable, to meet the set criteria.

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2. Integration Challenges in the Light of Different Approaches to the Inclusion of Migrants

Marie Jelínková

2.1 Integration objectives and general policy setting

There is a well-established literature analysing the integration of migrants as a process that evolves over time and across generations. However, this process may not be linear or identical for everyone across different areas of integration. On the one hand, migrants are confronted with a new reality in which they need to learn how the host society works and find ways to become part of it. On the other hand, this can only be possible if the receiving communities and governments are genuinely willing to accept the newcomers, which in practice requires that they provide migrants with support, orientation, information and mutual respect (cf. Gallagher 2018). Integration is a long, reciprocal, dialogical process of negotiating attitudes and rules of social coexistence between all involved, not only the migrants themselves. Local institutional conditions, legislation governing migrants' access to citizenship and local residents' attitudes toward migrants all play crucial roles.

The consequences of ignoring the need for integration or of bad practice in integration are devastating. Across the world, we see evidence of failed integration in large refugee camps, ghettos and gated communities and these places are merely the tip of the iceberg. Insufficient integration policies lead to social tensions, prevent migrants from equal participation in society and fail to exploit the potential that migration brings to both host countries and their new inhabitants. Several studies (e.g. Anjum, McVittie, a McKinlay 2018) have also shown that failed integration processes lead to further and deeper marginalization of migrants, which in turn affects their quality of life and their ability to participate in society. Furthermore, there is a wide range of positive arguments to support

migrant integration into host societies. Some of those arguments are anchored in legislation (e.g. non-discrimination), while others are economic in nature. Much of the literature on how integration outcomes improve over time points out that migrants can access greater economic opportunities once they become part of the host society. Moreover, migration contributes to local development. Demographic arguments should also be taken into account: UN studies have shown that populations will decline over the next 50 years in virtually all European countries. Unless they admit vast numbers of migrants, the EU countries will have to significantly reduce their social and pension programmes (UN 2001). Last but not least, safety must also be considered: failure to integrate migrants into society presents risks not only to the host society but also to migrants' livelihoods and social interactions. Therefore, in this monograph we do not ask whether or why integration should be pursued, but how it can best be achieved.

2.2 Migrant integration policies at the European level: a brief overview

Although migration policy is now part and parcel of several European policies, the EU's involvement in the integration of migrants remains relatively weak (Geddes a Scholten 2015). EU integration policies have long remained substantially limited, based on the implicit assumption that as long as migrants hold the same legal status and there are adequate tools to combat discrimination, integration can and should be implemented within social development policy by the individual Member States (Garcés-Masareñas a Penninx 2016). Nevertheless, with the growing coherence and harmonisation of European policies, the integration of migrants has come to the fore at the European level. Although migrant integration policies remain the responsibility of Member States, the EU seeks to harmonise and share certain standards in this area through "softer" non-binding methods of integration management. This includes coordination, research, exchange of good practice and significant financial support (for more see Bertossi 2011) French assimilation, Dutch and British multiculturalism.

These various softer governance mechanisms are not binding for Member States but can provide them with a forum for knowledge exchange and development. Migrant integration is also influenced by anti-discrimination legislation and legislation that affects participation

in society. Furthermore, the European Commission has set up significant funding through programmes such as the European Integration Fund, the European Refugee Fund and subsequently the Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund to support the integration of migrants. In addition, a sophisticated infrastructure of organisations has emerged, contributing to the dialogue between EU-supported research and EU-level policy. This includes think tanks, such as the Migration Policy Group (MPG) and the Migration Policy Institute Europe (MPI) as well as state-run intelligence-gathering networks, such as the European Migration Network (EMN) and the EU Urban Agenda: Partnership on Inclusion of Migrants and Refugees. Despite these successes, the European Union's approach raises a number of major questions, both as regards its common migration policy and persistent gaps between integration policies and their implementation, e.g. many restrictions on migrants' fundamental rights (Carrera a Merlino 2009).

In 2003 the foundations of the framework for the integration of migrants were laid at the European level. The framework highlights the reciprocity of migrants' and host countries' rights and obligations. The Common Basic Principles for Immigrant Integration Policy, which were adopted in 2004, reflect a change in the direction of European integration policies (Geddes a Scholten 2015). The Principles state that "integration is a dynamic, two-way process of mutual accommodation by all immigrants and residents of Member States" (Council of the European Union 2004, 19). However, given the growing emphasis on newly arrived migrants' obligations at the level of Member States, such reciprocity is far from evident in the integration process. The Principles further offer insight into what is expected of migrants: "respect for the basic values of the European Union", which on the other hand comes with "full respect for the immigrants' and their descendants' own language and culture" (Council of the European Union 2004, 20). Thus, the common principles set out a framework within which integration should take place, but they do not specify whether and to what extent Member States should be involved in implementing such integration. The third and fourth basic principles focus on employment, emphasising migrants' individual responsibility for socio-economic integration, as well as for gaining a basic knowledge of the language, history, and institutions of the host society. Over time, a civic integration policy based on these two principles has become a tool for controlling migration, enabling Member States to restrict entry or residence rights for unskilled or less desirable migrants. The fifth principle then targets host countries, emphasizing non-discrim-

inatory access to institutions and services for migrants as a key to better integration (Council of the European Union 2004, 21).

Although these principles still form the basic framework for the integration of migrants in the EU, the EU's more specific approaches to integration have continued to change over time, including a shift in its definition of integration from a bilateral process to a trilateral process (European Commission 2011). This shift has given migrants' countries of origin a key role in the integration process (i.e. as stakeholders who can prepare future migrants for integration in their destination country before their departure or support them once they have migrated). This new emphasis on the third party in the integration process provoked ambiguous reactions. On the one hand, studies have documented cases in which the integration process can truly be seen as tripartite (e.g. Van Ewijk 2013). On the other hand, this tripartite process is hampered by the limited capacities and mandates of institutions in the countries of origin, which make it difficult for them to engage effectively in it.

Another significant shift is also worth noting. In the latest Action Plan on Integration and Inclusion (2021–2027), which sets out objectives for the integration of migrants, the European Commission expresses support for the first time not only for the integration of migrants from outside the EU, but also for EU citizens living in other EU countries. This is a long-discussed change that had been called for by a number of Member States and their local authorities.

In conclusion, migrant integration policies remain a national competence. However, since the ratification of the Treaty of Lisbon in 2007, European institutions have the mandate to “provide incentives and support for the action of Member States with a view to promoting the integration of third-country nationals residing legally in their territories”¹. The EU's task in migrant integration is thus to establish priorities and goals on a regular basis, which will move its strategies, legislative proposals and funding opportunities forward.²

1 See the content of Articles 79 and 80 of the Treaty of Lisbon, available at: EUR-Lex – 12016E079 – EN – EUR-Lex (europa.eu).

2 For more, see: https://ec.europa.eu/migrant-integration/cu-grid/eu-strategy_en.

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

Marie Jelínková

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.

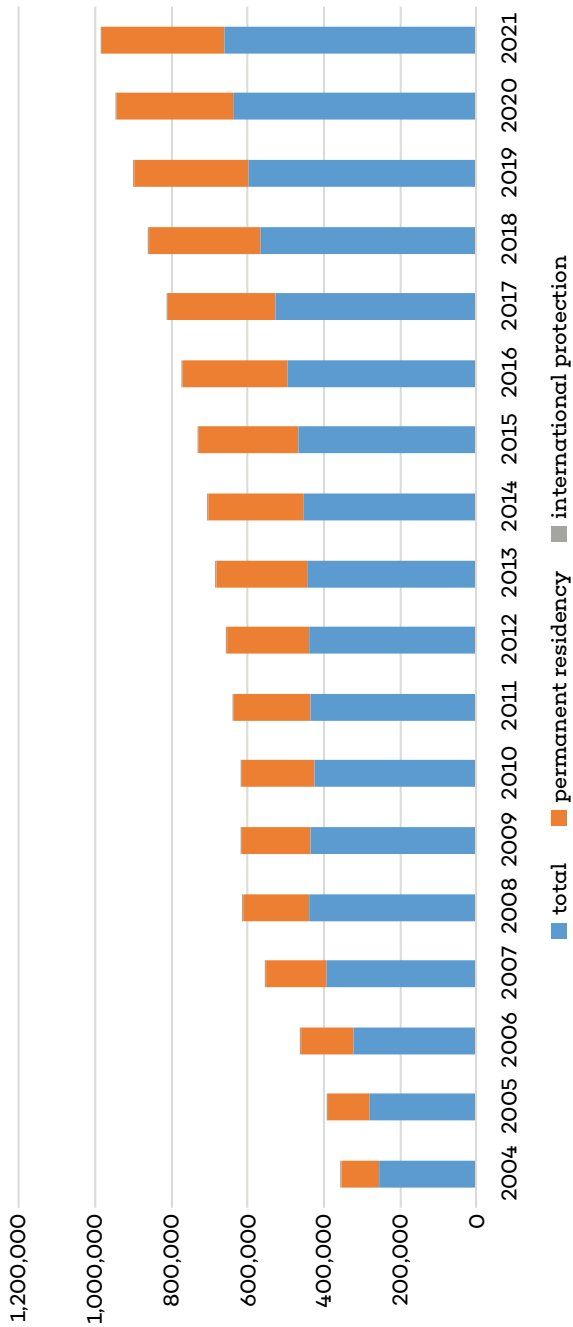


Chart 1 Development in the number of migrants in the Czech Republic between 2004–2021 by type of residence
Source: Ministry of the Interior 2022, Czech Statistical Office 2021

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,

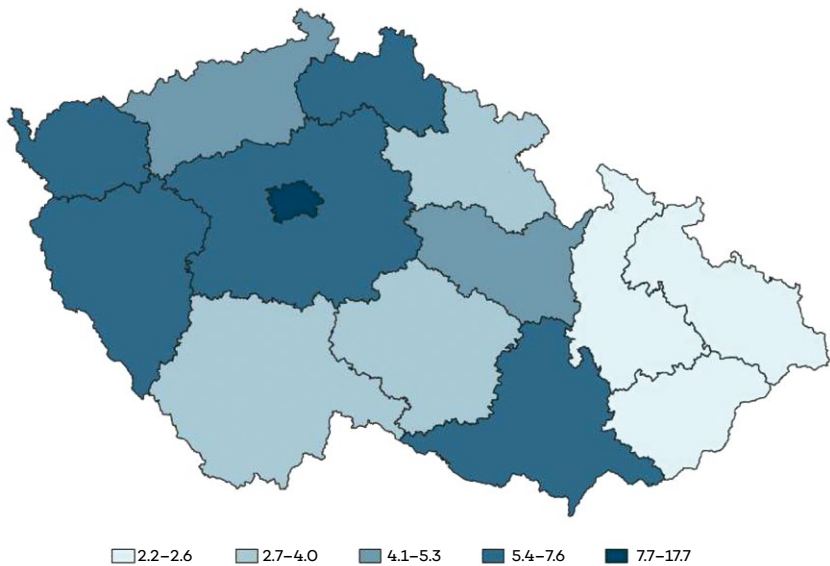


Plate 1 Proportion of foreigners in the Czech regions in 2021

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.

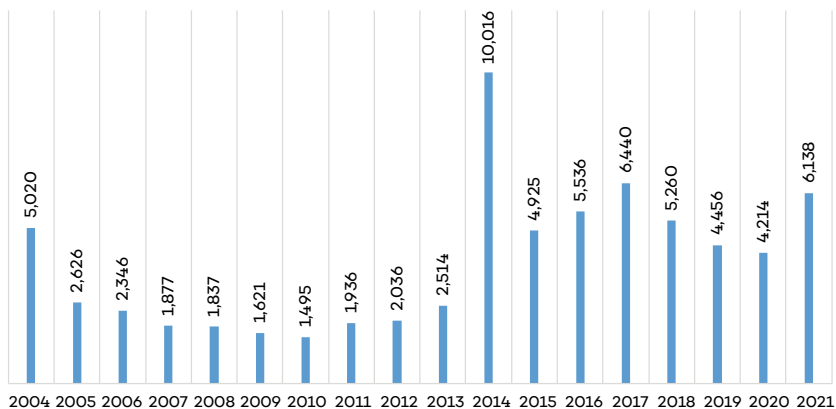


Chart 2 Acquisition of Czech citizenship between 2004 and 2021

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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4. Legislative Setting and Strategic Grounding of Migrant Integration Policies in Slovakia

Zuzana Bargerová

4.1 Statistical data

After the Velvet Revolution in 1989, the transformation of the social system immensely impacted the development of international migration in Czechoslovakia. The “fall of the Iron Curtain”, the opening of borders and the accompanying political and economic changes had marked consequences for migration processes in Central Europe, as did the subsequent split of Czechoslovakia and the formation of the Slovak Republic on 1 January 1993 (Divinský 2007; Drbohlav 2010).

Over the 28 years that have passed since the establishment of the Slovak Republic, the number of foreigners in Slovakia has risen steadily. Other trends are also evident: immigration legislation has tightened up, the state administration has professionalized its implementation of migration policy and the country has made its first attempts at strategic approaches to migration regulation and the integration of foreigners. Chart 3 shows the gradual increase in the number of resident foreigners since Slovakia’s accession to the EU in 2004.

While the share of foreigners with legal residence in Slovakia did not exceed 1% of the total population of the Slovak Republic between 2002 and 2008, this share exceeded 2% for the first time after 2018 and at the time of writing this monograph it exceeds 3% (Table 2). With such low numbers of foreigners, Slovakia has long had one of the lowest shares of migration among the EU member states (Eurostat 2021). Numbers of “forced” migrants – asylum seekers or refugees granted asylum or subsidiary protection – have been lower than numbers of “voluntary migrants” in Slovakia for more than 10 years, as Chart 4 shows. It may also be striking that the number of asylum seekers in Slovakia fell to record

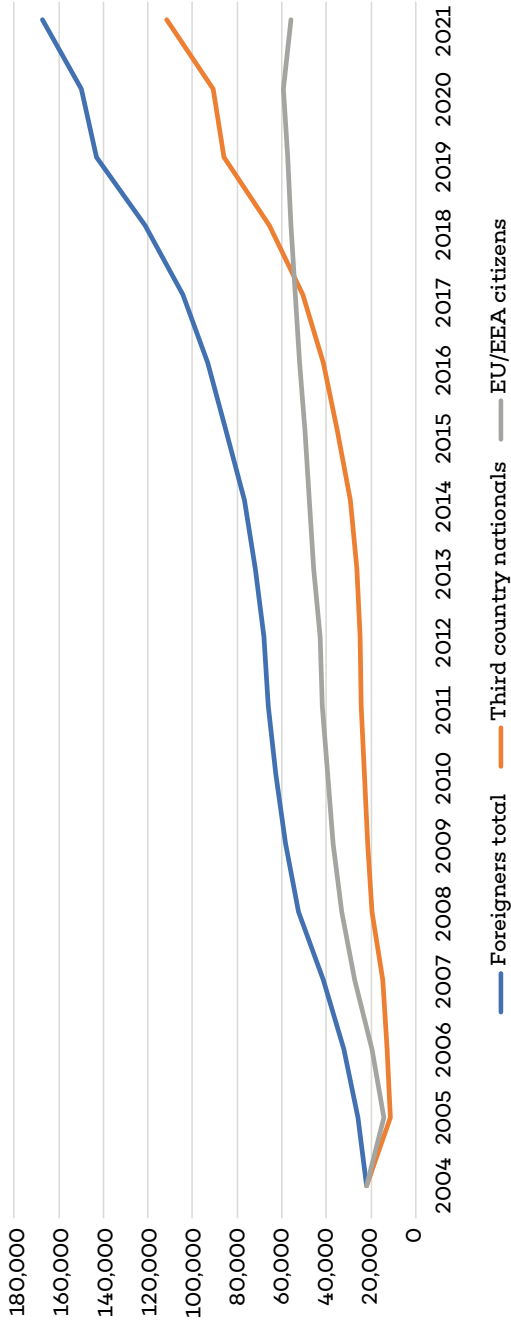


Chart 3 Increase in voluntary immigration to Slovakia (including EEA citizens) between 2004 and 2021

Source: Bureau of Border and Foreign Police of the Presidium of the Police Force (hereinafter Bureau of Border and Foreign Police) (2021), data as of 31.12. 2021

Table 2 Development of the number and share of foreign residents (including EEA citizens) in Slovakia between 2010 and 2020

	Pop. in mil.	Total no. of foreigners including EEA	Share of foreigners in %
2010	5.435	62,584	1.15
2011	5.404	66,191	1.22
2012	5.404	67,877	1.25
2013	5,411	71,649	1.32
2014	5.416	76,715	1.41
2015	5.421	84,787	1.56
2016	5.426	93,247	1.71
2017	5.435	104,451	1.92
2018	5.443	121,264	2,22
2019	5.450	143,075	2.62
2020	5,464	150,012	2,74
2021	5.449	167,519	3.00

Source: The Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic, Bureau of Border and Foreign Police (2021) and the author's calculations

lows at the time of the migration crisis around 2015 and has remained at that low level to this day.

As for the countries of origin of foreigners living in the Slovak Republic, this distribution has also changed during the last 20 years. In 2017, the number of legally resident third-country nationals was equal to the number of EU / EEA citizens registered in the country (hereinafter collectively referred to as “EU citizens”), and in 2018 third-country nationals outnumbered residents from other EU/EEA countries for the first time in Slovak history. However, as studies from the Czech Republic suggest, the number of EU citizens resident in Slovakia is likely higher than official statistics suggest, as many people in this category fail to officially register as Slovak residents.

