

Females who are granted asylum in the Czech Republic

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Abstract: The paper presents the trend and composition of the female asylum seekers between the time period of 1990 and the beginning of August of 2001. The distribution of the females who were granted asylum in the Czech Republic are calculated on the basis of country of origin and on age basis as well. The Czech Asylum Act 325/1999, provides the Integration Programme in the sphere of housing and the Czech language course. But so far no evaluation is done.

Keywords: asylum seekers, integration program, Czech Republic

The end of the communist regime in 1989 in the former Czechoslovak Socialist Republic has brought changes in political order of the country. The new country revives and consolidates its lost democratic power and it has been renamed as the Federal Republic of Czech and Slovak. Democratic political order is placed in power. A country of two major nations, called the Czech and the Slovak, on agreement later disintegrated into two independent countries. The newly emerged countries took names as the Czech Republic and the Slovak Republic.

On the very outset, among others, the Czech Republic has started facing with refugees and immigrants. Comparing with any West European countries, which has its own traditional and historical background with refugees and immigrants, the number of recognised refugees and immigrants in the Czech Republic is relatively small. In the Northern and Western Europe there are established communities of immigrants who have been living for two to three generations, alongside a significant number of newcomers. During the communist regime the international mobility was restricted and people were hardly allowed to move abroad and sometimes even nationally. Therefore the absence of multicultural disposition exists. International mobility becomes possible only after the changeover in 1989, and this put the country in an unimaginable situation. The country faces with a completely new phenomenon called refugees and asylum seekers, and the Czech legislation did not know the said terms.

Trend in composition of asylum seekers

On the very outset the inflow has been dominated by nationals of Rumania (between the years 1990–1993). Between 1993–1997, among the European origin asylum seekers, nationals of Rumania and Bulgaria outbalanced the number. Other European immigrants originated from Yugoslavia, Ukraine, former Soviet Union, Russia and other countries. Non-European nationals comprise among others nationals of Afghanistan, Iraq, Vietnam, Angola, Iran etc. Surprisingly the number of female asylum seekers as individual stock is

infrequent. Between the period of 1990–1997, 621 females were granted asylum; of them 441 of European origin, 133 were Asian, 41 African and 6 were Cuban. The figure does not include the stateless females (number is negligible).

Between the years 1997–1998, the trend changed and number of asylum seekers from Asia increased and ultimately comprised 66% of net number of asylum seekers. Male seekers were dominating in number. During this period there were 22 females from Asia, 17 from Africa, 1 from Cuba and 28 of European origin that were granted asylum. During the first half of 1999, there was a decline in number of asylum seekers from Asia, but again there was a rise during the second half of the year. At this time, there was an influx of people from Afghanistan. Then there was ebb in the influx of Afghan asylum seekers. In 2000 the country has experienced an over all decline in the number of asylum seekers from Asia. But still, the number of asylum seekers is growing from Europe. The growth is not due to the decline in number of asylum seekers from Asia. Between 1999–2000, inflows of asylum seekers were mainly from Russia, Armenia, Ukraine, Chechnya etc.

Asylum

The former Federal Assembly of the Czech and Slovak Federal Republic had passed the act no. 498 on Refugees in an effort to tackle the issue by the end of 1990. This Refugee Act was in effect until the end of 1999. Till that time, the Czech legal order has used the term *Refugee* for migrants who look for protected refuge and/or asylum. The Refugee Act was later amended and as of January 1, 2000, renamed as the Act on Asylum. The word “refugee” has been replaced by “asylum seeker” in the new act. Since that time, according to the Czech legal code, there is no refugee, but only asylum seeker. There is no provision to treat woman, if essential, specially. The only difference is that the new Asylum Act 325 contains provisions, which allows conferring asylum on humanitarian ground. Accordingly, from January 1, 2000 to July 1, 2001, 47 persons were granted asylum on humanitarian ground. 25 of these asylum seekers were females (including children and 6 lonely women).

On the outset, the country was used mainly as a *transit country* by migratory refugees. However, the country soon began to realize that some refugees and migrants decide to settle in the Czech Republic. These data are available based on the list of *recognised refugees*; the major part appears to comprise nationals from other Central and Eastern European countries. It can be said that the stock of asylum seekers are of European origin. It would be worthwhile to analyse why nationals of other CEE countries choose the Czech Republic as a country of destination. One of the major causes of emergence depressingly includes conflict. Persons with asylum status find safety and certainty in the Czech Republic. There are other factors: existing communities of compatriots, legacy of the Warsaw Pacts and bloc-based the then political affinity, pacts and alliances and/or akin cultural background etc. Other foreign population comprise nationals from the Ukraine, Slovakia, Poland, Russia, Germany, Bulgaria and non-European nationals include people from Vietnam, China etc., all of whom have either permanent residency or long-term residency for over one year, and illegal immigrants. For the purpose of the present paper, I have set the target years between 1995 and 6. 8. 2001. It is important to notice that during this period, the number of male asylum seekers outnumber the female asylum seekers.

