

# Synergy or disparity? Czech experts' insights on migration and development policies

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## Funding information

Technology Agency of the Czech Republic

## Abstract

This article discusses the promotion of policy coherence of migration and development policies that have figured high on the agenda of international organizations and the European Union but have been hardly explored in the context of Central and Eastern Europe. Based on in-depth interviews with 40 Czech experts on migration and development, we identified three key contradictions: (i) The increasing prominence of a security perspective on both migration and development policies and the lack of coherence between these policies in practice; (ii) The tension between the national and transnational perspectives guiding migration policymaking and development policies; and (iii) The lack of reflection on crucial issues, such as remittances and brain drain, in the dominant paradigm of labour migration. We argue that the findings on (in)coherence between Czech migration and development policies help us understand policy responses of Central and Eastern European governments since the 2015 'migration crisis'.

## INTRODUCTION

The origins of the concept of policy coherence can be traced back to the end of the Cold War, 'along a shift in aid allocation from geopolitical motives to consensus-based development around structural adjustment in the 1980s, and subsequent phases of neoliberal stabilization' (Yunita et al., 2022: 93). At the beginning of the 1990s, it was

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promoted as part of the 'beyond aid' approach towards development policies and has since become a regular item at both EU-level and global development agendas (Siitonen, 2016). The European Consensus on Development and the UN Sustainable Development Goals stress the importance of policy coherence as an implementation tool. In the aftermath of the 2015 'migration crisis', documents like the Global Compact and Global Agenda on Mobility and Migration<sup>1</sup> (GCM) have discussed policy coherence in the context of improved migration management, which should result in migration beneficial for the development of both migrant's origin and destination countries (European Commission, 2017).

Although both migration and development policies have separately been the subject of extensive research (Bjerre et al., 2015; Hackenesch et al., 2021; Hadfield & Lightfoot, 2021), the body of literature dealing directly with the issue of policy coherence in the areas of migration and development is relatively limited (KNOMAD, OECD and UNDP, 2020; Koff, 2017; Nyberg-Sørensen, 2016) or predominantly focused only on specific policies, such as trade (Langan & Price, 2021). This is puzzling in light of the billions of USD allocated annually to both policies in public budgets (Hadfield & Lightfoot, 2020) and due to the growing interest in both migration and development policies from the media and the general and professional public (Kiratli, 2021). The attempt to address immigration to economically rich countries through development in economically poorer countries, most often through various development aid programs, is a recurrent 'evergreen' response of politicians to every major wave of migration (Bakewell, 2008; Clemens & Postel, 2018). The case of the Czech Republic, discussed in this paper, is no exception in this respect (MI, 2021).

The antecedent literature offers several explanations for the persisting research gap regarding migration and development policy coherence. Specifically, it has highlighted three barriers that complicate both research and policymaking (Barry et al., 2010; Keijzer et al., 2016; Nijenhuis & Leung, 2017). First, there is a lack of agreement on what constitutes coherent policies (Barry et al., 2010). This is a consequence of the many different ideological and political stances regarding both development and migration individually (Berger, 2022; Siitonen, 2016). Due to the complexity of both issues, it can be difficult to define a common objective to guide the efforts for coherence (Czaika & De Haas, 2013). Moreover, since policy coherence occurs at different levels, horizontally or vertically, within a country or between countries, the antecedent literature offers many different conceptualizations and operationalizations of this term. According to Browne et al. (2023: 3163), policy coherence has been conceptualized by different authors as policy integration, policy coordination, policy mixes, mainstreaming and 'whole of government' and 'joined up government' approaches. In this article, we present the diverse Czech experts' perceptions of migration and development policy coherence. As such, we do not prioritize a single definition of policy coherence. However, in order to be able to analyse the diversity of experts' perceptions, we follow Browne et al. (2023: 3162) definition of the promotion of policy coherence as 'a process of policymaking that systematically considers the pursuit of multiple policy goals in a coordinated way, minimizing trade-offs and maximizing synergies'. Consequently, we assume that policy incoherence will occur in the absence of such dedicated processes promoting policy coherence and inefficient waste of resources.

Second, the specific way in which coherence is conceptualized and promoted matters. In other words, implementation gaps are often linked to how 'development' is understood by relevant policy-makers (Czaika & De Haas, 2013), which once again highlights the importance of their perceptions. The political economy behind migration policy involves multiple stakeholders with different interests; the same holds for multilateral coherence between different donors (states). Moreover, both migration and development policies are guided by security concerns, trade relations and historical (colonial) ties (Gamlen, 2014). As such, politicians maintain a public stance on migration that might differ from their actual needs or policy actions, resulting in a discourse gap (Czaika & De Haas, 2013).