Before arriving in Slovakia, third-country nationals are required to undergo an entry procedure, as is also the case for other EU countries. The length and difficulty of that procedure depends on the purpose of their stay in Slovakia and the presence or absence of a residence sponsor (a family member with whom they intend to reunite). The conditions upon which they may be granted legal residence in Slovakia are deter-

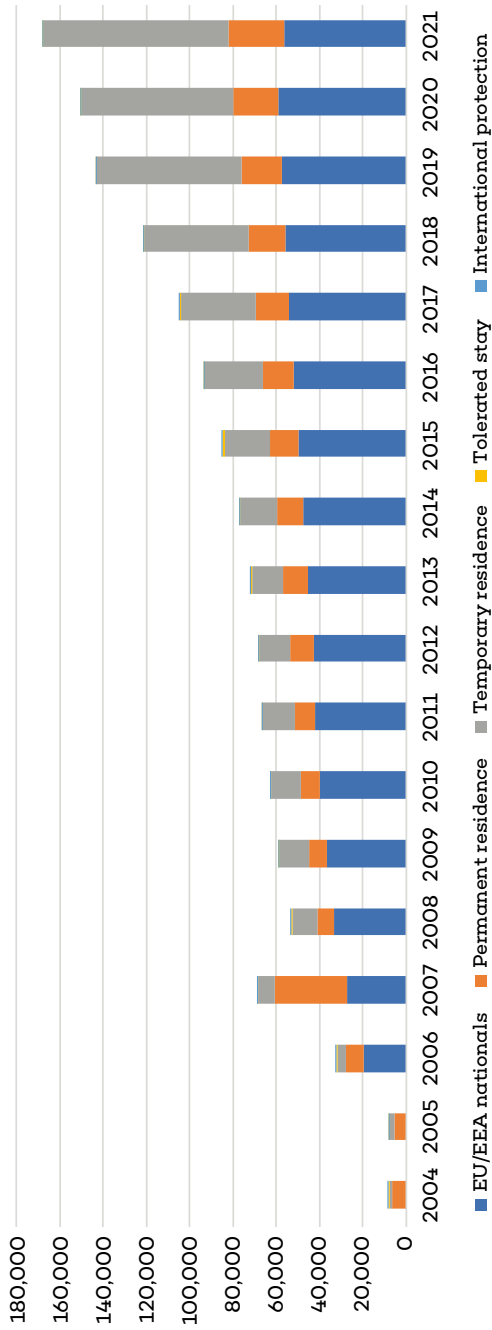
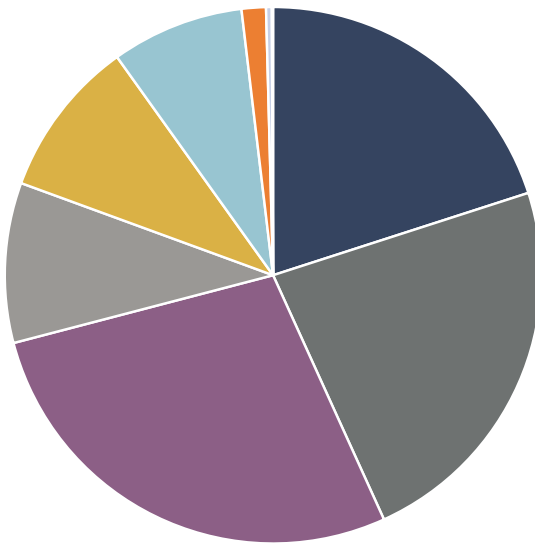


Chart 4 Development of the number of foreign residents (including refugees) in the Slovak Republic between 2004 and 2021
Source: Bureau of Border and Foreign Police, Migration Office of the Ministry of Interior of the Slovak Republic (2021)



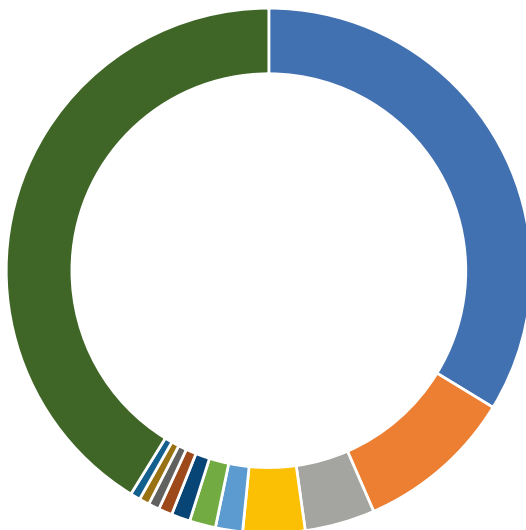
- 1. Employment
- 2. Permanent residence
- 3. Business
- 4. Slovak living abroad
- 5. Family reunion
- 6. Study
- 7. Family member of EU citizen
- 8. Sport
- 9. Volunteer work

Chart 5 The most frequent purposes for temporary residence among third country nationals in the Slovak Republic as of 31. 12. 2021

Source: Bureau of Border and Foreign Police (2021)

mined by the Act on Residence of Foreigners (No. 404/2011 Coll.). This law defines a foreigner as “anybody who is not a citizen of the Slovak Republic”. Nevertheless, there is a big difference between foreigners from other EU member states and third country nationals. The law distinguishes between some 30 categories of foreigners with varying legal status – different types of residence, rights and obligations. Newly arrived foreigners from third countries usually apply for temporary residence for one of the purposes specified by law. Established foreigners who have lived in Slovakia for more than 5 years or are married to Slovak citizens may be granted permanent residence. The number of new permanent residence permits granted is consistently low, as can be seen in Chart No. 2, even though the number of foreigners resident in Slovakia is increasing.

As Chart 5 illustrates, about one third of all “newcomers” come to Slovakia for work and about a quarter intend to do business in the country.



- 1. Ukraine
- 2. Serbia
- 3. Vietnam
- 4. Russia
- 5. United Kingdom
- 6. China
- 7. North Macedonia
- 8. South Korea
- 9. Iran
- 10. USA
- 11. India
- 12. Other states

Chart 6 The most common countries of origin of third country nationals resident in the Slovak Republic in 2021

Source: Bureau of Border and Foreign Police (2021)

Another substantial group consists of “ethnic Slovaks” who had Slovak ancestors, which enables them to obtain temporary residence rights more easily. Family reunification with a foreigner or a citizen of the Slovak Republic is the most common reason for migration for permanent residence, and the chart below shows that it is also an important driver of temporary residence requests.

In 2021, the largest groups of foreigners resident in Slovakia, including EU citizens, are Ukrainians, Serbs, Czechs, Hungarians and Romanians. The most numerous third-country nationals, as shown in Chart 6, are Ukrainians, Serbs, Vietnamese, Russians, British, Chinese and Macedonians.

Ukrainians, of whom there were 56,480 in Slovakia at the end of 2021, are a more diverse group than the second-largest group of Serbs (BBFP 2022). Many of them are settled in Slovakia long-term, with permanent

residence, while the remainder largely reside on the basis of temporary residence. Almost 10% of them study, while others largely work in low, medium and high skilled occupations or carry out business activities. Statistics do not specify whether these entrepreneurs are self-employed or business executives, but in total they represent approximately a quarter of all Ukrainians with legal residence. Many of them work officially as self-employed contractors but are in reality in dependent relationships, working as cleaners, builders, farm hands, etc. At the end of 2021, 13,556 Ukrainians had work permits and 5,897 were employed without the need for a work permit, but it is difficult to deduce how many of these were only circular seasonal migrants, posted workers, family members of foreigners, etc. (COLSAF 2022) The most common professions among these immigrants in 2020 were fitters and operators of machinery and equipment (> 8,000).

As for the second largest group of foreigners, of the 16,331 Serbs living in Slovakia at the end of 2021 about half (8,163) held a special temporary residence for ethnic Slovaks (BBFP 2022). Since they benefit from this “more advantageous” permit, it is more difficult to determine what their real purpose for residing in the Slovak Republic was. A smaller share of Serbs in Slovakia (3,749) were granted temporary residence for the purpose of employment or seasonal work (COLSAF 2022). Only about three dozen Serbs in Slovakia hold temporary residence for the purpose of study and about 1,100 are in business. Serbian workers in Slovakia mainly work as operators of machines and equipment (>3,500).

Czechs, who represent the third largest and most traditional immigrant group in Slovakia, make up 8% of the total number of foreigners. As discussed with regard to Slovaks in the chapter on the Czech Republic, Czech citizens enjoy an exceptional near-domestic status in Slovakia, given the countries’ common history and the “general intelligibility of the Czech language” even in official Slovak contexts.

The final report of the 3-year KapaCITY project, which focused on foreigners’ integration at the local level, mentions that the number of third country nationals from Vietnam, Russia and China has been growing much more slowly than the number of Ukrainian and Serbian nationals. At the same time, among these communities there is a small difference between the number of temporary and permanent residence holders (KapaCITY 2020). From a long-term perspective, Vietnamese, Russians and Chinese are traditional migrant communities and many of them have acquired Slovak citizenship in the past. Unnaturalized Vietnamese immigrants, of whom there were 6,798 at the end of last year and

who thus form the third largest community of third country nationals in Slovakia, mainly do business – almost half the temporary residence permits granted to Vietnamese nationals are for business purposes. The Vietnamese are most often employed in services, in trade and as fitters and operators of machinery and equipment.

According to data from the Central Office of Labour, Social Affairs and Family, at the end of 2020 there were 29,937 citizens from other EU countries and 39,075 third-country nationals working in the Slovak Republic (24,169 with work permits and 14,906 with information cards¹). At the end of 2020, a total of 69,012 foreigners were employed in Slovakia; most of them came from Ukraine (COLSAF 2022).

Migration legislation has gradually and continuously tightened in Slovakia since 2001, including the conditions for granting citizenship (between 2007 and 2010). Hand in hand with this trend, the state institutions have taken a generally more negative attitude towards foreigners. After 2007, this resulted in a 15-year decline in the annual numbers of Slovak citizenships granted, reaching an absolute minimum (Chart 7). This points to the existence of a targeted policy on the part of the Ministry of Interior of the Slovak Republic, which has resulted in a much lower rate of naturalization than before 2008/2009.

Like the Czech Republic, Slovakia does not count naturalized persons as foreigners, considering them – from an integration point of view and in relation to the definition of the term “foreigner” – already fully integrated. Given the significant increase in the number of foreigners living in Slovakia over the last 10 years and the dramatic decline in the number of citizenships granted in the same period, it seems that the Slovak Republic does not consider formal completion of any integration process necessary. Citizenship of the Slovak Republic is perceived as a privilege to be granted only to those who fulfil the exhaustive conditions of the Citizenship Act, pass language, history, geography and Slovak facts tests and in whose applications the Ministry of Interior finds no inconsistencies.

1 The employer is obliged to inform the competent Labour, social affairs and family office about the creation and termination of the employment relationship or the beginning and end of the secondment to perform work on a predetermined form. A sample of the “Information card” form is available for download, e.g.: https://www.eures.sk/clanok_detail.php?id=1221.

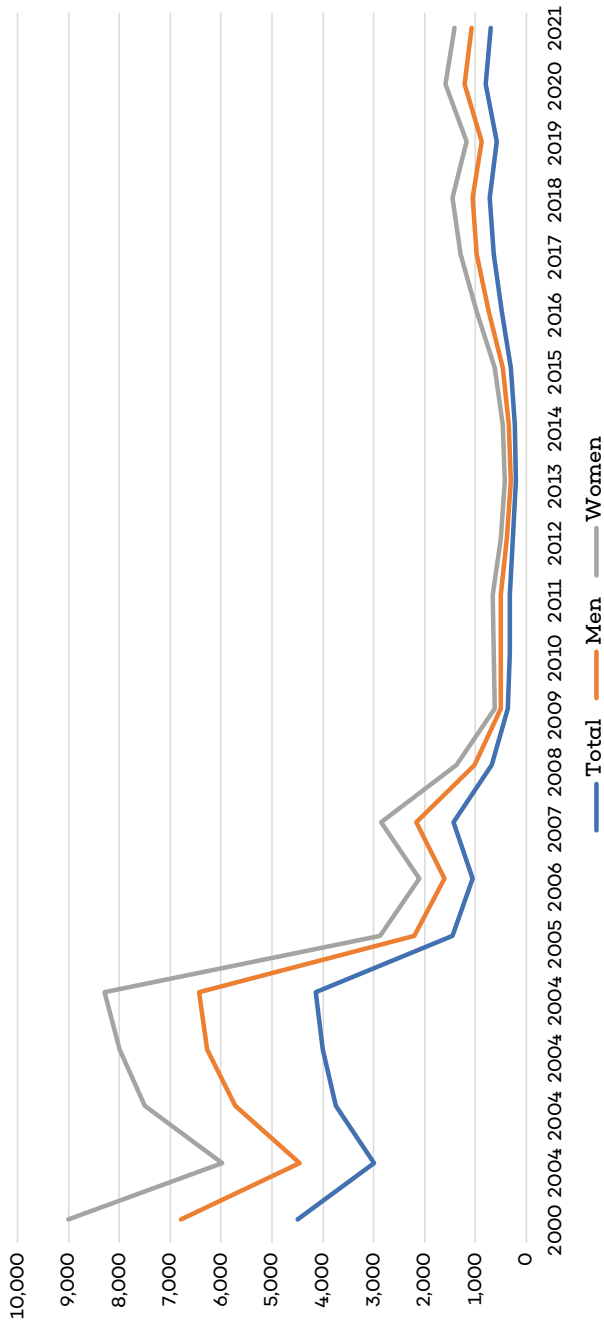


Chart 7 Numbers of citizenships of the Slovak Republic granted between 2000 and 2021

Source: Ministry of Interior of the Slovak Republic (2021)

Gender perspective

There are no available statistics on the number of migrant women. The Slovak Migration Office's statistics only record female asylum seekers, recognised refugees and subsidiary protection holders, which represent a partial share of all women migrants. The statistics of the Bureau of Border and Foreign Police do not differentiate between men and women in relation to types of residence or purposes of stay. It is clear from Eurostat statistics that male immigration outweighs female immigration in Slovakia, (Eurostat 2018). Despite the fact that equality, prevention of discrimination and the protection of vulnerable groups of foreigners, including women, are all principles found in the *Integration Policy of the Slovak Republic*, relatively little attention is currently paid to migrant women in Slovakia (MLSAF 2014).

Regional distribution of foreigners in Slovakia

Most foreigners in the Slovak Republic live in the Bratislava region (Chart 8); relatively large numbers have also settled in the Trnava, Košice and Nitra regions. This regional distribution can be explained by the development of the automotive industry in the cities of Nitra, Bratislava and Trnava and the resulting high demand for manpower by a large number of subcontracting companies.

According to data from the Bureau of Border and Foreign Police, equal numbers of Ukrainians, (the most numerous third-country nationality among Slovak residents) live in western Slovakia as in eastern Slovakia, close to the Ukrainian border. The second largest group of third-country nationals consists of Serbs. Most Serbian migrant workers live in western Slovakia, especially in the Bratislava region, where they largely work in the automotive industry and for related companies (MLSAF 2014).

As of 31 December 2020, a total of 51,000 foreigners lived in the Bratislava Region, of which 33,497 were third-country nationals. The number of third-country nationals has quadrupled over the last 10 years (COLSAF 2022; MI SR 2010).

The situation in the Slovak capital Bratislava is, for obvious reasons (geographical location, employment opportunities), significantly different from the rest of Slovakia. At the end of 2020, 40,237 foreigners

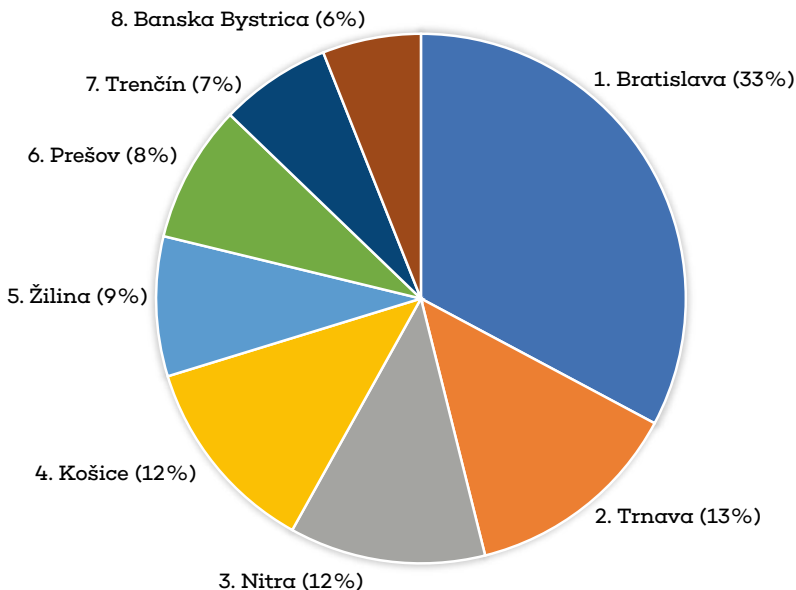


Chart 8 Distribution of foreigners across Slovak regions in 2021

Source: Bureau of Border and Foreign Police (2021)

lived in the city of Bratislava.² A year later, on 31. 12. 2021, there were already 41,952 foreigners in total registered with valid residence permits, of whom 20,829 held temporary residence (third country nationals) and 21,121 permanent residence (EU and third country nationals).

At that time there were just over 167,000 foreigners legally resident in Slovakia, which means that those living in Bratislava accounted for about 26% of all foreigners in the Slovak Republic and about 7% of the total population in Bratislava. Many of these foreigners live in Bratislava I (Old Town) district, where they comprise close to 18% of the total population, or in Bratislava III district, where foreigners make up some 12% of the population. In terms of the absolute number, the district with the largest number of resident foreigners (8,376) is Bratislava II³. To illustrate, in Tables 3 and 4 we present overviews of the numbers of third country nationals and EU citizens whose Slovak resident permits are registered within the city of Bratislava.

² The Bureau of Border and Foreign Police provided data on the number of foreigners.

³ The data on the population of Bratislava as of 31. 12. 2021 and 31. 12. 2021 were provided by the Bureau of Border and Foreign Police.

Table 3 Overview of numbers of valid Slovak residence permits held by third country nationals within the city of Bratislava on 31. 12. 2021 by type of residence permit and city district

Bratislava city district	Temporary residence	Permanent residence	Tolerated stay	Total
Bratislava II.	5,248	2 014	0	7,262
Bratislava III.	5,021	2 155	0	7,176
Bratislava IV.	4,254	1 462	0	5,716
Bratislava I.	3,031	1 658	0	4,689
Bratislava V.	3,275	1 074	2	4,351
Total	20,829	8,363	2	29,194

Source: Statistics from the Bureau of Border and Foreign Police

Table 4 Overview of numbers of valid Slovak permanent residence permits held by EU nationals within the city of Bratislava on 31. 12. 2021 by city district

Bratislava city district	EU nationals residence
Bratislava I.	3,249
Bratislava II.	3,128
Bratislava IV.	2,307
Bratislava III.	2,155
Bratislava V.	1,919
Total	12,758

Source: Statistics from the Bureau of Border and Foreign Police

4.2 Migrant integration strategies at national, regional and local levels

In this section, we offer an overview of existing strategic documents and their historical development.

National integration framework

The term “integration of foreigners” has been used by the Slovak state authorities in official documents as well as by non-governmental organizations approximately since the Slovak Republic’s accession to the

EU in 2004. At that time, European Social Fund resources were used to finance the first projects mapping foreign migration in Slovakia and supporting the integration of foreigners. Integration of foreigners was also a common topic of discussion in expert forums. The *Integration Policy of the Slovak Republic*, which is addressed in the next section of this chapter, defines the term “integration” more precisely.

Slovak integration policy is formally composed of both national strategic documents and instruments to support their implementation – national legal norms that overlap with European law and its legal institutes. It also includes other tools, such as measures and documents adopted at the local authority level, but these are as yet relatively few. Below we offer a brief historical excursion into the development of these integration policies in Slovakia.