From 27. 1. 1995 until 6. 8. 2001, a total of 668 persons were granted asylum. From this number, 166 of them were female asylum seekers; the number of female minors and children aged up to 15 is 127. In total, 293 females were granted asylum. According to the date of birth, some of the babies were probably born during the asylum procedure and some of them were probably – without escort.

Table 1. Number of female children who were granted asylum between 1. 1. 1995 and 6. 8. 2001

Year, granted asylum	Number of Female children
1995	7
1996	28
1997	21
1998	18
1999	24
2000	17
2001 as of 6. 8.	12
Total	127

Table 2. Number of adult and minor females who were granted asylum between 1. 1. 1995 and 6. 8. 2001

Year	Adult	Minor	Subtotal
1995	17	7	24
1996	38	28	66
1997	17	21	38
1998	20	18	38
1999	14	24	38
2000	42	17	59
2001 as of 6. 8.	18	12	30
Total	166	127	293

It is significant to notice that the female asylum seekers comprise 29 nationals and stateless persons. The pattern is quite diverse. From this number, 5 are from Asian countries, 6 are from African countries, and the rest are from European and independent states of the former Soviet Union. From the Asian countries, Afghanistan is most dominant totalling 68, then Iraq with 18, Iran with 2 and Sri Lanka with 1. Among the African countries, Congo is the most dominant with 13, then Ghana with 10, Nigeria with 7, Zaire with 4, Somalia with 2, and Sudan with 1. The stateless persons form 8. The European and independent states of the former Soviet Union countries include Armenia, Romania, Former USSR, Albania, Ukraine, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Georgia, Macedonia, Russia, Belarus, Yugoslavia, Bulgaria, Azerbaijan, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, Turkmenia, and Cuba. Numbers mentioned include the female minors and children.

Table 3. Origin of female nationals who were granted asylum between 1. 1. 1995 and 6. 8. 2001.

Country of origin	Number	Country of origin	Number
Afghanistan	68	Macedonia	5
Albania	1	Nigeria	7
Armenia	30	Rumania	10
Azerbaijan	4	Russia	6
Belarus	28	Somalia	2
Bosnia and Herzegovina	16	Sri Lanka	1
Bulgaria	8	Stateless	8
Congo	13	Sudan	1
Cuba	2	Tajikistan	2
Former USSR	1	Turkmenia	4
Georgia	10	Ukraine	7
Ghana	10	Uzbekistan	1
Iran	2	Vietnam	5
Iraq	18	Yugoslavia	15
Kazakhstan	4	Zaire	4
Total			293

It is also significant to note the age differences between the eldest and the youngest persons granted asylum during this period.

Table 4. The age pattern between the eldest and the youngest one in each following year

Year, granted asylum	Year of birth	Country of origin	Year of birth	Country of origin
1995	1948	Sudan	1993	Afghanistan
1996	1918	Armenia	1995	Afghanistan
1997	1939	B&H	1997	Stateless
1998	1941	Russia	1998	Afghanistan
1999	1936	Afghanistan	1999	Stateless
2000	1926	Kazakhstan	2000	Armenia
2001 as of 6. 8.	1916	Armenia	2001	Yugoslavia

Integration program

The Ministry of the Interior, the Department of Refugees and the Integration of Foreigners (later the Department was renamed as the Department for Asylum and Migration Policies) is entrusted with the charge of asylum issues.

The process of integration is closely connected with those who found new home in a new country. Integration is a two-way process and its success largely depends on what the host country offers and how the offer is implemented. In that spirit, the country acceded to a very important move in 1994 by issuing an *instruction of State supported Assistance Program (AP)*. Under the AP, DAMP offers flats through various districts and towns authorities throughout the country. To make districts and towns interested in *integration housing* of a flat/flats, money is reserved for the appropriate district/town to use for infrastructure development. During the period of 1994 and 1997, only those persons who were granted asylum in 1994 and the following year had access to benefit from AP. In 1997, the first instructions were amended by the second; therefore, all who were granted asylum in the Czech Republic were included under the AP programme. Moreover, handicapped persons who were granted permanent residency on the grounds of health by the decision of the Inter-Ministerial Committee also had access to AP. Later, the *State Integration Program (SIP)* was embedded in the new *Act on Asylum no. 325/1999*.