Third, the lack of robust empirical data and conceptualizations complicates adopting coherent policies (Hong & Knoll, 2016). While migration indicators are widely available via numerous indexes (see KNOMAD, OECD, and UNDP, 2020), when it comes to development, one of the few publicly available sources of information is the

Commitment to Development Index (CDI), which ranks countries in seven different areas of sectoral policies (trade, aid, migration, finance, environment, security, technology) when it comes to their 'friendliness' towards developing countries. In this respect, the Czech Republic has been repeatedly criticized for its low acceptance rate of asylum seekers and for scoring low in the migration section (Barder et al., 2013; CGD, 2020).<sup>2</sup>

Migration and development policy coherence is underexplored in Central and Eastern Europe<sup>3</sup> (CEE), with most research focused on analysing policy coherence in Western European countries, however, CEE countries experience increasing migration and refugee flows. They are also relatively new donors of development aid, as members of OECD's Development Assistance Committee (DAC). Therefore, understanding the perspectives of CEE countries is crucial to maintaining the EU's internal coherence. Moreover, the topic of migration policy is continuously recurring in these countries. The Czech government, which was one of the most anti-immigration governments in the EU at the time (in 2015), closed the borders, even though the Czech Republic did not face a significant influx from the main migrant source countries in the massive wave. At the same time, the government launched the Aid in Place development program (MI, 2021), primarily aimed at discouraging populations in source countries from migrating to the EU.

This case study offers the first comprehensive insight into the promotion of migration and development policy coherence in any EU member within the CEE region for the last decade. The main aim of this article is to contribute to closing the aforementioned research gap on migration and development policy coherence in CEE countries using the Czech case study during the decade between the end of the global economic recession (2008–2010) and the COVID-19 pandemic.<sup>4</sup> Our research question is, therefore, 'How do Czech migration and development experts perceive policy coherence in Czech migration and development policies in the decade between 2010 and 2019?'

## MIGRATION AND DEVELOPMENT CONCEPTS: TOWARDS COHERENCE?

When it comes to the literature on migration and development in Europe in particular, the idea of coherence between migration and development policy departs from the migration-development nexus adopted by the EU, among other development policy nexuses (climate, security), since the early 2000s (Hadfield & Lightfoot, 2021). The nexus is based on the idea of a (reciprocal) relationship between migration and socio-economic development processes (De Haas, 2010). Previous research has established that development will most likely encourage migration by raising the aspirations and capabilities of people (De Haas, 2007). Theoretically, under-development can also encourage migration by not providing enough alternatives to stay and have a meaningful life (Carling & Talleraas, 2016). In this case, however, the empirical base is relatively weak—it is usually the better-off who can afford the costs associated with migration (De Haas, 2020). Reflecting the multiplicity of policy initiatives across different EU member states, most of the research on the migration-development nexus, especially since the 'new migration-development' boom at the start of the 2000s, has therefore focused on how migration affects development in three main areas: remittances, brain drain and diasporas (De Haas, 2012; Faist, 2014).

Policy coherence has traditionally been analysed at the national level, where several factors have been identified that support or hinder policy coherence, including the quality of dialogue between different stakeholders (government and non-profit), the existence of coordination mechanisms or a supportive government environment, and targeted well-formulated policies (KNOMAD, OECD, and UNDP, 2020). However, as Carbone (2008) points out, EU member states' increasing interconnectedness and mutual impact call for a broader analysis (i.e., multilateral coherence) and recognition of global, regional and national policy coherence. Lavenex and Kunz (2008), therefore, evaluated policy coherence for development at the EU level, focusing on the external dimension of the EU migration policy. Their research shows how the migration-development nexus is constructed and adopted, resulting in a prevailing security approach in contrast to 'migration and/or development' via dialogue with countries of origin or increased legal labour options. Recently, the politicization and securitization of the migration-development nexus in the EU parliament have also been addressed by

Lauwers et al. (2021). Their research confirms the prevalence of a restrictive approach. Still, it provides a more nuanced view of how the relationship between migration and development is constructed differently across political parties and at the country level.

Barder et al. (2013) analysed European countries' 'commitment to development', which highlights the importance of non-aiding policies and their impact on developing countries. The core idea, also emphasized by other scholars, is that rather than by aid, poverty and inequality (as well as migration) between Global North and South is impacted by the direct and indirect effects of other 'donor' countries' policies (Carbone, 2008; Castles, 2009), including trade (Langan & Price, 2021), migration policy (Horký, 2010; Lavenex & Kunz, 2008), agricultural policy (Siitonen, 2016), finance or environmental policy (Barder et al., 2013).

Finally, according to Hong and Knoll (2016), coherence is a helpful framework for finding solutions that have developing countries' objectives in mind. However, a certain degree of incoherence will always remain due to the above-mentioned barriers. Further research is therefore needed to identify significant inconsistencies and subsequently to identify ways in which at least some degree of coherence can be achieved. This also requires analysis of the normative aspect of relations between development and non-development policies as perceived by involved stakeholders. In other words, policy coherence can be approached not only as an analytical but also as a normative framework. Although Siitonen (2016: 2) suggests the existing literature has neglected the role of policy coherence not only as a normative concept but also as 'an element of transformative development pointing to the power relations and structures that sustain poverty and inequality', some literature on migration and development has predominantly focused on the normative aspects of the nexus (Keijzer et al., 2016). Thede (2013) criticized the visions of market-led development and security concerns that it is often associated with. Lavenex and Kunz (2008) analysed 'policy frames' as a particular set of beliefs and perceptions about a social matter that becomes established and influences related policies. In contrast, Nyberg-Sørensen (2016) highlighted in a case study of Denmark how the migration and development nexus was framed in policy debates but left no significant mark on actual policies since incoherence was perceived as a better option than misusing the aid budget to contain migration. Similarly, de Haas (2012) suggested that attempting to interlink migration and development without proper knowledge about their complex relationship might cause more harm than good. Specifically, it could potentially increase the securitization of migration and development policy (Nijenhuis & Leung, 2017) or increase inequality in already disadvantaged regions (Skeldon, 2008). Alternatively, in their analysis of 11 EU Member States' migration and development policies, Keijzer et al. (2016) criticized the focus on short-term approaches that perceive migration mainly as an obstacle to development.