After the partition of Czechoslovakia, the first national strategic document, which was also the last for many years to regulate basic principles in the field of migration policy, was entitled *Principles of Migration Policy of the Slovak Republic* and adopted in 1993⁴. In the spirit of the time, this document called on foreigners to “submit to the sovereign power of the Slovak Republic” and “respect its legal order”, and made no mention of the importance of integration. The need to adopt a more modern strategic document became evident only in 2005, after Slovakia had joined the EU, when the Ministry of Interior of the Slovak Republic (hereinafter the “Ministry of Interior”) adopted the first *Concept for Migration Policy in the Slovak Republic*⁵. This document marginally addressed the integration of foreigners and was the first step towards a separate integration strategy. In 2007, the government instructed the Minister of Labour, the Minister of Interior and the Deputy Prime Minister to adopt “effective measures to safeguard the tasks associated with creating conditions for the integration of migrants into society and, on that basis, to create legal, legislative and financial conditions and to transfer certain competencies from the state administration to local governments and non-governmental organizations”.

In 2009 the Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs and Family of the Slovak Republic (hereinafter “Ministry of Labour”) adopted a new autonomous document on the integration of foreigners: *The Concept for Foreigner Integration in the Slovak Republic* (MLSAF 2009). A wide range of stakeholders participated in its elaboration: ministries, local government

4 These Principles were adopted by Government Decree No. 846/1993 Coll.

5 This Concept was adopted by Government Resolution No. 11/2005 Coll.

representatives, academics, the International Organization for Migration (IOM), non-governmental organizations working with migrants and representatives of migrant communities in Slovakia. Like the Czech *Concept for the Integration of Foreigners* from 2005, the Slovak Concept referred to the *Common Basic Principles for Immigrant Integration Policy in the European Union* of 2005 and called for support for integration policies and measures, especially at the local level, and for immigrants to participate in the democratic process.

After the parliamentary elections in June 2010, the representation in the National Council of the Slovak Republic changed as the new government was formed by right-wing parties. This contributed to a relatively radical shift in the national approach to foreign migration in the Slovak Republic. Section 4.2 *Internal Order and Security* of the *Programme Statement of the Government of the Slovak Republic 2010–2014* states that the government of the Slovak Republic will improve mechanisms of migration and integration management, emphasizing the harmonization of procedures and policies in these areas. The government's programme statement sounded very beneficial and progressive as far as migrants are concerned (SBA 2014).

The second version of the country's integration strategy, the *Integration Policy of the Slovak Republic* (hereinafter referred to as the "Integration Policy"), has been in force in Slovakia since 2014⁶. This document from the Ministry of Labour was/is a modern strategic document that was meant to implement measures needed to ensure foreigners integrated into Slovak society through concrete and detailed action plans (MLSAF 2017). The *Integration policy* emphasized, among other things, the integration of foreigners at the regional and local levels, the employment of foreigners, their participation in the health and social security system, equal access to education, language proficiency and support for obtaining adequate housing (HRL 2020). It called for the involvement of higher territorial units (regions) as managers of the implementation of individual measures and reiterated that the integration of foreigners should take place via a bottom-up approach at the local level.

It is not easy to assess whether the goals of the *Integration Policy* are being met – at least internally – after seven years of its existence, as there has been no evaluation of its achievements and the last monitoring of its implementation took place in 2017. Government Resolution No. 405/2018 of 5 September 2018 abolished the requirement for individual

6 This Concept was adopted by Government Decree No. 45/2014 Coll.

ministers to submit reports to the Ministry of Labour on the implementation of specific objectives and measures resulting from the Slovak Integration Policy for the relevant calendar year. It also abolished the requirement for the Minister of Labour to submit a summary report on the implementation of the *Integration Policy* to the government. This means that the implementation of the goals and measures of the *Integration Policy of the Slovak Republic* has not been monitored since 2018 (MLSAF 2018) and, in turn, that this implementation is in fact not taking place.

As the Slovak branch of the IOM stated in its *Annual Report on Migration and Asylum* for 2018, regular evaluation of the quality of annual monitoring and current (2021) challenges and problems in the Slovak labour market have indicated that the *Integration Policy of the Slovak Republic* is in need of a comprehensive update. The IOM also stated that there was (author's note: *in the past*) some cooperation between the state, local authorities and associations working in the field of integration of foreigners at meetings organised by the Ministry of Labour and by the Expert Interdepartmental Commission on Labour Migration and Integration of Foreigners (hereinafter referred to as the "Commission on Labour migration")⁷. Representatives of all local authorities, the Association of Towns and Communities of Slovakia and the Union of Towns and Cities of Slovakia⁸ were invited to the meetings of the Commission on Labour Migration. In January 2018, the Ministry of Labour called on local governments to increase their involvement and initiatives in the field of integration (EMN 2020). The last mapped activity of the Ministry of Labour in this area took place in 2019, when – to encourage better integration of foreigners – the ministry began work on updating the *Integration policy*, though it only focused on one area, namely labour market integration.

The only positive signal at the level of local authorities is the *Strategy for Labour Mobility of Foreigners in the Slovak Republic* (hereinafter referred to as the "Labour Mobility Strategy") from 2018, which introduced some new measures to support foreigners specifically in labour market integration. The *Labour Mobility Strategy*, like the *Integration Policy*, emphasizes the involvement of authorities and organizations at the regional and local levels. Its main measures include:

- Developing local integration strategies as an important tool for maintaining social cohesion and preventing conflicts, segregation, and

7 In Slovak: Medzirezortná expertná komisia pre oblasť pracovnej migrácie a integrácie cudzincov (MEKOMIC).

8 <http://www.unia-miest.eu/EN/index.asp>

ghettoization, within the framework of the update of the Slovak *Integration Policy*.

- Creating conditions for the implementation of the *Integration Policy* at regional and local levels.
- Supporting cooperation between non-profit organisations and public administration.
- Making more effective use of existing financial instruments to support the development of rental housing. The strategy directly addresses municipalities and cities and encourages them to make more effective use of contributions from the State Housing Development Fund.
- Creating a local platform for regional social dialogue at the municipal level, which would facilitate information exchange between various institutions, especially between town halls, foreign police departments, labour offices, regional branches of the social and health insurance companies, district offices, tax offices, larger employers, personnel agencies, educational institutions, etc.

At the same time, the Ministry of Labour adopted the *Action Plan for Migration Policies within the Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs and Family of the Slovak Republic for 2018–2020*. Its content was very brief and addressed the integration of foreigners in section 2.3. It called for integration mainstreaming (taking into account the specifics of the legal status of women, minors, people with disabilities, foreigners granted international protection and senior migrants) to be applied when preparing and drafting legislation and policies, taking into account the impact such measures have on migrant integration (MLSAF 2017).

The *Action Plan* further states in its introduction that:

“Because the Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs and Family of the Slovak Republic is working on two broad activities, which are: a) the ‘Strategy for Labour Mobility of Foreigners in the Slovak Republic’; b) updating the ‘Integration Policy of the Slovak Republic’, it does not state other measures in the submitted draft *Action Plan for Migration Policies within the Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs and Family of the Slovak Republic for 2018–2020*. All key measures from the point of view of the Ministry of Labour’s substantive competences are already, or will be, covered in the two aforementioned materials.”

As mentioned above, the Ministry of Labour stopped implementing any integration policy activities in approximately 2018. It is not clear who is responsible for its inaction in this respect and for its failure to carry out the tasks to which it had previously committed. The change of the Minister of Labour after the 2020 elections has not led to any change or

progress in this area, on the contrary it seems that the topic of foreigner integration is no longer considered important (Meššová 2021).

In Slovakia, the process of recognizing and formulating policies related to growing numbers of incoming migrants has previously taken place at the national level and is partly already taking place at the local level. Nevertheless, there is currently (2021) no systematic support for the integration of foreigners in practice. The integration of foreigners into society takes place uncontrollably, individually, as a result of various objective and subjective factors. Integration takes place through legal instruments regulating its sub-areas (e.g. social security laws, residence laws, laws governing access to education or health care, etc.), at the will of foreigners and their surroundings, ad hoc through integration activities organised by various intergovernmental and non-governmental entities, or through the activities of certain foreign communities.

In conclusion, it can be stated that the integration of foreigners has not been a key priority for the Slovak governments of the last 10 years. Although some progress was made between 2009 and 2014, this was followed by a slowdown and a subsequent decline in the initiatives implemented by the Ministry of Labour. However, with the recognition of the need to transfer certain key processes to local authorities, a new era of bottom-up integration began five years ago and we describe this positive turn in greater detail in the next subchapter.

Local strategies

Slovak legislation does not explicitly regulate the competences or obligations of higher territorial administrative units or municipalities relating to the integration of foreigners. Despite this and despite the relatively low numbers of foreigners living in Slovakia (compared to other countries in the SMIR project), some legal instruments supporting the integration of foreigners are already available. Municipalities that have recognized their foreign communities (in the legal definition of their inhabitants) can decide whether and how they will facilitate their integration. This situation mirrors the fact that even at the national level, no strategic vision is currently (2021) being implemented and there are no mechanisms to support such implementation.

The turning point in the bottom-up approach to integration came with a project initiated in 2014 by the Association of Towns and Com-

munities of Slovakia⁹ entitled “Capacity building at the local government level in the field of integration policy” (hereinafter referred to as the “BUK Project”).¹⁰ The BUK project opened up discussions at the municipality level on how to improve the quality of life and integration of third-country nationals, who are often long-term residents of cities and municipalities, through the creation of independent public policies. However, the city of Bratislava, which has the highest share of foreigners of all cities in Slovakia, has not yet been involved in this process and has no strategy so far.

The BUK project trained elected representatives and employees from 28 municipalities¹¹ and involved seven cities: Banská Bystrica, Prievidza, Svidník, Michalovce, Dolný Kubín, Snina and Senec in an intensive pilot scheme to develop local inclusion strategies for third-country nationals. Seven original strategies were developed within the project and more than five (planned) measures were proposed, adopted, incorporated, and put into practice. Some of these measures were implemented during the project: initial meetings between city representatives and representatives of third-country national communities to map their needs and the potential contributions of the project, building up a multicultural environment, intercultural education and informal language learning with the support of third-country nationals.

Despite a very negative discourse on the topic of refugees, which was consciously and purposefully used as an argument against the BUK Project (“the pilot cities are future gateways for refugees in Slovakia”) and which resulted in two cities failing to adopt their integration strategies, the elaborated public policies were successfully implemented in the five other cities.

In the cities of Banská Bystrica, Prievidza, Svidník, Michalovce and Dolný Kubín, local strategies for the integration of third-country nationals were adopted or the city councils noted that the proposed measures had come into force. In Svidník, one of the points of the Action Plan was to incorporate the issue of integration into the city’s future *Programme of Economic and Social Development* (hereinafter “PESD”). In Dolný Kubín,

9 In Slovak: Združenie miest a obcí Slovenska (ZMOS)

10 More information on the BUK project is available at: <http://cvek.sk/buk-budovanie-kapacit-na-urovni-miestnej-samospravy-v-oblasti-integracnej-politiky-2/>.

11 The towns involved were: Svidník, Michalovce, Košice, Prešov, Humenné, Senec, Poprad, Vranov Nad Topľou, Hanušovce Nad Topľou, Žilina, Zvolen, Žiar Nad Hronom, Dolný Kubín, Snina, Prievidza, Ružomberok, Liptovský Mikuláš, Banská Bystrica, Považská Bystrica, Trnava, Trenčín, Leopoldov, Hlohovec, Sereď, Modrý Kameň, Brezno, Handlová, Bánovce nad Bebravou.

the strategy was extended to all foreigners, with third-country nationals forming a separate target group.

Some local authorities have recently become more actively involved in integration thanks to the implementation of the three-year project *KapaCITY – Supporting the integration of foreigners at the local level*, implemented by four NGOs (the Human Rights League (HRL), the Centre for the Research of Ethnicity and Culture (CVEK), the Milan Šimečka Foundation and Marginal) (EMN 2020). This project focused on the cities of Banská Bystrica, Trnava and Bratislava as well as the Košice Self-Governing Region. Banská Bystrica built on its 2015 *Strategy for Capacity Building at the Local Government Level in the area of integration policy* and the Košice region relied on the *Roadmap for Managed Migration*, which is part of the PESD 2016–2022 (PEDS 2015).

The city of Košice developed its integration activities and created a *Concept for the integration of foreigners in the city of Košice*¹² in May 2018, in cooperation with the NGO ETP Slovakia as part of a project entitled INTEGRA – Integration of third-country nationals through urban partnerships.¹³

Further opportunities

According to Act No. 448/2008 Coll. on Social Services (hereinafter referred to as the “Social Services Act”), municipalities develop community social services plans and higher territorial self-governing units develop concepts of development of social services. Municipalities develop and approve their community social services plans based on the national priorities for the development of social services while taking into account the local specifics and the needs of individuals in the municipality’s territory, determine their social services needs and determine what personnel, financial, operational and organizational conditions are required to provide for those needs. Higher territorial self-governing units develop and approve concepts for the development of social services based on the national priorities for the development of social services and on the community social services plans drawn up by the municipalities in its territorial district.

12 The *Concept for the integration of foreigners in the city of Košice* is available in Slovak at: http://etp.sk/wp-content/uploads/2019/02/Kosice-City-Integration-Agenda_SK.pdf.

13 More information on the project INTEGRA is available in English at: INTEGRA – Integration of Third Country Nationals through Urban Partnerships – ETP Slovensko.

The *Programme of Economic and Social Development* (“PESD”)¹⁴ is a key basic document in the management of local government in self-governing regions and municipalities. Local governments formulate the PESD based on their knowledge of the situation and specific needs of the inhabitants, entrepreneurs, interest groups and other subjects in their territory. Although Act No. 538/2009 Coll. on Support for Regional Development does not use terms such as migration, integration or inclusion of foreigners, it nevertheless implicitly relates to these topics. According to Section 3(2) of the cited Act, support for regional development focuses, among other topics, on preventing social exclusion and mitigating its negative consequences, promoting equality of opportunities on the labour market, supporting disadvantaged communities, and developing a multicultural society in the region, including multicultural dialogue, cooperation and tolerance in regions and settlements.

The provisions of Section 11 of Act No. 5/2004 Coll. on Employment Services and on Amendments and Additions to Certain Acts (hereinafter “Employment Services Act”) in turn allows municipalities, town associations, civic associations and self-governing regions to enter into partnerships in order to implement projects or programmes to support the employment of job seekers.

Therefore, although most municipalities do not have their own specific strategic documents focused on the integration of foreigners, they do have the prerequisites for including this topic in their activities even without adopting their own integration policies. Many municipalities implement such measures on the basis of existing valid documents such as:

- The Programme of Economic and Social Development,
- Employment Action Plans,
- Community Plans.

For example, the local governments involved in the KapaCITY project decided to treat foreigners as a specific target group within their existing or emerging municipal or regional strategies, including the *Community Social Services Plans* in Banská Bystrica¹⁵ and Trnava and the *Concept for Social Inclusion in the Bratislava Self-Governing Region for 2020–2030*¹⁶. The *Participatory Planning Manual of the Metropolitan Institute of Bratislava* (MIB 2021) deals with foreigners as one of the communities that need

14 On the basis of Act No. 538/2009 Coll. on Support for Regional Development.

15 The Community Plan is available in Slovak at: https://cdn.banskabystrica.sk/2020/11/Komunitný-plán-mesta-Banská-Bystrica-na-roky-2021-2027.pdf_

16 The Concept is available in Slovak at: https://bratislavskykraj.sk/mdocs-posts/06-koncepcia-socialnej-inkluzie-2020-2030_koncepcia/.

to be addressed and heard when developing policies and implementing measures. At its inception, the *Community Social Services Plan for the City of Bratislava, 2019–2021* also analysed the specific situation of foreigners in the city and involved NGOs providing services to foreigners in its development. Foreigners are also taken into account in the PEDS for 2023–2030 and in the entry report for the preparation of the *Regional Integrated Territorial Strategy of the Košice Self-Governing Region* (PEDS 2015).

4.3 Legislative conditions and integration goals

In this section, we briefly discuss the basic legal norms regulating the competences of municipalities and self-governing regions in relation to activities supporting the inclusion of foreigners or residents of foreign origin. Of the many laws that guide foreigners through the process of integration into society, we have selected those that are most relevant to this monograph.

From the following description of selected provisions within the Act on Residence of Foreigners and the Act on Citizenship of the Slovak Republic, it will probably be obvious to the reader that Slovakia has not yet implemented an official integration strategy and that Slovak legislation does not yet work with a fixed definition of integration or of degrees of integration. Nevertheless, some elements of a definition of integration are already serving the authorities as criteria for granting residence or Slovak citizenship.

The Act on Municipal Establishment

The Act on Municipal Establishment (No. 369/1990 Coll.) regulates municipalities' obligations to take care of the all-round development of their territories and of the needs of their inhabitants, particularly with respect to housing, health protection and development, transport and communications, information sharing, education and training, overall cultural development, and the protection of public order. A full-fledged municipal resident is any person who has permanent residence in the municipality, i.e. a citizen of the Slovak Republic with registered permanent residence in the municipality or a foreigner who has been granted permanent or long-term residence in the Slovak Republic and whose registered place of residence is in the municipality. Foreigners who hold

temporary residence and whose registered residence is in the municipality also have the right to participate in local government, but with certain limitations on their political rights, including their active and passive voting rights and their right to vote on important issues relating to the life and development of the municipality in referenda.

According to the wording this Act, municipalities are responsible for creating and protecting a healthy environment and healthy living and working conditions for their inhabitants, protecting the environment and creating suitable conditions for access to health care, education, culture, educational activities, leisure activities, physical education and sport. However, local governments frequently face the problem that those who actually live and work in a given city are frequently not considered official inhabitants of that municipality. As explained above, a municipality's official inhabitants are only citizens whose registered long-term residence is in the given municipality and foreigners with permanent or long-term residence whose registered place of residence is in the given municipality. It may be assumed that this legal regulation will change over time at the initiative of the local governments.

The Act on Self-Governing Higher Territorial Units

According to the Act on Self-Governing Higher Territorial Units (Act No. 302/2001 Coll.), a resident of a self-governing region, and thus also the target group of any integration measures, is defined as any person whose registered permanent residence is in a municipality within the given region. Foreign holders of long-term residence permits may also participate in the self-government, with certain exceptions specified in the law. In the exercise of self-government, the region takes care of the all-round development of its territory and the needs of its inhabitants. We consider it problematic that the cited law's definition of long-term residence still refers to a long-invalid former law on residence, which was repealed in 2011 and replaced by its more modern "successor".

The Act on Residence of Foreigners

Unlike the Czech Republic, Slovakia has not introduced any mandatory integration measures. Slovak laws do not impose any specific integration conditions on foreigners before they may be granted residence or have

residence rights renewed, such as proving certain language skills or taking orientation or adaptation-integration courses. Nor do they specify what constitutes integration or how an individual's degree of integration is to be assessed if their residence permit is cancelled. This is unfortunate from the point of view of the foreigners' legal certainty as participants in these proceedings. The Act on Residence of Foreigners (No. 404/2011 Coll.) is cautious when it comes to elements that touch on integration measures or the notion of 'degrees of integration'.