During the period of 1994–1997, allotment of flats was managed by DAMP. In 1998 and 1999, DAMP managed the allotment in cooperation with one local NGO Counselling Centre for Integration (CCI). The cooperation was not renewed for 2000. From 1994 to 2000, a total of 207 flats were given to 557 persons, 22 of whom were females. I have found some anomaly in data that I have collected from the local NGO and the data from DAMP, both in terms of number of allocated flats and the amount of money invested and the number of persons provided with an apartment. I have decided to adhere to using official data, since reasons for anomaly can be the result of ill communication between CCI and DAMP. There are enough reasons to think so. DAMP did not renew the deed of cooperation, and there were no set criteria on the basis of which and who to offer flat. CCI complained that the selection and offer process was one sided, and that requirements of the person were never taken into consideration. There is reason to believe that there is some truth in it. Moreover, integration program without involving other appropriate ministries can be least successful. Recently, DAMP is preparing to constitute an Inter-Ministerial Committee to deal with allotment of flats.

In coherence with the AP and the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports ensured teaching of the Czech Language under separate Government Regulations. The courses were always run at the official education level. According to the data of the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports, during the period of May 19, 1998 and June 20, 2000, 60 persons were taught the Czech Language in 12 language courses organized by education offices in 4 districts. Unfortunately, there is no way to know how many of them were female. Under the SIP, the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports issued a new circulation on teaching of the Czech Language. This circulation is in effect on July 1, 2000. According to SIP, the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports receives a list of persons who were granted asylum on regular basis from the Ministry of the Interior. The Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports, through its chosen educational institute, makes an offer to teach the Czech Language to people granted asylum in 30 days. The deed between the Ministry and the institute is signed for the period of 16. 8. 2000–31. 12. 2002. Evaluation will be done at the end of the year.

Major Problem

Language is one of the major instruments for successful integration. Language enables people to communicate. Communication offers new friendships, provides understanding of one's surroundings, and removes feelings of alienation. According to CCI, women with children face difficulties in attending courses. There exist no facilities to look after the children during the language courses. Moreover, the state paid course for individual training is set for only 100 hours and group course for 150 hours. A questions which arises is, "are these hours enough to learn a foreign language"? Other relevant questions include: "are they enough aware of the necessity to learn the language of their new home"? Do they display at least some will and effort to learn the foreign language? What role can NGOs play to raise it? How can appropriate state bodies act more efficiently in decision making?

Comments

There is no scarcity of data availability in the field of persons with asylum status. Only that often they are incomplete. It is important to note that statistical data misses the demographic aspects of persons. In the case of allotted flats and the Czech Language courses, there are missing numbers for important data. This problem is more organizational than legal. Tables 1, 2, 3 and 4 were designed by the author. Moreover, there exist very little cooperation between NGOs and State Establishments. This in turn creates mistrust. The Czech Asylum Act does not distinguish between male and female asylum seekers. Female applicants must, like any applicant, show that they cannot return home and cannot avail themselves of the protection of their country of origin. Often the asylum claim of a female applicant will have nothing to do with her gender. In other cases, the applicant's gender may bear on the claim in significant ways. In such cases, women so persecuted should be considered as a "social group".

The article was written in August 2001. The current wording of Act No. 325/1999 Coll., on Asylum and Amendment to Act No. 283/1991 Coll., on the Police of the Czech Republic, as amended (the Asylum Act), as amended by Act No. 2/2002 Coll. entered into force on 2 February 2002.

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ŽENY V AZYLOVÉM ŘÍZENÍ V ČESKÉ REPUBLICE

Résumé

Článek pojednává o struktuře žadatelek o azyl v období od začátku roku 1990 do počátku srpna roku 2001. Lze říci, že v první polovině 90. let byla Česká republika pro uprchlíky pouze tranzitní zemí. Dnes tomu z mnoha různých důvodů již není a Česká republika se stala zemí cílovou. Od 1. 1. 2000 v stoupil v platnost nový zákon č. 325 o Azylu, který nahradil vůbec první zákon upravující tuto problematiku – zákon č. 498 o Uprchlících. V novém zákoně bylo slovo uprchlík z názvu odstraněno.

Příspěvek poskytuje údaje o počtu žen z období let 1995 až 2001 (srpen), kterým byl udělen v České republice azyl. Některé z nich byly tzv. "tied-mover". Rozdělení azylantek bylo uskutečněno podle země původu a také podle věku. Některé nezletilé osoby ženského pohlaví se narodily v době, kdy jejich rodiče byli žadateli o azyl v azylových táborech. V posledních několika letech modifikovala vláda České republiky svou politiku integrace osob, kterým byl udělen azyl. Jedním z hlavních problémů programu integrace, kterým autorka věnuje svou pozornost, je výuka českého jazyka. Úspěšnost integrační politiky v oblasti bydlení a výuky českého jazyka nebyla dosud řádně ověřena. Stále existuje na první pohled ne zcela patrný nedostatek důvěry mezi orgány státní správy a nevládními organizacemi, které se věnují této problematice.