## MIGRATION AND DEVELOPMENT POLICIES IN THE CZECH REPUBLIC

The topic of policy coherence of Czech migration and development policies has received relatively little attention in the literature. Policy coherence for development across different sectors has been addressed by Horký (2010). On the other hand, the development of the Czech migration policy has already been documented in the literature. The Czech Ministry of the Interior (MI) had the primary responsibility, and it was the driving force in migration and integration throughout the 1990s. The first reform initiatives came only in the early 2000s from the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs (MLSA). Overall, according to Drbohlav et al. (2010), the Czech immigration policy in the 1990s and 2000s was rather unsystematic. Their study also pointed to several specific examples of the gradual centralization of migration policy decision-making within the MI's Department of Asylum and Migration Policy.

In 2015, the Czech government approved the Migration Policy Strategy of the Czech Republic based on the Principles of the Migration Policy formulated in 2010 (MI, 2015). The most important cross-cutting topic in this strategy is the principle of security. However, the emphasis on security in Czech migration policy is much older.

The entry and stay of migrants to the Czech Republic are regulated by the Foreigners Act (no. 326/1999), last amended in 2019. The Department for Asylum and Migration Policy (DAMP) within MI is responsible for

designing and implementing the migration policy in cooperation with several other institutions, including the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA), MLSA and the Refugee Facilities Administration. Among the most important programs that support labor immigration to the Czech Republic are: (i) Program Highly Qualified Employee for companies employing highly qualified professionals (also open to their family members) from 2019; (ii) Program Qualified Employee for companies employing middle and low-skilled workers from selected countries (Philippines, Montenegro, Mongolia, Serbia, Ukraine, Belarus, India, Kazakhstan, Moldova) from 2019; (iii) Program Key Scientific Personnel from 2019 for companies and research organizations looking to employ highly qualified staff; (iv) Program special work visas for Ukrainian citizens working in agriculture, food and forestry (MI, 2019). The recent programs for highly qualified workers have become less geographically selective, perhaps to attract more professionals. Despite this, MI (2020) shows that overall applications remain relatively low compared to the schemes for less qualified workers. The majority of applications still came from Ukraine, India or Russia, countries specifically targeted by a previous project for highly qualified migrants.

Regarding development, the key institution is the Czech Development Agency (CzechAid), which was founded in 2008 by MFA. The agency aims to assist less developed countries with finding solutions to their development challenges. There are three key types of support provided by CzechAid (CDA, 2024): (i) Humanitarian aid aimed at helping in cases like natural catastrophes, epidemics or conflicts; (ii) long-term bilateral cooperation focused on selected countries; and (iii) multilateral cooperation with international institutions. Since 2013, the Czech Republic has been a member of the OECD's Development Assistance Committee (DAC), an international forum that unites most major providers of development assistance. According to OECD's latest estimates (OECD, 2023), the total ODA provided by the Czech Republic in 2022 was 987.1 million USD, representing 0.36% of its GNI (out of this, bilateral ODA formed USD 88.5 million).<sup>5</sup> Currently, the Czech Republic ranks 17th (out of 32) among DAC member countries when it comes to its ODA/GNI ratio, and thus exceeded the value of 0.33% of GNI by 2030 as part of the collective effort to increase ODA/GNI ratios across the EU (OECD, 2023).

Two key documents outline the current strategy of the CzechAid: the Development Cooperation Plan (MFA, 2017a) and the Development Cooperation Strategy of the Czech Republic 2018–2030 (MFA, 2017b). The latter has identified six priority countries with a cooperation program for the 2018–2023 period (Bosnia and Herzegovina, Cambodia, Ethiopia, Georgia, Moldova and Zambia). Other countries of focus included Afghanistan, Syria and Ukraine, with specific funds for humanitarian, stabilization and development cooperation approved by special government resolutions. For 2018–2030, the following thematic priorities have been identified in line with the Sustainable Development Goals: agriculture and rural development, sustainable management of natural resources, economic transformation and growth, inclusive social development and good democratic governance. The list of official Czech development projects (over 600 since 2008, when the Czech Development Agency was established) is provided in the Appendix S1.