However, the Bureau of Border and Foreign Police takes an individual's degree of integration into account, for example when granting permanent residence to a third-country national for 5 years or for an unlimited period of time, or when withdrawing a foreigner's residence rights. However, it is not known whether that degree of integration refers to social ties, integration in the labour market or a complex set of different aspects. From the application practice it appears that the Bureau of Border and Foreign Police primarily takes into account the given foreigner's family ties in Slovakia. The Migration Integration Policy Index (MIPEX) for 2014–2019 criticizes this approach because it means that non-EU migrants seeking a more stable legal status in Slovakia must go through a procedure that is heavily influenced by the discretion of officials (MIPEX 2020).

Other provisions of the law no longer refer to degrees of integration. Nevertheless, some provisions implicitly refer, for example, to the existence of a foreigner's ties and relationships in Slovakia. For example, in certain cases specified by law, the Bureau of Border and Foreign Police has the discretion not to cancel a foreigner's temporary residence permit if the consequences of such cancellation of his/her stay would be disproportionate to the reason for the cancellation, especially with regard to private and family life.

Other acts

The Social Services Act is another legal instrument that can be used to support the integration of foreigners at the local level. Under this law, municipalities can adopt their own social integration instruments as part of their social policy. In paragraphs 4 and 83, the Act also stipulates that if an analysis identifies a need to promote the integration of a certain group of foreigners through community work, it is possible to carry out activities to that effect. In theory, possible synergies to promote minority

cultures are also possible. These possibilities constitute piecemeal components of a strategic approach at the local level.

As we have already stated above, both the Czech and Slovak Republics consider the moment of granting citizenship as a kind of formal and legal completion of the process of integrating a foreigner into society. Based on the **Act on State Citizenship of the Slovak Republic (No. 40/1993 Coll.)**, a foreigner may apply for Slovak citizenship primarily (unless the Act provides otherwise) if he or she has held permanent residence in Slovakia for at least eight years. The strict conditions for granting citizenship, which consist of proven knowledge of the Slovak language and factual knowledge relating to social and cultural life in Slovakia, could also be considered an indication of deep economic, linguistic, and social integration. One key challenge for legislators in the future will be to specify and methodologically define the legal requirements regarding knowledge of the Slovak language or factual knowledge about the Slovak Republic. These are currently (2021) only vaguely defined and no study literature is available to guide foreigners in preparing for the citizenship tests.

4.4 Institutional framework and competences of key stakeholders, including municipalities

This section provides a brief overview of all state and local stakeholders working in the field of integration of foreigners in Slovakia.

Since 2007, the **Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs and Family of the Slovak Republic** has been the main stakeholder in and coordinator of foreigners' integration at the national level.¹⁷ It coordinates matters related to labour migration and integration as well as the implementation of other integration measures proposed by central government bodies, municipalities, and social partners. Work on this agenda is also entrusted to the **Expert Interdepartmental Commission on Labour Migration and Integration of Foreigners**, an advisory body to the Minister of Labour, Social Affairs and Family for the implementation of tasks relating to migration and integration policy.

Certain legal and administrative areas fall within the competence of the **Ministry of Interior of the Slovak Republic**, in particular the

¹⁷ For more information in English see: www.employment.gov.sk/en/information-foreigners/living-conditions-foreigners/.

Migration Office of the Ministry of Interior of the Slovak Republic, the Steering Committee for Migration and Integration (an advisory body to the Minister of Interior), the Bureau of Border and Foreign Police of the Presidium of the Police Force and the Department of Citizenship.

The Migration Office of the Ministry of Interior of the Slovak Republic is a specialised department of the Ministry of Interior for matters relating to asylum and the integration of asylum seekers and foreigners who have been granted subsidiary protection. It is primarily involved in the development of asylum policy, but also contributes to the development of integration and migration policy.

The Bureau of Border and Foreign Police of the Presidium of the Police Force is tasked with border control and matters relating to foreigners' residence rights in the Slovak Republic. It is also involved in the creation of strategic documents, including the Act on Residence of Foreigners and all its amendments. **The Foreign Police Department** and the **Directorate of Border and Foreigner Police**, which are subordinated to the Bureau of Border and Foreign Police, make decisions related to applications for residence, the revocation of residence permits and related appeals. In practice, in their proceedings they often assess the degree to which individual foreigners are integrated or the social ties foreigners have established.

The Department of Citizenship, within the Internal Administration Section of the Ministry of Interior, is affiliated to the Department of Administration, Citizenship and Registry. It oversees, assesses and decides on applications for Slovak citizenship and thus, in a sense assesses the extent to which individual foreigners are integrated into society to inform their decision as to whether to grant them citizenship. Since the Act on Residence of Foreigners does not use the term "integration" or "inclusion", in legal terms this department is concerned with assessing the given foreigner's independence, economic benefit and contribution to Slovakia.

Until 2018, other central state authorities, such as the Ministry of Education, Science, Research and Sport of the Slovak Republic, the Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic, the Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs of the Slovak Republic or the Ministry of Economy of the Slovak Republic (in charge of industry) also had duties related to integration policy. In 2018, however, Government Resolution No. 405/2018 abolished the requirement for individual ministers to submit reports to the Ministry of Labour on the implementation of specific objectives and measures resulting from the Slovak *Integration Policy* for the

relevant calendar year. It also abolished the requirement for the Minister of Labour to submit a summary report on the implementation of the *Integration Policy* to the government. At the time of writing this chapter, we were unable to obtain any new information on the anticipated update to the Slovak *Integration Policy*. It seems that although a new Minister of Labour took office after the 2020 elections, foreigners' integration in the Slovak Republic has still not become a priority for the Ministry of Labour or other ministries.

Higher territorial units or self-governing regions are the highest self-governing territorial units in Slovakia. There are eight such self-governing regions in Slovakia.¹⁸ In 2014, the self-governing regions were directly invited to develop the national *Integration Policy* into regional action plans suited to their regional conditions. Nevertheless, this task was left out of the 2017 document (MLSAF 2017).

Non-governmental organisations are special key players not only in the field of integration of foreigners, but also in the process of creating integration policy. For many years, some of the state's tasks in the field of integration of foreigners have been entrusted to them. In addition to "field work", they engage in advocacy (commenting on laws relating to foreigners' integration). The best-known NGOs involved in integration in Slovakia are the Human Rights League, the Centre for the Research of Ethnicity and Culture, Marginal, the Slovak Humanitarian Council, Mareena and the Milan Šimečka Foundation.

The **International Organization for Migration** is a separate agency of the United Nations in Slovakia. On the basis of an agreement with the Government of Slovakia, it deals with various areas of migration: from securing voluntary returns to organizing various integration initiatives and operating the IOM Migration Information Centre. For years, IOM has been involved in organising expert meetings and commenting on strategic documents and laws relating to integration. It is also a member of the Expert Interdepartmental Commission on Labour Migration and Integration of Foreigners and the Steering Committee on Migration and Integration (whereas NGOs were excluded from both platforms after 2015).

Municipalities can, within the framework of their competences and strategic documents, assist the process of integration of foreigners living in their territories (for more information on municipalities' specific tools see subsection 4.2 *Migrant integration strategies at national, regional and*

18 For more, see Act No. 302/2001 Coll. on self-governing higher territorial units.

local levels). Despite the fact that some municipalities have seen sharp increases in the number of labour migrants (Mikušovič 2017) and that there is a need to address their integration (not to mention their specific needs), it seems that integration has been addressed more in municipalities that have received training, assistance or advice from NGOs (or interest groups).

4.5 Funding mechanisms and grants schemes

From the point of view of Slovak local governments, a need for separate grant schemes is newly emerging. As the recommendations provided in the KapaCITY project handbook “How to integrate in a municipality” (KapaCITY 2020), in order for local governments to address the integration of foreigners, they need public funds to build their capacity or to take into account the needs that will arise from the provision of services to residents.

National level finances and funding for local government integration activities

Measures to support the integration of third-country nationals financed from the AMIF are largely implemented at the national level. However, according to the wording of the AMIF national program, 2014 marked a turning point: the BUK pilot project shifted integration substantially to the regional and local level, with a significant knock-on effect requiring further financial support (MI SR 2020). The opportunity to finance a local integration project from AMIF has not yet been taken up by local governments, probably due to a lack of professional capacity for project implementation.

Based on the experience gained through the KapaCITY project, the KapaCITY consortium of NGOs is currently (2021) calling for local governments to be supported in implementing local integration measures through funding for integration policy measures from the state budget, as well as on a project basis from the AMIF and European Social Fund plus (ESF+) national programmes for 2021–2027. The KapaCITY recommendations also advocate maintaining the current European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) and AMIF set-up, in which the Ministry of Interior of the Slovak Republic co-finances the necessary 25% from its own budget.

Currently (2021), local governments have the opportunity to use financial resources from several mainly foreign sources (such as EEA and Norway Grants, the Active citizens fund and the AMIF). The door is open for municipalities to benefit from these financial resources, but it is difficult for them to map the current situation, their needs and the needs of their resident foreigners.

The document *National Priorities for the Development of Social Services for the period 2021–2030*, drawn up by the Ministry of Labour, sets out National Priorities (“NP”) through which it regulates the development of social services. Although this document does not consider foreigners or other minorities as its target group, it opens up space for their inclusion. This is done mainly through NP1, which focuses on the transition from institutional to community-based care and support with the aim of ensuring the availability of diverse social services of a community character in accordance with the needs of the social services’ target groups (MLSAF 2021). According to experts, it is not possible to fulfil NP1 without implementing a national campaign to promote equal opportunities for people at risk of social exclusion (for whatever reason and on whatever basis). As such, NP1 should apply to all social services target groups and their sectors, including the crisis intervention sector, especially for the homeless and marginalized communities and in particular for the development of comprehensive (residential and counselling) crisis intervention services for victims of domestic violence. This gives some scope for considering the possible use of this tool for the target group of foreigners.

Local level funding possibilities for integration initiatives

Targeted integration activities in Slovakia are largely financed from foreign resources, but Slovak municipalities are open to various possibilities. To make municipal funds available for integration projects, local authorities could use Act No. 583/2004 Coll. on budget regulations for territorial self-government. Municipalities’ own funding schemes are already open to activities aimed at foreigner integration, but not all municipalities perceive such activities as a priority and the relevant applicants may not be sufficiently institutionalised to be able to apply for these grants in practice. In principle, every municipality could provide financial resources for public benefit activities. If non-profit organizations active in foreigner integration operate in their territory and the local government has not forgotten (or directly excluded) the need to

support the integration of foreigners living in their territory, this possibility could become a reality.¹⁹

The adviser to the Mayor of Bratislava, Bruno Konečný, expressed the view that tools for financing the integration of foreigners already exist at the municipal level. When municipalities are aware of the existence of these tools, they can use them. However, he added that “the state of funding for social services is deplorable, so if by any chance finances are available, they are prioritized elsewhere”.²⁰

Participatory city budgets also allow for funding to be granted for projects supporting foreigners’ integration, but in practice this happens rather sporadically. To illustrate this, we present three initiatives implemented in the past.

– **Multi-kulti Dimitrovka: a project in the Bratislava-Nové Mesto district (2015)**²¹

The Bratislava-Nové Mesto district has the largest Asian minority in Slovakia. This project, adopted in 2015 and implemented in 2016, focused on breaking down language barriers. Thanks to the project, Vietnamese children learned Vietnamese, while their parents learned Slovak. The project was initially not selected for participatory budget funding, but thanks to the organisers’ persistence, financial support was eventually secured from both the Bratislava self-governing region and the city district.

– **Language café: a project in the city of Trnava (2017)**²²

The “Language Café” project enabled people of all ages to improve their language skills for free in a pleasant environment with free refreshments. It was aimed at two groups of residents: those who wanted to improve their command of foreign languages (English, Spanish, Japanese) and foreigners living in Trnava who needed to practice their Slovak. The project also included three cultural days (Spanish Fiesta, English Halloween and Slovak Christmas), which introduced the general public to the culture and language of a particular country.

19 Based on an interview with Barbara Gindlová and Bruno Konečný, the adviser of the Mayor of Bratislava, 26. 3. 2021.

20 Based on an interview with Bruno Konečný, 26. 3. 2021.

21 More information on the Multi-kulti Dimitrovka project is available in Slovak at: <https://pr.banm.sk/liferay/multi-kulti-dimitrovka>.

22 More information on the Language café project in Slovak: <https://1url.cz/fK9bE>.

– **People from Another Land and Travellers’ Soirées: projects at the Evanjelické gymnázium Banská Bystrica (2018)**²³

These projects did not directly involve foreigners, but they educated and sensitized young people on the topics of migration and diversity. The “People from Another Land” project focused on migration issues. The “Travellers’ Soirée” project responded to young people’s expressions of hatred and xenophobia towards people from other countries, especially third countries, and to unfounded prejudices against people of different skin colours, countries, or continents, offering presentations on France, China, and Indonesia by experienced travellers. Students had the opportunity to experience a mini street-food festival at which they could taste food from these countries and to take a mini-course in calligraphy.

Proposed solutions for the future

When redistributing public revenues from income tax, the tax revenue of a particular municipality is determined, according to Government Regulation (No.668/2004), by the following factors: the number of inhabitants with permanent residence in the municipality, the altitude of the centre of the municipality, the size of the municipality, the number of pupils (children) at elementary art schools and school facilities run by the municipality and the number of permanent residents in the municipality aged 62 and above. Many municipalities therefore make permanent residence in their territory a condition for access to services (including day nurseries, kindergartens, parking, etc.).

The final publication issued as part of the KapaCITY project identifies potential for change in this regard. It recommends that the legislator consider taking into account in this redistribution calculation both the number of foreigners with permanent residence and the number of foreigners with temporary residence who live in the municipality. This would ensure a better direct link between the taxes paid by foreigners with temporary residence in Slovakia, the revenue for the municipality that provides them with public services, and the resources that the municipality can invest in integration measures.²⁴

23 Further information about the projects People from Another Land and Travellers’ Soirées is available in Slovak at: <https://bbonline.sk/studenti-avg-su-proti-rychlej-a-lacnej-mode-podporuju-upcyclaci-u-a-swapovanie-oblecenia/>.

24 Source: KapaCITY – Ten Recommendations for Central State Migration and Integration Policy (Desatoro odporúčaní pre centrálnu štátnu migračnú a integračnú politiku).

4.6 Conclusion

As we have seen, there is a range of successful local-level activities and projects ongoing in Slovakia, but these are primarily project-based activities. Only a handful of Slovak municipalities pay close attention to the topic of coexistence with migrants, and even in those that do, it is difficult to ensure the required continuity in their integration measures. This situation substantially reflects the approach taken to this topic at national level, where there are several policy documents in place, but the mechanisms for their implementation are extremely weak or do not work. Even in the existing national strategies, only occasional, passing reference is made to the involvement of higher territorial units; in practice, these units do not pay much attention to this topic. The current idea that migrants will integrate into Slovak society in part of their own accord and in part via a bottom up approach driven from the local level, appears not to work. But perhaps this is a phase that we have also seen in many other countries which, after years of partial projects and activities, have gradually developed comprehensive local integration policies. However, these policies progress in Slovakia, the civil sector will remain crucial in developing migrant integration initiatives, both at national and local level.

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5. Migrant Integration Policies in Flanders (Belgium)

Corinne Huybers

5.1 Statistical information

In this chapter, we examine relevant facts and figures regarding ethnic and cultural diversity in Belgium at all levels: national, regional (Flanders) and municipal (Mechelen).

Historical context

After World War II, migration to Belgium was mainly driven by demand for workers in the (coal) mining sector. To fill that demand, Belgium signed an agreement with Italy (1946). However, after a mining disaster (1956) in which many Italian miners died, the Italian government decided to stop emigration to Belgium. The Belgian government then began to recruit new workers based on bilateral agreements with Spain (1956), Greece (1957) and later with countries outside of Europe: Morocco (1964), Turkey (1964), Tunisia (1969), Algeria (1970) and Yugoslavia (1970). Meanwhile, Europe was developing free movement. Rights to internal mobility applied from 1958 within the Benelux countries and from 1968 among the six member states of the European Communities. An economic crisis in the 1970s, however, led to high unemployment rates in Belgium. After the oil crisis, the Belgian government decided to stop immigration completely. From the mid-1980s onwards, migration rates increased again, but this time the inflow mainly consisted of family members of migrants who were already settled in Belgium, i.e. family reunification (Statistiek Vlaanderen 2018).

This historical context explains the presence of the most represented nationalities of origin in Belgium as of 2022: Moroccan, Italian, French, Dutch and Turkish. The list below showcases the top three countries of origin in each region of Belgium:

- Flemish Region: Netherlands, Morocco and Turkey.
- Walloon Region: Italy, France and Morocco.
- Brussels Capital Region: Morocco, France and Italy.

National level (Belgium)

According to data from the Belgian Statistical Office (Statbel) from January 2022, 66.6% of the Belgian population was Belgian with a Belgian background, 20.6% was Belgian with a foreign/migration background and 12.8% was non-Belgian (foreigners) (Statbel 2022). In 2011, these percentages were 74.3%, 15.5% and 10.2% (ibid.).

The percentage of people of foreign origin¹ differs among the Belgian regions significantly for the above-mentioned historical reasons. In 2021, this percentage was lowest in Flanders at 24.2%, rising to 34.1% in Wallonia, and peaking at 75% in the Brussels Capital Region. In the Brussels Region this mainly concerns people of non-EU origin, in Wallonia people of EU origin. All in all, **in 2021 33.4% of the population in Belgium was of foreign origin** (Statistiek Vlaanderen 2022a).

Compared to the other EU15 countries², **Belgium issues relatively few residence permits for the purpose of paid employment**. In 2016, half (50%) of the residence permits issued in Belgium to incoming non-EU citizens were for the purpose of family reunification. Study and work accounted for 12% and 10% of residence permits, while the category ‘other reasons’ accounted for 29%. This last category mainly concerns international protection (Statistiek Vlaanderen 2022a). In 2021, 25,971³ people filed applications for international protection (refugee status or

1 „People of foreign origin“ includes not only people currently of foreign nationality, but also people who have Belgian nationality but whose nationality of birth was foreign, as well as people of Belgian nationality of birth whose parent(s) had a foreign nationality of birth. (Statistiek Vlaanderen 2022a)

2 European countries that joined the European Union in or before 1995: Belgium, Denmark, Germany, Finland, France, Greece, Ireland, Italy, Luxembourg, Netherlands, Austria, Portugal, Spain, United Kingdom, Sweden.

3 In 2015 the DVZ received 44,760 applications for international protection. This high number was due to the severe, worldwide humanitarian crisis.

subsidiary protection) with the Immigration Department (DVZ)⁴ of the Home Affairs Federal Public Services⁵. Protection was granted especially to Syrians, Palestinians, Eritreans, Afghans and Turks. Of those recognized as refugees in 2021, 25% were Syrian nationals and 16% were Palestinians. Among those who obtained subsidiary protection status, Afghans (41%) and Syrians (16%) constituted the largest groups by nationality (Statistiek Vlaanderen 2022c).

Regional level (Flanders)

If we look at the data for the Flemish region, we see that Flanders is characterised by growing diversity. The share of people of foreign origin⁶ is increasing – 25% of the total population in 2022 compared to 10% in 2000 – and so is the internal diversity of the migrant population (Statistiek Vlaanderen 2022b). Although the majority of people of foreign origin come from outside the European Union (approximately 60%), when broken down by country of origin, people of Dutch origin form the largest group (14%). This is followed by people of Moroccan, Turkish, Italian and Romanian origin (Statistiek Vlaanderen 2022b).

In 2022, foreigners (non-Belgian nationals) made up 9.8% of the total population. This share has risen from 4.9% of the population in 2000. The largest foreign nationality group is Dutch. At the beginning of 2020, Dutch nationals represented 23% of all foreigners in Flanders. This was followed by Romanians, Poles, Moroccans, Bulgarians, Italians, Spaniards and French nationals. Turks and Portuguese complete the top 10. Overall, the number of foreigners in Flanders doubled between 2000 and 2020. This increase mostly concerned persons from the EU13 countries⁷. Among non-EU nationalities, the high number of Syrian immigrants stands out in 2016 due to the worldwide humanitarian crisis. The proportion of foreigners is highest in the outskirts of Brussels (EU-citizens), in

4 DVZ stands for The Dienst Vreemdelingenzaken.

5 Equivalent to the Ministry of Interior in other countries.

6 “People of foreign origin” includes not only people currently of foreign nationality, but also people who have Belgian nationality but whose nationality of birth was foreign, as well as people of Belgian nationality of birth whose parent(s) had a foreign nationality of birth. (Statistiek Vlaanderen 2022a)

7 These are the newest Member States of the European Union (which joined in 2004 or later): Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Czech Republic, Slovakia, Hungary, Slovenia, Bulgaria, Romania, Malta and Cyprus, since 2013 also Croatia).

Antwerp, Ghent, the central cities⁸ (non-EU citizens), and in the border region with the Netherlands (Dutch) (Statistiek Vlaanderen 2022a).

Municipal level (city of Mechelen)

As we will use the city of Mechelen to illustrate integration measures later in this chapter, we present here the data on Mechelen.

In 2020 Mechelen had 86,921 inhabitants. 11.5% of *Mechelaars* (residents of Mechelen) were of non-Belgian nationality and 34.8% were of non-Belgian origin. The number of inhabitants of non-Belgian nationality increased from 5,315 in 1990 to 10,100 in 2020 (Agentschap Integratie en Inburgering 2020). The number of inhabitants of non-Belgian origin increased from 6,896 in 1990 to 30,464 in 2020 (ibid.). More than 50% of minors were of foreign origin. In the 65+ age group, by contrast, 89.8% of the city's residents were of Belgian origin.

Mechelen is home to people of 136 different nationalities speaking 69 different languages. *Mechelaars* of Moroccan (41%), Turkish (Assyrian, Chaldean, Aramaic) (6.7%) and Armenian (3.2%) origin form the largest communities. In 2019, Mechelen welcomed 758 adult newcomers, most of whom came as labour migrants, asylum seekers and recognised refugees under subsidiary protection, for family reunification or as EU citizens. The majority came from India, Romania, the Netherlands, Morocco and Syria (ibid.).

5.2 Integration at the national and regional levels

National level

In Belgium, the policy areas of integration, diversity, asylum and migration are spread across three levels of government: national, regional and municipal. The federal Minister of the Interior⁹ is responsible for Immigration Policy. The Minister is supported by the State Secretary¹⁰

8 In the context of its urban policy, the Flemish government designated 13 'central cities'. These are: Aalst, Antwerp, Bruges, Genk, Ghent, Hasselt, Kortrijk, Leuven, Mechelen, Ostend, Roeselare, Sint-Niklaas and Turnhout.

9 Annelies Verlinden, the Minister of the Interior for the period 2020-2024.

10 A State Secretary supports a Minister in the political management of a Ministry. State Secretaries are mainly found in 'heavy' ministries. They are entrusted with specific policy areas, but

for ‘Asylum and Migration’.¹¹ The (national) asylum and migration policy determines who is permitted to enter Belgium and who is permitted to stay in Belgium.

“The granting of refugee status falls within the competence of the FPS Home Affairs. These competences of the FPS Home Affairs lie with the **Immigration Office (DVZ)** and the **Office of the Commissioner General for Refugees and Stateless Persons (CGRS)**. [...] The Convention relating to the Status of Refugees (hereafter: Refugee Convention), which was signed in Geneva on 28 July 1951, is the key document for granting refugee status. Belgian legislation explicitly refers to this Convention. [...] Refugee status is granted to foreigners who meet the conditions of article 1 of the Refugee Convention (1), where a refugee is defined as ‘any person who, owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality and is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country’. [...] On 10 October 2006, to complement the Refugee Convention, subsidiary protection was introduced in Belgian law. [...] Subsidiary protection status is granted to any foreigner ‘who does not qualify as a refugee but in respect of whom substantial grounds have been shown for believing that the person concerned, if returned to his or her country of origin, or in the case of a stateless person, to his or her country of former habitual residence, would face a real risk of suffering serious harm (...), and is unable, or, owing to such risk, unwilling to avail himself or herself of the protection of that country, provided that he or she does not fall under one of the exclusion clauses defined in article 55/4’”(Federal Public Service 2022).

Fedasil, the Federal Agency for the Reception of Asylum Seekers, handles the initial reception of applicants for international protection and guarantees quality and conformity within the various reception structures. It also coordinates the organisation of relevant individuals’ voluntary return to their countries of origin.

Belgian citizenship can be acquired in three different ways. For applicants under 18, citizenship is ‘automatically attributed’. For those over 18, it is ‘acquired’, which can be done through two possible procedures: ‘declaration of nationality’ (general) and ‘naturalisation’ (exceptional).¹²

the Minister remains co-responsible. Like the Minister, the State Secretary is accountable to Parliament.

11 Sammy Mahdi, the State secretary for Asylum and Migration for the period 2020-2024.

12 The situations in which each of these procedures is used and the specific conditions for each

Regional level

Civic integration and access to social benefits are managed at the regional governmental level. Civic integration policy in Belgium thus differs from region to region. Each region (Flanders, the Brussels Capital Region, Wallonia) and the German-speaking community has its own priorities, measures and policies (Adam, Martiniello, and Rea 2018). Since the city of Mechelen is located in Flanders, we will focus below on integration policy in the Flemish region.

The Flemish integration policy is an inclusive policy¹³, which means that it is implemented within various policy areas, largely via general measures and only when necessary via specific measures. In other words, **integration is the responsibility of every policy domain**. Integration policy responds to the situations and dynamics linked to the consequences of migration, with the aim of enabling independent and proportional participation, the accessibility of all services, active and shared citizenship and social cohesion (Vlaanderen 2019). The integration policy should ensure that newcomers and people with migrant backgrounds feel at home quickly and can fully participate in society. In Flanders, this is achieved through the civic integration programme and local integration measures (see below).

The Flemish Integration Decree manages integration policy on a regional and local level (Vlaanderen 2013). Flemish integration policy aims at the whole society but pays special attention to: 1) people of foreign origin and 2) people who legally reside in Belgium.

The Flemish Government recognises and **subsidises one participation organisation that aims to strengthen the social position of people of foreign origin in Flanders**, promotes respect between different nationalities and acts as a voice and advocate for foreigners in Flanders and Brussels. It also promotes participation in society among the groups highlighted in the integration decree, issues policy recommendations and works on the positive image of the target groups. This organisation must apply for funding every five years. For the past 20 years, this organisation has been the ‘Minderhedenforum’, but in 2020, their application for further funding was rejected:

can be consulted via Agentschap Integratie en Inburgering (the Flemish Integration and Citizenship Agency): <https://www.agii.be/thema/vreemdelingenrecht-internationaal-privaatrecht/nationaliteit/procedures-om-belg-te-worden>.

13 General / inclusive policy versus specific / categorical policy.

“Instead of being an umbrella of associations, the participation organization should consist of various actors who organize or support the political participation of persons of foreign origin via a variety of activities. This is necessary for it to fully assume its role as representative of ethnic-cultural minorities”, explained Bart Somers, the Flemish Minister responsible for integration and equal opportunities. Somers is the former mayor of Mechelen for the Liberal party and was awarded the 2016 World Mayor Prize in recognition of his outstanding achievements in welcoming refugees during recent years and for the city’s long-term integration of immigrants from different cultures, religions and social backgrounds.

Somers wants the new participation body to move “beyond pigeon-holing” and to “bring together different experts, companies, organizations and citizens with experience in the field to promote integration and equal opportunities.” (DeMorgen 2020). On 26 November 2021, the Flemish Government recognized LEVL as the participation organisation it will support for the next 5 years (2022–2026).

In addition, in 2015 the Flemish government founded **three independent, external agencies** to implement the Flemish integration and Civic Integration policy in the field. These are the Flemish Agency for Integration,¹⁴ which works within the entire Belgian-Dutch language area, including the city of Mechelen and the bilingual Brussels-Capital area; In-Gent (for the city of Gent); and Atlas (for the city of Antwerp).

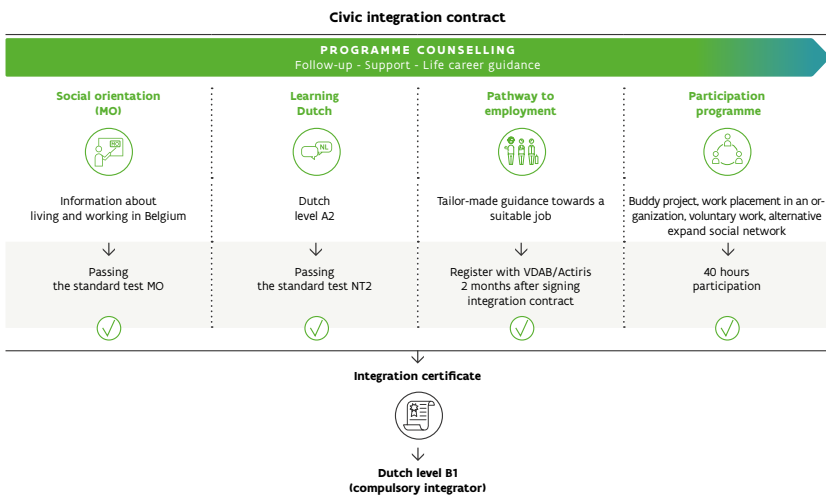
The aim of civic integration is to assist people who migrate to Belgium in becoming self-reliant and to give them the opportunity to participate fully in society. To this purpose, the above-mentioned agencies implement a civic integration programme consisting of three pillars: Belgian-Dutch language lessons; Social Orientation course; and individual guidance when looking for a job or applying to study. Newcomers are not expected to integrate on their own; every individual is offered various types of individual coaching from the start, including with a permanent programme counsellor. A fourth pillar is now being added, which consists in an additional tailor-made participation programme (40 hours) to strengthen newcomers’ social networks and participation. This can for example include: buddy projects; training courses at companies, associations, organisations or local administrative offices; guidance in voluntary work; language training; introductory placements at cultural,

14 Vlaams Agentschap Integratie en Inburgering. For more information see: <https://www.integratie-inburgering.be/>.

youth or sports associations, residential care centres, local service centres or neighbourhood centres. The local authorities (i.e. the municipalities) are responsible for the coordination of this fourth pillar, in close cooperation with the integration agencies responsible for the other three pillars.

Before participating in this integration programme, each newcomer/migrant (anyone born abroad, with legal status, who is over 18 years of age) must sign an integration contract (Agentschap Integratie en Inburgering b.r.). There are two kinds of contracts: one for people who are obliged to take part in the course and a second for people who are entitled to take part in it. By signing the contract, individuals commit to attend the Dutch language lessons provided within the programme (they must complete at least levels A1 & A2) and the Social Orientation course (they must complete at least levels A1 & A2) and the Social Orientation course (they must attend at least 80% (compulsory trajectory) / 50% (voluntary trajectory) of these lessons). The Social Orientation course takes 60 hours, is provided in the individual’s mother tongue or a contact language, and covers all aspects of life in Belgium (education, work, housing, health...).

Client orientated civic integration programme as from 2022



AGENTSCHAP
INTEGRATIE &
INBURGERING

Plate 2 Client oriented civic integration programme (Flanders) as from 2022

Source: Agentschap Integratie en Inburgering, 2022, <https://www.integratie-inburgering.be/nl/inburgeringstraject>

An administrative fine may be imposed for failure to comply with the obligation to participate in the course (from 50 to 5,000 euros), or if the individual has voluntarily signed the integration contract and then unlawfully and prematurely terminates the training (maximum 150 euros).

For several decades, this integration programme was provided free of charge; as of January 1, 2022, newcomers (both those who are obliged to attend and those who choose to do so) must pay a fee (of at least 360 euros) (Vlaamse Regering 2020). Other changes (ibid.) include a new requirement for each participant to sign a declaration at the beginning of the programme, endorsing their essential rights and duties. Further, every participant with job prospects is obliged to register with the Flemish employment service. At the end, those who pass a citizenship test are given an integration certificate. This certificate is an important condition for becoming a Belgian citizen or renting social housing.

For minors, integration does not take place via the integration programme, but via the school system.

5.3 Integration at the municipal level

Within their own boundaries, Flemish cities and towns are in charge of managing local integration policy. This means that, within the limits of the subsidiarity principle, they are responsible for the elaboration, guidance, coordination and implementation of an inclusive local integration policy. Attention to diversity must be embedded in all city departments and in external services, institutions and organisations, all of which are responsible for taking into account new needs and requirements resulting from increasing diversity by adapting their HR policy, increasing their accessibility, giving people a say, and bringing people into contact with each other. This diversity policy will only bear fruit if everyone – citizens, facilities, associations and authorities in all policy areas, in all sectors and at all levels of the population – take responsibility. This approach is described as inclusive.

The local authorities coordinate relevant stakeholders in their city or municipality and involve the target groups and their organisations in the implementation of the inclusive policy. All policy domains (national, regional, local) come together on a local level, which is where innovative solutions across these domains are created.

Since 2016, seven Flemish sectoral subsidies,¹⁵ including integration subsidies, have been integrated into an additional allocation within the Municipal Fund (with the exception of the municipalities with facilities). This means that, since 2016, all sectoral subsidies have been merged and the municipality no longer has to account for them sector by sector. This reform is part of the process of administrative simplification, giving local authorities more freedom to use Flemish resources locally. Thus, local administrative departments who are eligible for this grant can decide for themselves whether they use the resources for local integration policies within their multi-year strategic plans and budgets.

In 2016, 57 (out of 300) Flemish cities and municipalities had an integration service and received the integration subsidy. This subsidy is granted based on two criteria: where at least 1,000 inhabitants have a migration background (for the smaller municipalities) or where more than 10% of inhabitants have a migration background. These criteria date from 2013 and have not changed since the subsidy was integrated into the Municipal Fund. In 2022, at least two thirds of Flemish cities and municipalities were eligible to receive funding according to these criteria, but the regional budget is limited and no new municipality has been accepted for subsidy since 2013.

In 2022 the Flemish government launched a new 3-year funding programme, called 'Plan Living Together' that consists of 7 objectives with 24 actions to support cities and municipalities in promoting living together. All cities and municipalities in the Flemish Region with more than 7,500 inhabitants of non-EU-15 origin can apply for this grant.

In addition to the Municipal Fund, there are many additional (supralocal) subsidies and financing options available to strengthen integration policy and make integration easier and more effective at the local level (Agentschap Integratie en Inburgering 2019). These grants are often project-based.

The integration agenda is embedded to various degrees within the structure of the municipality. In some municipalities there is a separate integration service (ranging from a one-man/woman-service to an entire team, subdepartment or department); in others it is mainstreamed at the strategic level. Many (often) smaller municipalities in Flanders, however, do not have a dedicated integration service. They have local integration

15 Namely: local cultural policy, local youth policy, local sports policy, flanking education policy, combating child poverty, development and integration.

strategies, set out within the Flemish framework, and often assign one civil servant to implement them, on top of other tasks. By consequence, they do not have any active integration policy or strategy or, where they do, this is low on their priority list.

Key stakeholders in local integration include the Flemish Association of Cities and Municipalities (VVSG)¹⁶ – an advocate, knowledge contributor and network organisation for the local authorities – and the above-mentioned Flemish Agency for Integration,¹⁷ which supports local authorities in their local integration and diversity policies.

Financed by Flemish municipalities and cities' membership fees, the Flemish Association of Cities and Municipalities works alongside others on integration and defends local authorities' interests at the Flemish level. Financed by the Flemish government, the Flemish Agency for Integration works in 3 areas: supporting local authorities and organisations in the implementation of their integration policies, providing integration and civic participation services, and directing newcomers to providers of Dutch language lessons.

5.4 Mechelen: from a categorical to an inclusive approach

Fifteen years ago, Mechelen had a very bad reputation. Polarisation was high and over 30% of the city's inhabitants voted for the far right. The city had one of the highest crime rates in the country, middle class families were leaving the city and deprivation was high. Nowadays, Mechelen is hailed as one of Flanders' flagship cities and 76% of *Mechelaars* are proud to live in Mechelen (Vlaanderen 2020a). Local inhabitants' appreciation for the city's integration policy is one of the highest in the country. The overall culture has changed, people are becoming more open to each other, and 42% of people in Mechelen have a positive attitude towards diversity (Vlaanderen 2020b).

How did Mechelen manage to make this radical change in just 15 years?

16 Vereniging van Vlaamse Steden en Gemeenten vzw. For more information see: <https://www.vvsg.be/kennisitem/vvsg/integratiebeleid>

17 Vlaams Agentschap Integratie en Inburgering. For more information see: <https://www.integratie-inburgering.be/>

First, the city started to invest in urban renovation and renewal projects in green areas, parks, open spaces, outdoor playgrounds¹⁸ and sports infrastructure, with the aim of creating social mix in the public domain.

Second, to increase the objective and subjective feeling of safety, the city installed a large number of street cameras and invested in strengthening the capacity of the local police force,¹⁹ front-line workers and those involved in outreach: street patrols, social workers, community guards, etc. These personnel keep their eyes and ears open and can respond quickly and preventively where and when necessary.

Thirdly, the city decided to work on an inclusive policy. Thus for the past decade, policy attention has been increasingly directed towards diversity, upward social mobility and equal opportunities. Mechelen's success in these areas has been described repeatedly (Wieland 2018; Bertelsmann Stiftung 2018; Whybrow 2018; McDonald-Gibson 2016; INCLUCITIES 2020; World Mayor 2017).

The city established its integration service in 1998, and by 2000 it had transformed it into a diversity service working on themes such as equal opportunities, integration, senior citizens, disability, gender, racism and interpreting. The integration service was co-financed by the Flemish government (two thirds) and the city of Mechelen (one third). The objectives and priorities (policy action plan) were set out in a cooperation agreement between Mechelen and the Flemish government. This agreement has been renewed every three years.

The Flemish government provided this specific integration funding (between 170,000 and 180,000 euros per year) until 2019. In 2016, this specific funding was integrated into the municipal fund (see above) for administrative simplicity. As a result, local authorities are no longer obliged to account annually for the use of these resources.