## METHODOLOGY

We employed an exploratory qualitative research approach to identify the main areas of (lack of) coherence between the Czech migration and development policies. Because expert judgement is invaluable for assessing systems and policies for which measurements or test results are sparse or non-existent (Bogner et al., 2009), we employed a qualitative research approach focusing on experts' perceptions to produce the first explorative study of the (lack of) coherence of the Czech migration and development policies. We conducted in-depth, semi-structured interviews in 2018 and 2019 with 40 experts on aspects of migration /and development, representing the governmental sector (ministries and governmental agencies) as well as non-profit organizations focusing on immigrants, private sector (business companies and business umbrella organizations), and academia (universities and research institutions) focusing on the coherence of the two policies (see Table 1).

TABLE 1 Respondents' Characteristics.

Code	Sector	Position	Gender
M001-PA	Public administration	Director	F
M002-PA	Public administration	Head of Department	M
S007-PA	Public administration	Head of Section	M
D008-NP	Non-profit	Director of the Czech branch	M
M009-PA	Public administration	Responsibility for International Migration	M
D010-AC	Academic	Researcher	M
D011-NP	Non-profit	Policy officer	M
S012-PA	Public administration	Vice-President	M
D013-PA	Public administration	Head of Section	M
D014-PA	Public administration	Director	M
M015-NP	Non-profit	Programmer Leader	F
M017-PA	Public administration	Head of Department	M
M019-PR	Private	Head of Section and Deputy Director	F
S021-PA	Public administration	Director	M
S022-PA	Public administration	Analyst	M
S023-PA	Public administration	Analyst	M
M026-NP	Non-profit	Director	F
S035-PA	Public administration	Head of Department	M
D037-NP	Non-profit	Project Officer	M
M039-AC	Academic	Senior Lecture	M
M043-AC	Academic	Professor, Deputy-Head of the Department	M
M045-NP	Non-profit	Director	M
M046-NP	Non-profit	Vice-Chairman	M
D047-NP	Non-profit	Policy Officer	M
D048-PA	Public administration	Head of Department	F
D049-NP	Non-profit	Policy Officer	F
D050-NP	Non-profit	Director Department for Foreign Projects	M
D051-NP	Non-profit	Director	M
M054-NP	Non-profit	Chairman	M
D055-AC	Academic	PhD. student	F
M056-PA	Public administration	Head of Department	F
M058-NP	Non-profit	Head of the Migration Program	F
M059-AC	Academic	Researcher	F
D066-PA	Public administration	Head of Policy Planning Department	M
M080-PR	Private	Partner of a Law Firm	M
M081-PR	Private	Professional Coordinator – External Relations	M
M082-PR	Private	Recruitment of Foreign Workers	F
D083-AC	Academic	Associate Professor	M
M084-AC	Academic	Senior Lecturer	F
M086-NP	Non-profit	Migration Coordinator	F

Note: To protect the anonymity of the respondents, each respondent was assigned a specific code that indicates the field of expertise (M, migration policy; S, security policy; D, development policy) and the sector they belong to (PA, public administration; NP, non-profit; PR, private; AC, academic).

The selection of respondents was deliberate, that is, we first identified experts based on their existing expertise in various aspects of the Czech migration and development policies, excluding representatives from the authors' home institutions. We then used the snowballing method based on the recommendations of experts who have already been interviewed. Thus, our interviewees include prominent experts from all relevant sectors, which makes our analysis unique and fully representative in the Czech context. What we have achieved is that in our sample of respondents we have all the relevant experts who have some influence on the design and/or implementation of the two policies under review. To encourage openness, all respondents were guaranteed anonymity, including the names of their organizations. In most cases, the interviewees could be described as 'top managers' within their organizations. In the academic sector, they were generally in senior positions.

The interviews were transcribed and coded using the MAXQDA software for qualitative data analysis. Due to the exploratory nature of our research, the analysis started with an open coding procedure to identify key themes discussed by the respondents. In the second step of our analysis, key themes identified by respondents across all sectors were selected. Their quotations were compared to identify points of agreement or disagreement and represent the diversity of experts' perceptions.

By focusing on experts' perceptions, our exploration seeks to avoid at least some of the dilemmas related to the aforementioned dichotomy of approaching policy coherence either as an analytical or a normative framework. Experts' perceptions both outline a normative framework of what our interviewees consider efficient migration and development policies and offer insights into the extent to which the Czech Republic implements these. However, because our discussion is primarily based on data from our experts' survey, we cannot comment on the empirical validity of all of the arguments mentioned by our respondents. Although the opinions of all our respondents reflect years' and, in several cases, decades' worth of professional experience with Czech migration and development policies, further qualitative and quantitative research is necessary to test their relevance in the long run. As such, this explorative study sets the agenda for future research. In the final section, we also discuss several conclusions that could further advance theoretical and policy-relevant findings from existing studies on (in)coherence between migration and development policies in other countries.

## RESULTS

This section presents the interviewed experts' perceptions regarding the (in)coherence of Czech migration and development policies.