Until 2013, Mechelen's diversity service, embedded within the Department of Society's Welfare sub-department, consisted of a team of nine employees, each working on a specific topic/target group. After the 2013 budget reform, the Department of Society was reorganized, in part as a result of the 2013 budget declaration on diversity: "Instead of a powerless individual service that is often positioned outside the organisation, diversity policy is horizontally embedded throughout the organisation

18 Every household should have an outdoor playground within either 500 or 800 m², according to the city regulations.

19 Police recruitment is actually a federal (national) matter, but Mechelen decided to invest in local recruitment campaigns with the aim of diversifying the local police department.

with a network of competent officials in key departments. There will be a special focus on effectively channelling diversity in our city towards traditional youth work.”²⁰

After a city-wide survey, the College of Mayor and Aldermen/-women established **six strategic/transversal goals** in 2013: Mechelen wants to be an inclusive, child-friendly, participative, customer-friendly, smart, shopping city. This means that attention to these themes must be embedded in all policy sectors and in various city services and external services, organisations and institutions. The ‘Inclusive City’ strategic programme manager, in cooperation with the diversity project coordinator, is mandated to work cross-departmentally and horizontally on this theme within the city.²¹ As a result, the diversity service was closed at the end of 2013.

Instead, a **programme manager** was appointed for each strategic goal (inclusive, child-friendly, participative, customer-friendly, smart, shopping). He/she coordinates and oversees (directs) the particular strategic goal within the town hall (including regular activities, ongoing projects, new developments/projects, etc.), and ensures that all services, departments and sub-departments operate within the vision, the agreed framework and the (policy) priorities and contribute towards reaching the inclusive policy objectives. The programme manager is a point of contact, a partner for discussion and a coach within (and outside) the organisation for the implementation of the particular strategic goal.

The strategic programme manager for the ‘Inclusive City’ works city-wide. Through the city’s long-term strategic plan, this officer convinces the other departments to incorporate the ‘Inclusive City’ organisational goals into their regular policies. This is not an easy task because he/she has to lead from a non-hierarchical position. That is why the support, commitment and mandate from the political and managerial leadership is crucial.

Originally, the six programme managers were scattered across various departments, but this changed in July 2016 when the six strategic goals were embedded into the **Strategy & Development Department**. The head of the Strategy & Development Department watches over the effective implementation of inclusive policy and liaises with the management team. At the political level, the theme remains the responsibility of the authorized alderman, who is a member of the political board, the

20 Internal policy document regarding evaluation of the diversity policy and future approach 2013-2018, Mechelen.

21 Internal policy document regarding the vision on strategic programme management, 12.03.2014, Mechelen.

college of mayors and aldermen. The alderman is responsible for the diversity and equal opportunities agenda and, in that capacity, holds final political authority.²²

Another important body is the **Steering Committee**, composed of administrative, political and management representatives. The committee is the strategic programme manager's instrument in managing, monitoring and coordinating the 'Inclusive City' programme. It monitors the progress of projects/initiatives that contribute to the objectives of the programme within the different departments and subdepartments. Politically, the Alderman for Diversity and Equal Opportunities has the final say, but since several policy areas are involved, the aldermen decide among themselves under which authority a particular initiative/project is to be handled.

With regard to the practical implementation of the inclusive policy, each strategic programme manager works substantively with a 'source' department. For the 'Inclusive City' programme, this is the Living Together Department and its Social Policy Sub-Department. Mechelen's transversal inclusive policy translates into projects that go beyond traditional policy domains and involve inter-departmental cooperation across the city hall, with the aim of mainstreaming diversity (mindset, attitude, language). Such projects include e.g. an internal learning trajectory on polarisation and hate speech and how to respond adequately as a local government, as well as cooperation between the communication, prevention, diversity, youth, and culture departments.

All this naturally requires a dedicated budget. As the 'Inclusive City' is a transversal strategic goal, including areas such as diversity, integration and equal opportunities, it is difficult to pinpoint the exact amount dedicated to integration work and migrant/refugee services, projects and initiatives. The city invests roughly 360,000 euros per year in realising the objectives of the 'Inclusive City' programme (50% from the Flemish government and 50% from the city of Mechelen). In addition, the city of Mechelen regularly applies for European project subsidies to create the required experimental space to tackle local integration and diversity challenges.

22 Gabriella De Francesco, for the period 2019–2024.

5.5 Conclusion

We conclude with a reminder that, in the Flemish context, towns are responsible for managing the local integration agenda within their territory and for planning, leading, coordinating and implementing inclusive local integration policies. The city of Mechelen serves as an excellent example of how well thought-out, long-term and targeted inclusive policies can play a major part in transforming a city and improving quality of life for its residents. The pathway Mechelen took to achieve this transformation is described in greater detail in chapter 7. It is nevertheless important to note, when taking an overall view of local integration policy in Flanders, that despite their clear responsibility for this agenda and relatively easy access to resources to support it (when certain conditions are met), many (smaller) Flemish towns (and they are rather numerous) are not currently building effective integration policies because they are lacking capacity or/and resources. Due to the lack of these essential conditions, these municipalities often lack a long-term vision. The coexistence of population groups with different experiences of migration thus often leads to the creation of partially parallel societies, with all the associated negative (in particular social) consequences. It should thus be emphasised that Mechelen serves as a good example of a Flanders success story, but that it is far from representative.

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6. Migrant Integration Policies in Bavaria (Germany)

Katsiaryna Viadziorchyk¹

6.1 Statistical information

According to the Federal Office of Statistics there were 21.9 million people with a statistically attributed “migration background”² in Germany in 2020 (Destatis 2020). That is 26.7% of the total population, which means that one in four people living in Germany has a “migration background” – 29.1% of the population in western Germany and 8.2% of the population in eastern Germany (Destatis 2020).

Foreigners, i.e. individuals who do not have German citizenship, made up 11.4 million of this group. Migration from EU countries constitutes 42.8 % of the overall migration flow into Germany and a further 26.6% of migrants originate from other countries on the European continent. The remaining 30.6% of migrants come from non-European countries (Destatis 2021).

In the 2019 statistical microcensus, approximately 2.6 million people stated that they had come to Germany as repatriates or late repatriates (“Aussiedler” or “Spätaussiedler”) (Oswald 2019). (Late) repatriates are Germans within the meaning of the Basic law (*Grundgesetz*)³ (hereinafter referred to as German Constitution) and Federal Law on Refugees and Exiles who lived as persons of German ancestry in Eastern Europe and remained there after 1945. Most of them arrived in Germany between the 1960s and 1990s from the successor states of the former Soviet Union

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- 1 With the assistance of Hangwen Maierhofer, who participated in the research and data collection for the purposes of this chapter. Chapter conclusion: Marie Jelínková, Réka Lörincz
 - 2 “A person has a migration background if they or at least one of their parents was not born with German citizenship”, for more details see: <https://www.destatis.de/DE/Themen/Gesellschaft-Umwelt/Bevoelkerung/Migration-Integration/Glossar/migrationshintergrund.html>.
 - 3 The whole text of the German Constitution is available at: <https://www.bundestag.de/gg>.

(2019: 1.6 million) – mainly Kazakhstan (720,000) and Russia (661,000) – and large numbers also came from Poland (699,000) and Romania (226,000). (Late) Repatriates are entitled to claim German nationality and voting rights at all levels upon their arrival to Germany, if they fulfil two requirements: they must have been born before 1992 and prove basic knowledge of the German language. They can also bring their family members (husband or wife and children) with them, who do not count as repatriates themselves. (Late) Repatriates were previously addressed by special integration programmes, as it was assumed they were Germans “returning” to their home country, Germany. They are not counted as having a “migration background”.

In terms of their residence in Germany’s federal states, most people with a “migration background” live in North Rhine-Westphalia (2019: 25.6%); about one in six lives in Baden-Württemberg (17.4%) and a similar share in Bavaria (15.7%) (BMI 2020). 23.8% of the total population in Bavaria has a “migration background” (Oswald 2019) and these people are concentrated in the larger cities: they constitute 47% of the population in Nuremberg, 43% in Munich and 41% in Augsburg (Altunordu 2020; München.de 2020).

6.2 Integration on the federal level

The Federal Republic of Germany is constitutionally structured as a multilevel system: the distribution of responsibilities between the federal government and the federal states is supplemented by the responsibilities of the municipalities, whose rights to self-government are assured within the German constitution and the respective state constitution. Legislative and administrative competences and financial responsibility for the performance of public tasks are distributed across these various levels (Fincke 2012, 55).

In so far as legislative competence lies solely with the federal government, the federal states are generally not allowed to legislate (Art. 71 and Art. 73 of the German constitution). This applies, for example, to citizenship law and thus in particular to the requirements for naturalization of migrants and persons born in Germany without German citizenship. The German Constitution, too, can only be changed by the federal legislature.⁴ A change in the German constitution would be nec-

4 Two-thirds of the members of the Bundestag and two-thirds of the members of the Bundesrat

essary e.g. in order to grant non-EU nationals the right to vote in local elections (Fincke 2012, 58).

Despite all the opportunities offered by its flexible, subsidiary and relevant regulatory structure, the multi-level system enshrined in the German Constitution suffers from a number of inadequacies that become particularly evident in areas relevant to migrant integration policy. The distribution of legislative competences and administrative tasks to different actors in the federal, state and local governments leads to numerous parallel and overlapping responsibilities, which makes it difficult to bundle integration policy measures effectively. As a result, there is also the risk that municipalities may not have sufficient funds to implement targeted integration policies locally (Fincke 2012, 67).

Although migration to Germany has been substantial and evolving since the 1950s, the first law promoting integration, known as the Immigration Act, was introduced only in 2005 by the new government of the Christian Democratic Union of Germany (CDU) / Christian Social Union in Bavaria (CSU) and The Social Democratic Party of Germany (SPD)⁵. The coalition began to set new trends in migration and integration policy, which focused on promoting migrants' integration and placing stronger controls on further immigration. Integration courses were introduced to improve migrants' German language and social skills and these became a central component of the integration policies (Butterwegge 2007).

The integration courses in Germany consist of a language course and an orientation course. Generally, integration courses are available for all migrants and refugees who hold residence permits or have "good prospects of remaining" in Germany. Citizens of the EU and German citizens can also take part in these courses if space is available; to do so they must apply to the Federal Office for Migration and Refugees for admission. A 100-hour general integration course costs €1,540.00. However, under certain conditions all the above-mentioned groups of participants are entitled to partial or full exemption from these fees (for example, unemployed, (late) repatriates, refugees). In particular cases, the foreigners'

must agree in order to change the German Constitution, which represents a hurdle that must be overcome to achieve any legislative changes concerning the extension of voting rights or requirements for naturalisation.

- 5 The CSU is a Christian Democratic and Conservative political party in Germany. Having a regionalist identity, the CSU operates only in Bavaria while its larger counterpart, the Christian Democratic Union (CDU), operates in the other fifteen states of Germany. The CSU is known for its conservative rhetoric towards migration, which has caused some dispute between the sister parties.

office may require an individual to participate in an integration course as a condition for the issue of a residence permit. Participation in an integration course can also shorten the residence requirement for naturalisation from 8 years in Germany to 7. Other requirements include e.g. oral and written German language skills equivalent to at least B1 level.⁶

The Federal Government initiated its first “Integration Summit” in June 2006 under the auspices of the Chancellery, in order to seek dialogue with migrants on integration issues. As a result, a “National Integration Plan”⁷ was developed with the participation of civil society and migrant organisations. A particular focus was also set on dialogue with Muslims, themselves a varied and heterogeneous group of around 3.5 million people in Germany. At the same time, the Immigration Act tightened the law on foreigners’ entry and residence, in particular setting tougher requirements for naturalisation and integration, placing restrictions on family reunification and strictly regulating the immigration of skilled workers (National Integration Plan 2006).

The next important legislative step was taken in 2012, when the Law for the Improvement of the Determination and Recognition of Professional Qualifications Acquired Abroad⁸ was introduced, aiming to make the practice of recognising qualifications acquired abroad more uniform, transparent and effective. The federal government further anchored integration tasks in law in 2015 and 2016.

During the so-called “refugee crisis “ more than one million refugees arrived in Germany (Herbert a Schönhagen 2020). This large influx of people seeking protection within a short period of time triggered debate in Germany about the focus of EU asylum and refugee policy and about Germany’s own immigration and asylum policy. The German society’s attitudes and behaviours towards the refugees ran the full spectrum between welcoming and xenophobia. On the one hand, there was Angela Merkel’s famous statement “Wir schaffen das” (“we can do this”), and various civil society efforts to help refugees and facilitate their integration. On the other hand, some efforts were made to deport rejected asylum seekers as quickly as possible and to close national borders

6 Further details on Germany’s integration courses (Integrationskursen) are available at: <https://www.bamf.de/DE/Themen/Integration/ZugewanderteTeilnehmende/Integrationskurse/integrationskurse-node.html>.

7 The text of the National Integration Plan (2006) is available at: <https://www.bundesregierung.de/resource/blob/975226/441038/acdb01cb90b28205d452c83d2fde84a2/2007-08-30-nationaler-integrationsplan-data.pdf?download=1>.

8 More details on this law are available at: <https://www.anerkennung-in-deutschland.de/html/de/pro/anerkennungsgesetz.php>.

against unwanted immigration. The political parties differed greatly in their guiding principles for migration and asylum policy as well. This led to the 2016 Federal Integration Law, which contrary to its title did not form a framework for a comprehensive integration policy, but rather contained detailed technical regulations about the labour market integration of recognized refugees and asylum seekers with good prospects of remaining in the country.⁹

In the following years the government adapted new legal regulations. Two central laws were passed: 1) the Skilled Workers Immigration Act (*Fachkräfteeinwanderungsgesetz*) in 2019, which aimed to facilitate the immigration of skilled workers, but also improved the enforcement of deportations (Hanewinkel 2019); and 2) the National Action Plan on Integration in 2020, which includes provisions for “pre-integration” (*Vorintegration*): potential migrants are to be better prepared for a life in Germany in a first step, for example through language and orientation courses in their country of origin or qualification and information on the labour market (e.g. on the possibility of having their qualifications officially recognised) (Hirsch 2020).

6.3 Integration on the state and municipal levels

While the federal government is primarily responsible for shaping migration policy and the federal states for implementing it, the federal states can still make significant contributions to stimulating and promoting active and strategically oriented integration policies in municipalities. The widespread realisation that integration takes place locally does not only require carefully worded political appeals to districts, cities and municipalities, but needs to be systematically supported with resources and networks at the federal state level. This can be done within the framework of funding programmes or on a legal basis. Structures must be created on site that can promote the migrants’ integration and participation in a needs-oriented and sustainable manner, regardless of the municipality’s financial situation and the economic cycle of project funding.

It is fair to say that there is a centralistic tendency in Germany’s integration policies as far as immigration, citizenship, naturalisation and

9 The text of the Integration law, known as “Integrationsgesetz 2016” is available at: https://www.bgbl.de/xaver/bgbl/start.xav?startbk=Bundesanzeiger_BGBI&start=%252F%252F%255B%2540attr_id=%2527bgbl116s1939.pdf%2527%255D#___bgbl___%2F%2F%255B%40attr_id%3D%27bgbl116s1939.pdf%27%5D__1656710907961.

residence are concerned. In that regard, it is important to mention the Federal Office for Migration and Refugees (BAMF), the central migration authority with competencies in the areas of migration, integration, naturalisation and return. The scope of its responsibilities includes the development and organisation of integration courses, promotion of projects and measures for social, linguistic and professional integration, accompanying scientific research, resettlement, relocation, humanitarian admission, etc.¹⁰ The federal states, however, are responsible for the legal framework of local self-administration in their federal state (municipal constitutions, district ordinances, etc.). Since municipalities have had practical experience in integration work for several decades, they are highly familiar with the necessities, challenges and experience involved. They, with the direct involvement of migrant communities, are best placed to formulate the necessary framework for local integration. The federal states can set up programmes through which they provide support (including financial) to their municipalities and districts in developing these local integration concepts.¹¹

This implementation sovereignty provides the federal states with a certain level of flexibility in the extent and form of their implementation. They can, for example, strive to create a more “welcoming culture” in immigration offices (Gesemann a Roth 2014), include more migrant representatives in decision-making processes and grant migrants the corresponding financial support and recognition. To what extent this flexibility is used to the benefit of migrant communities depends on the political situation in the particular federal state.

In addition, the federal states regulate the admission, accommodation and care of asylum seekers through their own (refugee) admission laws. They also autonomously regulate culture, school and education policies, which impact the settings within which initial socialisation and integration takes place for children with migration backgrounds. Consequent, needs-oriented, anti-discrimination-based access to education and the education process itself contribute to better participation and inclusion of migrants.

In the federal states’ adoption of state integration, laws complementary to the relevant federal legislation (see above) can be of high benefit. Depending on their formulation, such laws can improve the effectiveness

10 For more, see The Federal Office for Migration and Refugees (BAMF) https://www.bamf.de/DE/Startseite/startseite_node.html.

11 There is no statistical data on the number of municipalities in Bavaria or Germany, which have their own integration concepts, but that number is growing.

of integration policy by anchoring integration as a cross-sectional task and institutionalising structures of coordination and participation, as has been seen in Berlin (2010), North Rhine-Westphalia (2012) and Baden-Wuerttemberg (2015) (Karsch 2017). Integration laws can be particularly effective if they formulate a broad political consensus and have the backing of migrant communities as well as other civil society actors. An extremely controversial example of this was the first Bavarian Integration Act, which was passed by the majority of the CSU in December 2016. The law was strongly criticised by the opposition parties in the Bavarian parliament, as well as by civil society and migrant communities. Many critics pointed to the questionable use of the term *Leitkultur* (“Leading Culture”), indicating the desire for migrants to adhere to one (*German*) cultural code and a potential requirement for migrants to give up their own cultures. The Act’s portrayal of migrants (characterized by negative prejudices), repressive tone and failure to reflect on successful integration processes have been also strongly criticised. A lawsuit brought by the two opposition parties in the Bavarian government led to a decision by the Bavarian Constitutional Court in 2019, which found the Act to be partially unconstitutional (Mittler a Wittl 2019). Since then, the opposition parties and civil society have demanded the introduction of a “Participation Law” in place of the “Integration Law”, which would focus on providing equal participation possibilities to all rather than expecting migrants to assimilate.

All of Germany’s federal states have migrant representatives at state level in one form or another (integration officers, state Integration Councils, associations of municipal Integration and Migration Councils, see AGABY below). Most of these have solely advisory roles without any secured entitlement to participate in municipal decisions and/or do not have their own resources. Federal state governments can, however, also pass laws containing binding regulations for their municipalities that enable the voices of migrants’ representative bodies to be heard in the political decision-making processes. For example, they can make the establishment of Integration and Migration Councils binding and municipalities’ tasks on integration issues compulsory (Gesemann a Roth 2014, 89). The federal states also have jurisdiction over the introduction of antidiscrimination laws and the establishment of antidiscrimination agencies at the state level.¹²

12 See more at AGABY’s website: <https://www.agaby.de/presse/detailansicht/grosse-notwendigkeit-fuer-ein-landesantidiskriminierungsgesetz-und-eine-landesantidiskriminierungsstelle-in-bayern>.

Special funding options are created at the federal, state and municipal levels that are designated for projects and measures related to integration, inclusion and participation of migrants, or specifically to refugees, women migrants or youth with migration histories.¹³ Some of these funds go directly to municipalities and relevant local administrative bodies. One good example of such support for municipalities at the state level is the integration guides (*Integrationslotsinnen*) initiative.¹⁴ These guides work in municipalities to coordinate integration networks locally, support voluntary initiatives and assist migrants in their orientation. Unfortunately, the frequent uncertainty that comes with the project financing system inhibits the continuity of their work and results in such roles often not being established long-term. The same uncertainty is also a feature of the project funding relied on by many civil society organisations that contribute greatly to the integration process.

6.4 Historical insight and prerequisites for the emergence of the integration and migration Councils

In order to understand how integration and migration policies have developed, along with migrants' self-organisation and emancipation in Germany, it is important to take a closer look at their history.

Germany is now an established immigration country; more than a quarter of its population consists of people with migration backgrounds. Although migration to and within Germany was present even before World War II, the rhetoric, perception and development of integration and migration policies in the country have primarily been shaped by the flow of migration between the 1950s and the 1990s.

In 1955, West Germany made its first bilateral recruitment agreements with Italy, via which it actively recruited so-called "guest workers" (*Gastarbeiter*innen*) to work in the industrial sector to supplement the existing workforce: West Germany was experiencing an "economic miracle" (*Wirtschaftswunder*) and also needed to rebuild after the damage done during the war. Further bilateral recruitment agreements followed

13 Examples of projects offered by the Bavarian State Ministry of the Interior, for Sport and Integration, the ministry responsible for integration in Bavaria, are available at: https://www.innenministerium.bayern.de/mui/integrationspolitik/integration_frauen/index.php.

14 For detailed information on integration guides in Bavaria see: <https://www.stmi.bayern.de/mui/integrationspolitik/integrationslotsen/index.php>.

with Spain, Greece, Turkey, Morocco, South Korea, Portugal, Tunisia and Yugoslavia in 1968 (Rietig a Müller 2016).

Parallel to this development, East Germany also began recruiting foreign contract workers (*Vertragsarbeiter*innen*). Officially, these “foreign workers” who came to the German Democratic Republic from the 1960s onwards were “friends” arriving to receive training in order to then help rebuild their homelands, which were allied Communist countries (Rabenschlag 2016) . The first such agreement was signed with Poland in 1963, followed by agreements with Hungary, Algeria, Cuba, Mozambique, Vietnam, Angola, Mongolia, China and North Korea (ibid.).

In both cases, these “guest workers” and “foreign contract workers” were not given long-term residence rights; their migration was based on a workforce rotation principle (*Rotationsprinzip*), whereby migrants would come to the industrial centres of Europe to work for a few years before returning to their countries of origin with the money saved and skills acquired, making room in turn for new workers to do the same (Rabenschlag 2016). West Germany stopped recruiting such “guest workers” in 1973. After the German unification in 1990, the federal government tried to dissolve the ongoing intergovernmental agreements on contract workers that East Germany had and sent “contract workers” back to their homelands.

During the recruitment decades, hundreds of thousands of migrants came to both parts of Germany; many of them left again, but many also stayed, some brought their families, and others started their families here. These foreign workers were not seen as an equal part of the society, whose integration was a matter to be facilitated. The absence of any integration or inclusion measures for them led to a neglectful approach towards their well-being. They often had to endure very precarious working conditions, lower remuneration for their work in comparison with the locals, and xenophobic and hostile attacks.¹⁵

This historical phase was very important and relevant to the further development and the appearance of numerous migrant self-organisations and associations, migrants’ participation in trade unions, protests and demonstrations, and the establishment of the first Integration and Migration Councils (*Ausländer-, Migranten und Integrationsbeiräte*) in response to migrants’ lack of rights, participation possibilities and representation opportunities as well as their discriminatory experiences.

15 For more information see: <https://www.dw.com/en/25-years-after-rostock-lichtenhagen-dont-dwell-on-the-pastlearn-from-it/a-40155429> .

From the mid-1980s, Integration and Migration Councils (Ausländer-, Migranten und Integrationsbeiräte, hereinafter IMCs) were actively established in response to the increasing number of foreign residents living permanently or at least for longer periods in Germany without any form of representation. Meanwhile, municipalities began to realise the need for more contact and exchange with the migrant communities in their districts. Integration and Migration Councils provided a platform through which social, political and legal integration, participation in local decision-making processes and connections between the migrant communities and the local society could be promoted. IMCs thus became the first form of political participation for migrants at the local level and played an essential role in formulating political appeals to shape Germany as a country of immigration from the very beginning (Nergiz 2019). The IMCs also gave migrants living in Germany the opportunity to vote: migrants have both active and passive voting rights within the IMCs, which remedy/redress their otherwise non-existent voting rights.

At present, only German citizens can vote and be elected at all levels of government in Germany; citizens of EU countries can vote and be elected at the municipal level after being resident in a German municipality for at least three months. Non-EU citizens are excluded from voting at all levels. Although some German states extended local-level voting rights to migrants in 1989, these regulations were withdrawn in 1990 by the Constitutional Court (Pedroza 2019, 114).¹⁶ Therefore, Germany's example is seen as "a relevant negative case" of how to approach migrants' political rights because of its failed implementation of this necessary political step (Pedroza 2019, 114). This means that, even now, the IMCs are the only means through which non-EU nationals are able to exert a democratically legitimised influence on politics (Wilmes 2018). The IMCs, however, cannot and should not replace the municipal right to vote, which both the IMCs themselves and their umbrella organisations have been calling for since their establishment. Today, Germany has 9.5 million residents (Destatis 2020) who cannot participate in any elections because they are neither German citizens nor citizens of other EU member states. This means that their political participation options are limited to informal participation opportunities (for example: civic engagement, protests, demonstrations, volunteering) and participation in the IMCs.

16 For details see: Bundesverfassungsgericht, Beschluss vom 12. Dezember 1991, <https://www.wahlrecht.de/wahlpruefung/19911212.htm>.

Integration and Migration Councils, however, are not the only form of migrant self-organisation. Germany has an estimated 12,400 to 14,300 migrant organisations (Schu 2020). These migrant organisations can be divided into three main groups according to their self-image: 1) multifunctional, participation-oriented organisations, 2) organisations that focus on and promote culture, and 3) organisations that represent the interests of various groups or of all migrants. Migrant organisations almost never work in isolation, but are integrated into diverse networks, where the IMCs and their umbrella organisations play an essential bridging function in connecting them on the local and state level, respectively.

6.5 Integration and migration councils in Bavaria

Many different factors contribute towards the successful integration of migrants in their municipalities of residence. One of the most important of these is the active involvement and participation of people with migration backgrounds in shaping local integration processes. One of the most tried and tested instruments for this is a functioning Integration and Migration Council.

Although the formation and establishment of IMCs Germany-wide started actively in the mid-1980s, the idea of representative bodies for migrants at the municipal level had already appeared in the late 1960s and early 1970s. The first IMC election in Bavaria took place in Nuremberg in 1973 (Gross 2017, 67) and so the IMCs have supported integration policies in numerous districts and cities in Bavaria (and other federal states) since the 1970s. At the municipal level, IMCs offer migrants opportunities to participate politically. This is extremely important because:

- In a democratic society, integration requires everyone’s participation.
- People with migration backgrounds can only integrate successfully if they are taken seriously as actors and are involved in decision-making processes.
- Migration experience, linguistic and cultural resources and access to ethnic networks are indispensable for successful integration work.
- The practical implementation of integration policy takes place locally, in the municipalities: the places where people live and where their children attend school or childcare facilities. These places are instrumental in how well and how quickly migrants become fully part of the society (AGABY 2012).

There are no specific legal requirements in the municipal code of the Free State of Bavaria¹⁷ for the establishment of IMCs as there are in other federal states (such as in Hesse and Rhineland-Palatinate). Municipalities in Bavaria are thus not required to establish such councils. More and more cities and municipalities in Bavaria are, nevertheless, now showing interest in migrants' political participation and in the establishment of IMCs. The vast majority of the Bavarian Integration and Migration Councils' members are elected directly by a vote among the migrants resident in a given municipality, although some IMCs are appointed by their city councils. This usually happens with newly established IMCs and, as a rule, these then aim to change to a direct vote for the following term.

Despite their differences, the majority of the Bavarian IMCs have one thing in common: they are democratically legitimised bodies that represent the interests of the population with a migration history in the given city or a district. Rather than representing the specific interests of a single nationality, they focus on questions that are relevant to all migrants and for successful coexistence in the local society as a whole. Due to their multinational, multifaith and multicultural composition, they work as models for solving the conflicts that might appear in a diverse society. The IMCs are able to deal with all issues that arise within the municipality and advise the city council accordingly. However, their main focus is on matters related to the design of local integration policies.

As the establishment of IMCs is not compulsory in Bavaria, there are no concrete legal requirements as to their form and function. The success and effectiveness of the IMCs' work, however, hinges upon whether their initiatives, recommendations and projects are noticed by politicians, authorities and the general public. An Integration and Migration Council thus needs certain rights such as:

- the right to submit applications and speak in the city council;
- the right to information from the public authorities as early as possible on topics and processes that fall within the IMC's area of responsibility;
- the right to submit opinions to the city council;
- the right to financial, human and material resources (to an extent agreed in consultation with the city council and administration) (AGABY 2014).

17 In German: Gemeindeordnung für den Freistaat Bayern.

These rights, along with the IMC's duties, its election procedure, the size of its board, allocation of seats, etc., are usually set out in their statutes (*Satzung*) (AGABY 2014).

Since IMCs usually only have an advisory function and no voting rights of their own in the municipal councils, it is up to the political decision-makers whether or not they implement the IMCs' recommendations. Close cooperation with the local municipal politicians is thus of critical importance. This is made possible, for example, by enabling members of the city council to attend meetings of the Integration and Migration Councils (in some cases they also have voting rights there) and, vice versa, inviting migrant representatives to attend meetings of political groups and relevant thematic working groups within the municipal council.

Studies show that the IMCs give migrants and people with a migration histories better access to resources in the municipality, provide intercultural exchange and intercultural opening, contribute to peaceful coexistence and serve as an empowerment platform for migrants in their political engagement (Wilmes 2018). Integration and Migration Councils have become an indispensable element on the local level that brings the interests of the population with a migration history into the local political decision-making process. Despite everything, they cannot and should not compensate fully for the lack of political participation opportunities offered to third country nationals.

6.6 AGABY and the Bavarian integration and migration councils

Founded in 1993, AGABY¹⁸ is the umbrella organisation for the municipal democratically elected Integration and Migration Councils in Bavaria. It supports and coordinates the work of the local IMCs and represents the interests of migrants in Bavaria as a democratically legitimised, non-partisan, cross-ethnic and cross-national migrant organization at the state level. As of April 2021, AGABY had 31 members,¹⁹ which are Integration and Migration Councils located in five districts

18 AGABY is an abbreviation for Arbeitsgemeinschaft der Ausländer-, Migranten und Integrationsbeiräte Bayerns

19 AGABY's map of the Bavarian Integration and Migration Councils is available at: <https://www.agaby.de/ueber-uns/unsere-mitglieder>.

and twenty-six cities of Bavaria. Its members are present in all large and almost all medium-sized cities in Bavaria.²⁰

As an umbrella organisation, AGABY represents Integration and Migration Councils and people with migration backgrounds at the state level. It advises the Bavarian state government, ministries, democratic political parties and parliamentary fractions on issues of migration and integration. It informs them about the challenges and discrepancies in the Bavarian integration policy and makes society as a whole aware of the integration hurdles faced by people with a migration histories.

AGABY further works with and for its members, passes practical experience onto them and strengthens networking and exchange between the IMCs. AGABY supports and accompanies the establishment of new IMCs and advises municipalities on the design of participatory integration policy and on the necessary steps for founding, establishing or restructuring their IMC and on framework conditions for the successful work of municipal councils. Furthermore, AGABY does public relations work and represents the IMCs in numerous organisations and committees at the state level. AGABY has been a founding member of the Federal Immigration and Integration Council (BZI)²¹, the umbrella organisation of the Integration and Migration Councils at the federal level, since 1997.

Through its project work, AGABY offers the IMCs opportunities for professionalization and empowerment. Until now, AGABY's work, and its funding, has been exclusively project-based. AGABY's demands include institutional recognition and financial support for the IMCs from the Bavarian State Government, as well as the obligatory establishment of IMCs in all municipalities in which the amount of people with migration histories exceeds e.g. 5,000 and the development of a full legislative framework for the IMCs.

AGABY's organisational structure includes an intercultural and multilingual team that works on the projects and puts the organisation's strategic vision into practice. It also includes a democratically elected board of seven members, which defines the organisation's political vision and strategy in close cooperation with the executive team and managers. The AGABY board is elected by its general assembly, which is the organisation's supreme body and consists of delegates sent by each of the

20 For further details, see also: „Handbuch erfolgreich arbeiten im Integrationsbeirat“, AGABY, (2014), available at: <http://handbuch.agaby.de/6-agaby/61-struktur-und-aufgaben>.

21 BZI (Bundeszuwanderungs- und Integrationsrat): <https://bzi-bundesintegrationsrat.de/bzi-zur-neuen-beraterin-des-auswaertigen-amtes/>.

Bavarian IMCs. The general assembly elects the AGABY board from among its voting delegates for a period of three years. The seven board members must belong to at least five different Bavarian IMCs. The chairperson and two deputies represent AGABY externally. Board and team meetings regularly take place in the AGABY offices in Nuremberg or online.

6.7 Conclusion

Integration and Migration Councils were set up to secure the participation of immigrants on the local level. Although their role at the local level has proved extremely valuable and beneficial in practice, municipalities are still not obliged to establish them unless the relevant Federal State has adopted relevant legislative measures. Most Migration and Integration Councils therefore still struggle to obtain sustainable funding and, in some cases, respect for their role at the local level, which remains substantially dependent on the attitudes of local politicians. In the long-term, the expansion of these Councils and their links with the Bavarian and Federal Government can be seen as major successes. In conclusion, if we look beyond the current workings of the Integration and Migration Councils in Bavaria, it is important to recall that the implementation of integration policies is, in Germany, the responsibility of the Federal States and that it can thus (with both positive and negative implications) take a variety of different forms.

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7. Inspiring Practices to Share

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This chapter is different in concept from the previous chapters. Having introduced each country and summarised their shared and country-specific challenges and some possible solutions to those, we now present promising practices for each country described. These practices may be (at least partially) transferable and thus can offer inspiration to those looking for workable tools and approaches in the field of local integration of migrants.

Inspiring practices are often limited to particular situations and contexts (Henderson, Pavlickova, and Lewis 2016), and they also result from conditions and systems that are unique to a particular country. Therefore, it is essential to understand how these practices are embedded in their national and local contexts (Virkkala and Niemi 2006). We have attempted to facilitate this by providing detailed descriptions of each country's context and migration integration policy setting in the previous chapters. Hopefully, this will enable those seeking inspiration here to have a better understanding of the context in which these practices arose.

First, we introduce a practical methodological guide for regions and cities, entitled the *Manual on Local Integration of Migrants in the Czech Republic*. Second, Slovaks share their experience of working with municipalities that have little to no experience in migrant integration. The third example comes from Germany and presents migration and integration councils, which are political bodies in Bavaria (and across the country), anchored within local administrative bodies, that represent and vocalise migrants' needs and opinions and advocate for their rights. Finally, we zoom in on the transition that the city of Mechelen in Belgium has gone through in becoming a city for all "Mechelaars" thanks to its integral and inclusive approach.

7.1 Manual on Local Integration of Migrants in the Czech Republic (the Czech Republic)

In the Czech Republic, as in other Central European countries, the topic of migrant integration is gradually developing, particularly in the largest cities. However, even there, this agenda is often not developed comprehensively, but mainly through particular areas associated with important aspects of migrant integration (most often social or educational policy). The actors involved then gradually try to cooperate with other actors and approach the issue from multiple angles. This is not easy, and it often takes a long time to make any progress.

Local government officials therefore began to ask for basic information concerning the integration of migrants at the local level, as well as ideas and suggestions on what they could do in their practice and what they could recommend to cooperating departments. Based on this demand from local authorities, a comprehensive publication entitled *Manual on Local Integration of Migrants in the Czech Republic*¹ was produced to provide detailed guidance to local officials and those interested in the issue of migrant integration.

This Manual introduces migrant integration at the local level through individual topics (e.g. services to migrants, education, access to health care), so that regions and municipalities can familiarise themselves with a particular topic and begin to introduce activities in particular areas where they have the opportunity or perceive the need. It consists of twelve chapters and is intended for staff at the regional and municipal authorities, local politicians and anyone else who comes into contact with the topic of migration.² Each chapter presents a particular aspect of integration in terms of the relevant legislation, possible projects, successes and challenges that local authorities or migrants may face. Furthermore, the Manual contains practical tips and specific instructions for readers who have no previous experience with migrant integration. The publication consists of removable, numbered infosheets of various lengths, which can be studied individually or in chapter groupings and

1 Selected chapters of the Manual are available in English at: https://www.migrace.com/en/regulation/mesta-a-inkluzivni-strategie/integracni_manual.

2 The framework of and actors in the integration of migrants in the Czech Republic; Self-government as a provider and recipient of grants; Strategic management of integration in local authorities; Integration at the municipal level; Communication with the majority society; Communication with migrants; Education of students with a different mother tongue; Employment; Social; Healthcare; „Refugees“ – a specific system of international protection; Safety.

can be used as separate background material for meetings, negotiations or presentations. Thanks to its structure and design, the Manual makes it possible to quickly move between topics based on interest or need and thus connect various aspects of migrant integration as best suits the given situation.

The Manual is designed to be a comprehensive yet clear and concise set of instructions on how to approach migrant integration in terms of legal requirements, with respect for local specifics, and for the benefit of all inhabitants of the Czech Republic.

7.2 How to engage municipalities with no experience in migrant integration (Slovakia)

In Slovakia, most cities and regions have very little experience in migrant integration. The most common situation is that migrants are largely invisible to the municipal authorities, as they do not come to the municipality with their issues. Consequently, municipalities devote almost no attention to the topic of migrant integration.

Therefore, the first step taken by Slovak partner organization Human Rights League and its local partners to encourage migrant integration at the local level in Slovakia³ consisted of engaging with municipalities willing to work on the issue of migration. HRL identified three cities, one region and the Union of Towns and Cities of Slovakia (an umbrella organization for cities and towns in Slovakia) that were willing to collaborate with them on this issue. HRL began by introducing them to the issue and to the migrants residing within their territory, providing them with comprehensive information about the migrant population and training them to enable them to collect and analyse relevant data and information on their own. HRL produced a report for each municipality involved in the project with detailed statistics and a description of the migrant population living in the municipality (e.g. Kadlečíková 2018). This information was mostly new and eye-opening for the municipalities concerned.