### Coherence in the political discourse versus incoherence in practice?

Migration and development policies in the Czech Republic have evolved predominantly as separate streams of policymaking. Their mutual dialogue started only recently when the political representatives began to promote the Czech national development policies as a tool to prevent migration and to legitimize the anti-immigration position of the Czech Republic during the 2015–2016 'migration crisis' in Europe. As elsewhere in Europe, since 2015, the issue of migration has been significantly affected by security concerns, which was reflected both in the political sphere and in the field of policymaking. Thus, in our interviews, the coherence of migration and development policies was often connected with security policies.

Although the number of migrants coming to the Czech Republic for work, study or joining their family members for both short-term periods and long-term settlements has been steadily rising since the 1990s (see [Figure 1](#)), the prevailing political approach to migration that crystallized in 2015 has been anti-immigration with both populist and mainstream political parties agreeing on restrictive measures against immigration (Krotký, 2019), thus actually



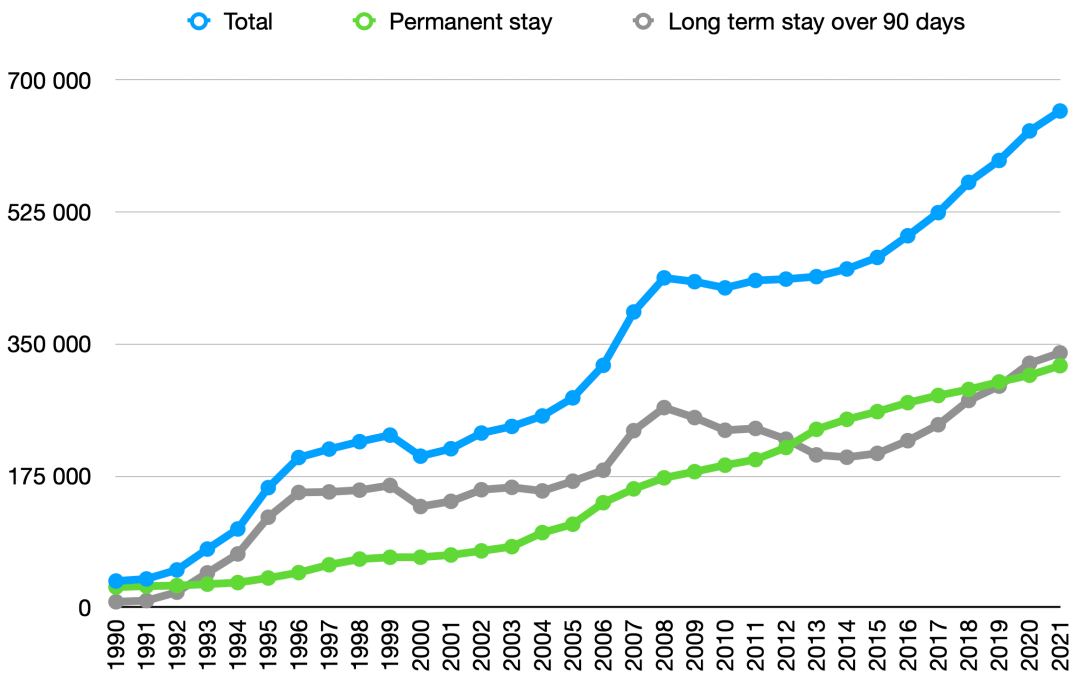


FIGURE 1 Permanently and Long-term Residing Foreigners in the Czech Republic (1990–2021).

Source: CSO (2024)

also neglecting the demographic and economic reality. The attitudes of the Czech public towards migration were also not favourable: the data from the 2018 European Values Study showed that almost 60 per cent of Czechs perceive a negative influence of immigrants on the labour market, crime and the welfare system (Chromková & Jaworsky, 2022).

As such, the prevailing anti-immigration approach created a fundamental discrepancy between the prevailing negative and security threats interwoven political discourse on migration and the actual policies enabling large-scale immigration for work, pointing to the de facto recognition of migration as a necessity for the Czech economy. According to our respondents, both politicians and representatives of relevant public administration institutions emphasized the predominant connection between migration and various security risks, especially crime and terrorism. Nevertheless, according to many of our respondents, and as confirmed by available data (CSO, 2023), migration in the Czech Republic is primarily associated with petty, rather than serious, crime (S007-PA, M058-NP, M081-PR, M082-PR), and the risk of terrorism is relatively small (S012-PA, S021-PA, M080-PR).

Our respondents offered two main explanations for the emphasis on the security threats associated with migration and, conversely, for neglecting the benefits of migration. First, after the ‘migration crisis’ of 2015–2016, the previously politically neglected topic of migration became one of the key topics in the political debate within the Czech Republic and the EU. Security concerns and prevention of migration through fear-mongering were presented by the leaders of both populist (D050-AC, M081-PR, M082-PR) and mainstream Czech political parties (M009-PA, S021-PA). Second, employees with a security perspective on migration issues predominate in the relevant government ministries, especially in the Ministry of the Interior. However, according to some of our respondents, the emphasis on security aspects of migration is predictable and has its positives, as argued by a policy officer from an NGO working in the area of development policies: ‘It is a public office. Whatever they say that will frame migration positively, they will immediately be accused of being under the influence of someone. That the ministry simply does not fulfill its proper [security] role’ (D011-NP, similarly to M056-PA).