The project concentrated on early engagement with local political leaders and local municipal representatives to build trust, find “ambas-

3 For more, see the Project *KapaCITY* – *Supporting the integration of newcomers at a local level* (2018–2020) webpage, available at: <https://www.hrl.sk/en/our-work/projects/old-projects/kapacity>.

sadors”⁴ for the project and prevent disinformation about the project activities. The report and project activities were presented to municipal councils and parliaments in each involved city/region. This has helped to build trust among the actors involved. Also, a memorandum on cooperation was signed with each municipality, describing each party’s roles and responsibilities. HRL also provided an opportunity for municipalities to fund the work of their employees tasked with integration activities, since municipalities frequently lack funding for integration of migrants.

The next steps were to provide training and tools on how to engage with the migrants in each municipality. Meetings between migrants and municipalities were organized to enable them to learn about each other, and intercultural workers were recruited in every municipality to act as *liaison officers* between migrants and the municipality. The focus was on the empowerment and activation of migrants at the municipal level; this included providing information on the role and responsibilities of municipalities and establishing lasting frameworks for regular meetings between municipalities and migrants. However, without any permanent advisory bodies established and funded by the municipalities, these meetings and other forms of contact between migrants and municipalities turned out to be unsustainable in the long term.

Much attention was also paid to communication. In most cases, municipalities did not know how to communicate about integration issues and therefore chose not to. HRL provided the municipalities with the skills to communicate with the local population about migration and integration. Initially, municipalities were scared to do so, since they tended to view migration as a topic leading to conflict and disinformation, and so HRL focused on narratives, framing and facts that could be used. It hired an agency to assist in developing the municipalities’ communication skills and strategies.⁵ Also, migrants were engaged and trained in how best to communicate their individual stories as well as their expectations and aspirations to the public. The cooperation with the agency proved very beneficial.

Nevertheless, several challenges remain, such as communicating multilingually with migrants or engaging migrants in local level interaction. More effort must be invested in these issues in the future.

4 By „ambassadors“ we mean people who were interested in the issue and working on the issue within the municipality as “municipal coordinators”, they also acted as liaison officers between the project and the municipal authorities.

5 A comprehensive communication strategy was created and municipalities received communication training (Neuropea & HRL 2020).

HRL's recommendations from its work with municipalities/regions with very little experience in migrant integration are as follows:

- Doing “political work” is crucial when it comes to such a heated issue as migration. This includes investment into engagement with local parliaments, mayors and others from the municipality to explain issues and ensure support.
- Identifying “ambassadors” for particular issues/activities helps.
- It is necessary to frame the issue of migrant integration clearly and carefully. Employees and local MPs are influenced as much as others are by pictures in mass media and migration hysteria. Therefore, it is important to explain the issues at stake, the aims and goals, and to clear all possible misunderstandings (e.g. migration “crisis” vs. labour market needs). Finding common ground helps (e.g. accommodation for migrant workers).
- Becoming familiar with the working culture/cycle of the municipality and planning activities to match the municipality’s cycle is highly useful.
- Municipalities are frequently faced with understaffing, shortage of money and fluctuation of employees. If possible, it helps to offer funding for some of their activities.
- It is worth focusing on how to communicate with the local population about migrants. It is a good idea to invest resources into finding the right common framings and narratives that are inclusive and provide connections between migrants and the local population. It is also important to find ways of motivating municipalities to start communicating about migration.
- It is vital to identify a communication plan for each municipality separately, ideally in the early stages of the project, as this allows room for piloting joint communication campaigns. While national narratives may work, it is important to be aware of the local context, which can play an important role in communication.
- Providing tools for municipalities is crucial (such as information materials, training, tips for involving and engaging with resident migrants, a website with the important information in one place, contact details for intercultural workers and migrant communities).

7.3 Integration and migration councils in Bavaria (Germany)

The integration of people with migration histories can only succeed if they are taken seriously as actors and are involved in decision-making processes. The most tried and tested instrument for this in Germany is a well-functioning integration and migration council.

These councils contribute to participatory democracy in several ways: first, migrants are directly involved in local political work through their work in the councils. Second, the councils represent heterogeneous social groups that otherwise have little or no representation in the municipalities. Third, the councils open the way to immigrant associations, networks and communities to which local authorities and political bodies previously hardly had any access.

For the councils to work successfully, their work and networking must be coordinated and supported and their interests represented at the state and federal level, and know-how and best practices need to be transferred. In this case, an umbrella organisation is essential. The work of AGABY in Bavaria (and other umbrella organisations in Germany⁶) is based on representation, participation and empowerment principles.

Studies show that the work done by these councils gives migrants and people with migration history better access to resources in their municipalities, provides intercultural exchange and intercultural opening, contributes to peaceful coexistence, and serves as an empowerment platform for migrants in their political engagement (Wilmes 2018). In Germany, integration and migration councils have become an indispensable element that brings the interests of the population with a migration history into the local political decision-making process.

7.4 Mechelen's journey towards becoming an inclusive city (Flanders, Belgium)

In 2005, Mechelen had a very bad reputation in Flanders and was referred to as “the Chicago of the Dijle”: this reputation was driven by impoverished neighbourhoods, public nuisance and a great feeling of insecurity. The Mechelaars were not ‘proud’ of their city, the overall feeling was

6 For further details see the webpage of Der Bundeszuwanderungs- und Integrationsrat (The German Federal Immigration and Integration Council), accessible at: <https://bzi-bundes-integrationsrat.de/mitgliedsverbaende/>.

one of distrust in politics, and faith in the (local) government crumbled. Things had to change, and they did. The City Council and the Mayor radically changed their approach and based the city's policies on three pillars: security, city renewal, and inclusion. Investments were made in favour of prevention and safety: strengthening the police force, installing cameras and streetlamps, pursuing urban renovation and renewal projects, investing in first-line workers, creating more green public spaces, public playgrounds, and so on.

The key strength, however, is the city's inclusive vision. This vision consists of:

- a firm anti-discrimination policy (e.g. the city has a local contact point where citizens can file reports or complaints with regard to racism & discrimination⁷, Mechelen is a member of the European Coalition of Cities Against Racism (ECCAR) network⁸ and has a ten-point action plan against racism⁹);
- a strong focus on accessibility and social mix at different levels (neighbourhood, school, sport club ...);
- a positive (counter) narrative where diversity is regarded as an added value. “Mechelen is an inclusive society in which differences are acknowledged, tolerated and respected, but not without limits. We propose legislation and core values that are non-negotiable. Mechelen sees value in this diversity. We have a diversity mindset, drawing on the wealth of difference to discover what binds people together. The spirit of coexistence is key.”¹⁰

In Mechelen, the saying goes: “We are all from Mechelen”, meaning that the citizens might not share a common past, but they share their city's future. The city works to create a climate in which it is generally accepted that diversity is part of society. Every resident of Mechelen is duty-bound to integrate in the new and super- or hyperdiverse Mechelen of the 21st century. The city takes a critical and open view of traditions, practices and structures and calls them into question. It does not avoid sensitive issues, but encourages dialogue and debate.

Every resident of Mechelen has a complex identity: there is no need for anyone to choose between being Muslim, being Flemish, being from Mechelen, speaking Spanish, or being gay. The city's policy encourages

7 For further details see: <https://www.mechelen.be/tegenracisme/racisme-melden>.

8 For further details see: European Coalition of Cities Against Racism, <https://www.eccar.info/en/mechelen>.

9 For further details see: <https://www.mechelen.be/tegenracisme>.

10 Working on Diversity: The Vision and Mission of the City of Mechelen, 2008

every resident to be proud of who they are, of their complex identity. People have freedom of choice when it comes to expressing certain aspects of that complex identity. The city aims to create a diversity-friendly environment in which the full complexity of those identities can be explored. Mechelen is not made up of 136 different communities. Mechelen has one community containing almost 90,000 individuals, each with a complex identity.

The diversity in Mechelen has gradually changed in character. Until the 1990s, two large groups lived in the city: native Mechelaars and Moroccans. Today, Mechelen is a multicoloured mixture and internal diversity is also increasing within its various sub-communities. The stereotypes are less and less reflective of the reality of “the migrants”. Target group policies (a categorical approach) thus lost touch with reality, and lost their value and legitimacy. The City Council of Mechelen has therefore developed a reverse strategy since 2013. Instead of defining differences and excluding people based on differences, efforts are made to strengthen shared identity. That is the core of urbanity: all of us together in diversity.

The principle is being an inclusive city, which means stressing mainstreaming as much as possible. Diversity in all its forms is given a prominent place in the city’s communication and identity experience. All policy areas, city services and partners must support this inclusive approach. However, the city of Mechelen is also aware that inclusive policy must go hand in hand with more specific policy and acknowledges the need for some carefully chosen exclusive (categorical) measures. One of the principles behind diversity is that everyone plays a part in shaping society and that everyone must be given the opportunity to participate actively in that society. It makes sense to have a partly categorical approach, to counter disadvantage and exclusion and give certain target groups greater opportunities to participate.

Strategic programme management at the city level further supports a coordinated and consistent approach and strategy within a clear, shared vision on integration and diversity. The development of cross-cutting networks and greater insight on crossovers between different policy areas and policy objectives make integration policy more efficient and effective (challenges, opportunities and cooperative partners are detected easily) and as such, the city’s initiatives have more impact.

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8. Challenges, Opportunities and Practical Recommendations from the Countries Studied

Marie Jelínková

Integration policies in Europe diverge and converge in different aspects (Avcı 2006), and this is also true in the case of our four focus countries: the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Germany and Belgium.¹ Nevertheless, these four countries share a number of similar challenges and opportunities. In the first part of this chapter, we thus focus on the challenges that the authors of the previous chapters currently (2021) perceive as critical in their countries, with the caveat that some challenges are specific to particular country situations and others cut across the experiences of multiple countries. In the second part, we introduce shared recommendations, which stem mainly from the experiences of the authors and their organisations.

This chapter is based on correspondence and interviews with civil society representatives, academia, migrant associations and municipalities. In our debates on the integration policies adopted in each country, we have touched on which approaches are more and less successful, and we have to some extent sought answers as to why this is the case. Understanding why a particular practice works well (or does not work) is crucial for assessing its possible transferability. It is clear that approaches to migrant integration are substantially linked to the conception of other public policies and indeed to the values anchoring public policies in the given country.

For example, many practices related to migrant integration in Belgium stem from the country's emphasis on the participative approach, i.e. talking with residents rather than talking about them. Although the

1 In Belgium integration is a regional, rather than national, competence, so references to Belgium in the text refer to the regional level.

Czech Republic and Slovakia have begun to emphasise participation at the local level in recent years, political and administrative institutions still take a very ambivalent attitude towards the participation of the general public and other actors in decision-making (cf. Mička 2016). This is not to say that the participative approach is necessarily widespread in all Belgian municipalities, but rather that a country's experience with participatory policies, along with its social and political traditions, shapes the necessary breeding ground for the promotion of particular policies or policy tools. Also, this does not imply that Czech and Slovak cities should abandon the idea of involving migrants in public decision-making. However, it does mean that it may be more difficult to enforce such mechanisms in these countries, and that it might be worth considering other options that are more compatible with the traditions and contexts of the countries concerned.

Similarly, the Integration and Migration Councils in Bavaria have become established bodies that German local politicians mostly accept despite a number of practical challenges. However, their existence is conditional (among many other circumstances) on the fact that migrants need to be involved in local affairs and that it is good for local communities to take their voices into account. Without this pre-understanding, it would be difficult, if not impossible, to enforce such measures. Nevertheless, even inspiring practices that are not easy to transfer may serve as desirable visions, or such practices can be transferred once the necessary conditions are met in a particular setting.

Let us add that while we have tried to achieve as balanced a view as possible with regard to what is working well and what is not in the area of migrant integration, the selection of specific challenges and opportunities described here may in part naturally reflect the work experience and individual perspectives of the authors.

8.1 Identified challenges and opportunities

The different contexts do not change the fact that many of the challenges and opportunities in the field of integration policies remain the same. Turning now to the challenges and opportunities on which the representatives of the studied countries agreed at a national level, the following were mentioned in particular:

- Clear and effective distribution of legislative competencies and administrative tasks to different actors at the federal, state and local gov-

ernment levels. A failure to distribute competencies clearly can lead to parallel and overlapping responsibilities, which make it difficult to bundle integration policy measures effectively or may result in a lack of ownership of the necessary measures and their implementation.

- Regularly updated strategic documents, with sufficient mechanisms to ensure and monitor their implementation and with due attention to impact measurement.
- Availability of data and good data handling to enable evaluation of the policies and measures implemented, or lack thereof.
- Recognition and promotion of the importance of migrant and civil society participation in decision-making processes for the successful shaping of integration policy.

Despite the agreement on these key points of setting a functional integration policy at the national level, what the representatives of each country view as the key aspects within these points differs. For the Czech Republic and Slovakia, the key issue at the moment (2021) is the implementation and evaluation of policies and acceptance of the integration agenda by the state bodies responsible for it. In the context of Slovakia, the formal and administrative anchoring of the integration agenda is still a key focus point. In particular, it was mentioned that the meaning of the term “successful integration” remains rather blurred and needs to be clarified (e.g. through unified and codified criteria for Slovak language learning and the knowledge of Slovak values, life and institutions necessary for obtaining Slovak citizenship). In contrast, as far as Germany is concerned, the current (2021) priority is the need for the integration paradigm to shift away from a purely administrative and paternalistic approach to dealing with migrants to an integration policy that engages migrants and their organisations as actors and subjects in shaping integration processes. In Belgium, the key challenge currently (2021) lies in making other policy domains (housing, work, education, youth, culture, sports...) accountable for integration. This means that other domains should also provide budget/resources and formulate objectives with regard to migrants. To this end, a transversal integration policy needs to be implemented across different policy areas.

It is certainly worth noting that there are far greater similarities between the opportunities and challenges identified at the national (or perhaps general) level in the countries studied than between those identified at the regional and local levels.

In terms of regional and local policies, all four countries emphasised a current lack of motivation within regional governments and (many)

municipalities to address the issue of migrant integration. Nevertheless, this lack is different in each particular context. The only similarities are between the Czech Republic and Slovakia, both of which highlighted the need for both regions and municipalities to become more involved in integration, and to involve local actors (including universities and employers) to a far greater extent. This involves opening up the topic of migrant integration with individual municipalities, which often avoid the topic since international migration is often perceived as a negatively polarising issue, and migrants' contribution to society is not emphasised. From the German perspective, on the other hand, municipalities are already integrally involved; nevertheless, without systematic support in terms of resources from the federal states and constant exchange with local migrant communities, municipalities' participation in integration policies risks being marginal and unsuccessful. From the Belgian perspective, there is a pressing need for regional governments to take a cross-cutting approach on specific topics (e.g. the intersection of LGBTQI issues & migration, language policy & multilingualism).

Furthermore, there are significant challenges to the local integration of migrants in all four countries studied that are not intrinsic to the national, regional or local level. Two such challenges in particular have been identified as key obstacles to successful integration.

The first of these concerns the rhetoric towards migrants and/or the rhetoric on migration in general: fear-mongering, promotion of hate speech, polarisation and us versus them rhetoric. This gives rise to the need for responses that do not fuel polarisation, which is far from easy, particularly in view of the recent flood of fake news.

The second widely mentioned shared issue related to migrant integration is the political participation of migrants and/or citizens of foreign origin/with migration backgrounds. In this respect, civil society actors in the Czech Republic and Germany have long been trying in vain to secure the right to vote in local elections for foreigners from non-EU countries who hold permanent residence. In both countries, this is a key right that migrants are not granted, which often results in them not being a population of interest to local politicians. In Slovakia and Belgium, migrants with permanent residence have the right to vote locally. Despite this, in Slovakia, permanently resident migrants are still not a population addressed by politicians (which, apart from the negative rhetoric about migration, may also be due to their low numbers). In Belgium, low levels of political engagement among Belgians with migrant backgrounds remain an important issue.

8.2 Shared recommendations

Just as there are differences and similarities between the four countries described in terms of the challenges they face, there are also differences and similarities in terms of the recommendations to be made.

The key common recommendation is that **migrant integration needs systematic support at national, regional and local levels**. This support should include not only a strategic grasp and functional implementation mechanisms, as mentioned above, but also stable financial support complemented by administrative and structural support for the agenda at various levels of government. Furthermore, this recommendation concerns the provision of mechanisms/tools to enable migrants to participate in decision-making processes so that their well-identified specific needs are reflected in the measures taken.

The shared recommendations then also relate to migrant integration governance. In this area, a particular need for the following measures was voiced:

- sufficient administrative capacity to deal with the migrant integration agenda (mainly at the local level);
- support to strengthen migrant associations;
- consideration and recognition of the role played by local and national governments;
- consideration of new, specific or intersectional topics related to integration in (local) policies (e.g. integration of migrants in rural areas);
- regular meetings of local networks/committees etc. dealing with the topic, which should not be only informative but should also contribute to addressing emerging challenges through concrete proposals (e.g. aiming to shape local policies);
- involvement of migrants, migrants' self-organisations and other migrant groups in discussions about local integration measures and/or in drafting integration strategies or related documents;
- from a governance perspective, consideration of integration at a strategic level (e.g. mayor's bureau), especially as the topic is highly transversal
- accountability/ownership at both political and administrative levels for integration agenda/policy.

The following set of recommendations relates to the practicalities of dealing with the migrant integration agenda at the local authority level. These measures call for:

- time, trust and patience in the process of establishing mutual coexistence and adaptation;
- administrative workers to be taught greater intercultural sensitivity as a key to understanding migrants' situations;
- a personal approach and space to meet and communicate;
- investment in people and organisations on the ground;
- impact monitoring that is not merely quantitative – personal stories often provide the clearest picture of the change achieved;
- invisible processes to be made visible. This involves substantially increasing communication on a variety of topics related to migrant integration (within the authorities and outside the authorities, among the community, towards migrants, etc.).

Let us conclude this chapter by adding that the recommendations mentioned here naturally respond to the challenges described above, addressing for example migrants' political rights, political and civic participation, and responses to negative rhetoric towards migration.

8.3 Conclusion

One of this publication's aims was to outline the local integration policy setting in the four selected countries. In describing the hierarchical structures of national anchoring and the roles played by regions and by local authorities, we set out to understand the policy setting and approaches taken to migrants in each of the focus countries. We have also pointed out each country's strengths along with the individual and shared weaknesses of the policies described. Comparisons of public policies tend to be very useful, but it is almost impossible when making them to avoid simplification and various blind spots (Wenzelburger and Jensen 2022).

We hope that this publication will serve as a springboard for further explorations of questions the scope of this publication did not provide room for, or which we touched on only briefly. These might explore, among other things, why integration policies and measures are set as they are; on what basis the given country judges integration success and what data (if any) it works with to do so; what the impacts of the setting and implementation of these policies are for migrants' everyday lives; and a deeper understanding of how countries behave towards specific groups of migrants, such as Ukrainian refugees.

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