The emphasis on migration-related security risks began to be reflected in development aid policymaking when political representatives, such as the Czech Foreign Minister during the 'migration crisis', started to promote the need to review the existing development policy and to re-focus aid in countries from which migrants came from (D047-NP). Migration is now also reflected in various conceptual strategies, such as the new military engagement in the Sahel, which exhibits a clear link between the development and security nexus as explained by a respondent from the public administration sector (D066-PA). Another change, which was supposed to help prevent or reduce migration, was the development and humanitarian program of the Ministry of the Interior called the Aid in Place program. In reality, however, this appears to be a unique program whose effect on either migration or development has not been effectively monitored and evaluated thus far. According to the respondents from the public administration sector (D048-PA, D013-PA), the nexus of migration and development in countries receiving Czech aid was also reflected in preparing the respective cooperation programs and their migration profiles. Nevertheless, since (i) not many immigrants come to the Czech Republic from the countries that are traditionally perceived as 'developing'<sup>6</sup> (D050-NP) and (ii) at the same time, the priority countries for Czech development aid are not the key source countries of migration and (iii) the Ministry of Foreign Affairs approves the sectors in which the Czech Republic will actually operate in each country, migration is reflected only very weakly in development policies. Similarly, the Czech humanitarian aid program approved by the government stipulates that specific countries are funded ad hoc (D013-PA). The respective countries are defined as facing general migratory pressures, and there is no specific alternative aid program for them (D047-NP). Countries from the Sahel region have recently been included for the first time precisely because of potential migration outflows. Consequently, according to the director of an NGO in the area of development (D050), humanitarian aid is growing at the expense of bilateral development cooperation.<sup>7</sup> This is a cause of incoherence since recipient countries have no economic development, which should lead to reduced migration pressures.

Our respondents expressed diverse views on the coherence between migration and development policies concerning the Aid in Place program. Some respondents, both from the non-governmental and public administration sectors (D008-NP, S021-PA, D037-NP), believe that on-the-spot assistance is an excellent tool to address the causes of migration and that development and migration are coherent. Specifically, according to respondents from NGOs working in the area of development (D050-NP, D047-NP), development projects can help increase education and thus encourage skilled migration or improve the living situation and thus prevent the emigration of the poorest. However, other respondents argued that on-site assistance was more of a political declaration by former Czech Prime Minister Babiš and other politicians, such as former Foreign Minister Zaorálek, for voters of their political parties. A policy officer at an NGO (D011-NP) pointed out that the actual amount of money (about 150 million CZK ~ US\$ 7.5 million annually) that the Czech Republic provides for on-site assistance is too small to have any significant effect. According to a public servant responsible for international migration (M009-PA), it is an inefficient way of sending money. Moreover, the solid rhetorical emphasis on helping on-site can be interpreted as part of the opposition against all war refugees and thus create xenophobic sentiments, as argued by the director of an NGO (M045-NP). Another NGO director (D050-NP) was also critical of other migration prevention programs under the auspices of the Ministry of the Interior (such as MEDEVAC), arguing that they are not systemic solutions and that more extensive multilateral programs could then have a more significant impact and potential.

## Migration and development policies: National vs. global perspective

Respondents who were critical of linking migration and development aid pointed out the tension between the national and the broader global or interstate, principles on which these two policies are based. While principles of national interest guide migration policy managed by the Ministry of the Interior with an emphasis on security, development policy under the Ministry of Foreign Affairs integrates a global perspective via the setting of its projects towards global cooperation, even though many projects are bilateral (D008-NP). For example, according to

a head of a department at a public office (D048-PA), efforts to link migration and development aid are misguided because migration, unlike development policy, is purely in the hands of the Czech government, and it would not be suitable for development cooperation to fall under the control of security or migration policy. Most respondents expressed great caution when it came to linking development and migration policies due to the potential of using development policy programs to legitimize the refusal of any migration in the Czech Republic.

The tension between the parochial national and more comprehensive global principle is also related to the division of competencies of the two key ministries responsible for the migration and development policy—MI and MFA. None of the ministries is tasked with reconciling the objectives of the two policies (D048-PA), and, as noted by a researcher specialized in the area of migration: *'I do not see any thinking about coherence there. No impacts are measured there; it is not monitored there (M059-AC)'*. The authority which should be responsible for the pursuit of policy coherence is the Council for Foreign Development Cooperation. However, as it is not directly responsible to the Prime Minister, its ability to influence either the government or the parliament is weak (D048-PA). This is a consequence of the impact of the 2015 'migration crisis' on the drafting of both the Czech foreign policy conception and Agenda 2030, although attempts to address migration via development policy are not in line with the setting of cooperation either in the OECD or the EU.

Many respondents were critical of the Czech government's national perspective on migration policy and the reluctance to engage in enhanced transnational cooperation in resolving the 2015–2016 'migration crisis'. According to respondents S021-PA and S012-PA, the 'crisis' has not directly impacted the Czech Republic since it closed its border already in September 2015 and was considered more of a transit country by migrants. The highest number of undocumented migrants (8500) was apprehended in 2015, and the most common nationalities were Ukrainians, Vietnamese and Russians. *There were only hundreds coming from Syria and Afghanistan. Nevertheless, the public is afraid of those of Muslim origin'*, noted a director of a public office (S021-PA). During the 'migration crisis', the Czech Republic opposed the European Union's approach for the first time, a move which the UN described as being part of a systematic approach by the Czech government to deter refugees: *'Even transit refugees (including children) were placed in detention, which the then Minister of Interior supported, albeit it later turned out that it conflicted with Czech legislation'* as noted by a researcher on migration (M059-AC) and there were 'pushbacks at Prague Airport' as reminded by policy officer from a non-governmental sector (D011-NP).

This highly restrictive national approach contrasted with the experience during the wars in the former Yugoslavia in the 1990s when the Czech Republic actively participated in helping refugees, who were often also Muslims. Overall, 5676 refugees were accepted without much media coverage (Trachtová, 2016). However, as explained by respondents from a non-governmental sector (M086-NP, D008-NP and M026-NP), since the 2015–2016 'migration crisis', the Czech public began to fear people from Syria and Africa, and political leaders exacerbated this fear. Consequently, the Czech Republic showed inflexibility in 2015 and focused excessively on protecting its borders, as noted by a head manager of an NGO (D008-NP). Albeit our interviews predate the Russian invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, it is important to note that the Czech approach to refugees has undergone a U-turn recently, and the Czech Republic has already welcomed almost 490,000 refugees from Ukraine (MI, 2023).

## Temporary migration paradigm in relation to development aid

During our interviews, respondents often raised the topics of circular migration, remittances and brain drain, which are not reflected in either Czech migration or development programs. According to a migration coordinator in an NGO (M086-NP), circular migration emerged primarily due to the transfer of employees from companies to employment agencies, which are sometimes more advantageous for migrants due to better time-off and sick leave conditions. Another advantage of circular migration is that it can prevent illegal employment. According to a leading manager of public office in the area of migration (M001-PA), circular migration also has the advantage that workers will be able 'to look around, find out if they want to work in the Czech Republic and possibly return'.

However, the prevailing view on Czech circular migration policy among our respondents, mainly from the academic and non-governmental sector, was critical, emphasizing the impossibility of migrants' integration (D055-AC, M043-AC, M045-NP, D011-NP) or a sense of uprooting (D055-AC). Alternatively, according to an academic in the area of development (D055-AC), 1 year is not enough for an individual to learn something new, which s/he could use after returning to his country of origin. There is also the risk that in case of persisting demand, temporary migrants will stay illegally after their circulating visas expire (D011-NP). Problems with temporary labour migration, however, also arise in times of economic recessions, as noted by a leading manager in a public office: '*The problem with [temporary] economic migration is that workers are fired whenever they are not needed*' (D066-PA). However, it is precisely during the economic crisis when financial assistance in less developed countries in the form of remittances is paradoxically most needed.

According to our respondents, a policy officer from an NGO and a senior lecturer from the academic sector (D049-NP, M039-AC), remittances<sup>8</sup> play an important role in circular migration, but they are not sufficiently reflected in the Czech Republic—neither financial nor social remittances.<sup>9</sup> A senior lecturer in the field of migration argues: '*If remittances were encouraged, they would be a far better tool than some artificially created aid programs in countries of origin*' (M039-AC). On the other hand, an academic in the field of development (D055-AC) argued that the impact of remittances wired by individuals is unlikely to impact the whole country's development significantly. In either case, in contrast to some other countries, there is no institutionalized support for remittances in the Czech Republic (D050-NP) because it is not considered to be either a relevant or current topic for the Czech Republic as argued by an NGO migration coordinator: '*I do not know any projects to support remittances, measures against brain drain, etc. They are not even considered. Only business and investments are addressed*' (M086-NP, also D014-PA). According to some respondents, however, remittances should be formally facilitated by creating guaranteed financial channels (D037-NP), and transfer fees should be reduced (D055-AC, D083-AC).

Another crucial issue often raised by our respondents is the brain drain. As aptly summarized by an NGO policy officer D011-NP: '*Do we help Ukraine by hiring their people for work and sending home remittances, or is it a crucial brain drain, and should these people rather stay at home?*' Although some experts have suggested that the issue of brain drain does appear in discussions at the policymaker level, which is important, overall, it is not a topic well reflected in policy practice (M059-AC). Moreover, the Czech Republic is also unable to retain many of its talented young people who are heading to the West. This outflow is compensated by the immigration of other young, talented people from developing countries (M039-AC, D008-NP), in the Czech case primarily from Ukraine (M081-PR and M082-PR).

## DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

This article explored stakeholders' perceptions of the efforts to promote migration and development policy coherence in the Czech Republic between 2010 and 2019. We contextualized the Czech response to the EU 'migration crisis' in 2015–2016, emphasizing the need for continued debate on the development and migration we strive for. Our findings indicate that the promotion of policy coherence in the Czech Republic tends to be technocratic, risking the reproduction of inequalities that coherence aims to address. Specifically, our respondents highlighted three key issues: (i) The increasing prominence of a security perspective in political discourse, with a lack of coherence in practice and on the normative level; (ii) the lack of reflection on crucial issues such as remittances and brain drain in the dominant paradigm of circular labour migration; and (iii) tension between the national and transnational/global perspectives that guide migration policy-making on the one hand and development policy on the other.

Based on our findings, we suggest several conclusions related to insights from previous studies on (in)coherence between migration and development policies in other countries. As such, their relevance is not limited to the

Czech context, but they have theoretical and policy implications for studying and implementing policy coherence in the CEE region. As such, the findings on (in)coherence between Czech migration and development policies can also help us understand the policy responses of Central and Eastern European governments since the 2015 'migration crisis'.

First, in line with Nijenhuis and Leung (2017), we highlight the prevailing incoherence due to a lack of agreement on definitions and synergies between migration and development policies. This is accentuated by the fact that migration and development policies constituted, until recently, two separate streams of policymaking. Their intersection most clearly emerged within the political anti-immigration discourse during the 2015–2016 'migration crisis'. Czech political representatives used the arguments of development aid in countries of origin to legitimize their rejection of accepting virtually any migrants coming to Europe. Despite this political rhetoric (Horký, 2011), practical coherence has been questioned, according to our respondents, especially with the proliferation of the migration-security nexus in recent development policy documents.

Second, the discourse on migration in the Czech Republic is too restrictive and politicized, which prevents the identification of synergies. However, one positive aspect of the politicization of migration is that it has brought more attention to the link between migration and development issues, which aligns with previous research in other European countries (Nyberg-Sørensen, 2012). Although the approach to 'migration for development' is limited in the Czech discourse, there is a growing recognition of migration's economic benefits while development is often imagined as less migration. Similar to Czaika and De Haas (2013), our research also revealed a contradiction between the prevailing 'tough' political discourse on migration and the actual policymaking practice. However, our respondents emphasized the need for policies to consider remittances and brain drain effects, given the trend towards supporting temporary and circular labour migration. Institutional support for the remittances outflows in development aid programs for maximizing the impact of remittances is an under-researched topic and this study highlights why it would be worthy of further research.

Third, the 'sedentary tendency' observed in Aid in Place, which aims to help people in their place of origin to prevent them from coming to Europe, reflects a narrow understanding of development policy, similar to that observed by Bakewell (2008), and more recently by Nijenhuis and Leung (2017) or Lietaer and Durand-Delacre (2021) about development practice. Among our respondents from major NGOs, the Czech Development Agency and staff from relevant public administration, we identified a 'discourse coalition' (similar to Czaika & De Haas, 2013) regarding the need for assistance in migrants' areas of origin to stop migration.

Finally, for greater policy coherence, we recommend that migration policy and development policy programs should be less focused on the needs of the nation-state and instead prioritize the needs from an international or global perspective in the search for effective management of migration processes and for reducing global inequalities. This would lead to harnessing the shared potential of both policies while avoiding the often shared concern about the misuse of development aid to oppose any immigration.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This work was supported by Technological Agency of the Czech Republic, research project TL01000468 Smart Migration in the Czech Republic and by Metropolitan University Prague, research project no. 100-4 'Center for Security Studies' (2023), based on a grant from the Institutional Fund for the Long-term Development of the Research Organization. Open access publishing facilitated by Mendelova univerzita v Brne, as part of the Wiley - CzechELib agreement.

## FUNDING INFORMATION

Technological Agency of the Czech Republic, Mendel University in Brno, Metropolitan University Prague – grant no. TL01000468 Smart Migration in the Czech Republic.

Metropolitan University Prague – Research project no. 93-04 Center for Security Studies.

## CONFLICT OF INTEREST STATEMENT

The authors declare that they have no known conflict of interest, personal relationships, financial interest or benefit that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this article.

## DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

The authors guaranteed anonymity to all interviewed respondents. Due to the small size of the Czech migration and development expert communities, adding more specific information about our respondents would enable their identification. All respondents consented to the use of their coded anonymous statements for scientific purposes.

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## ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup> Later referred to as the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration, see <https://www.iom.int/resources/global-compact-safe-orderly-and-regular-migration/res/73/195>.

<sup>2</sup> In the last report of CDI (CGD, 2023), the Czech Republic has improved its score in the migration category due to hosting high numbers of Ukrainian refugees but still faced criticism, among others, for its integration policies and low acceptance of migrants from less developed countries.

<sup>3</sup> CEE, usually meaning former communist states from the Eastern Bloc, creates Central Europe, Eastern Europe, and Southeast Europe (primarily the Balkans). CEE countries include Albania, Belarus, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Kosovo, Latvia, Lithuania, Moldova, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Poland, Romania, Russia Serbia, Slovakia, Slovenia and Ukraine.

<sup>4</sup> Because our data collection and analysis preceded the Russian invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, we do not discuss the current refugee wave and its effects on the coherence of migration and development policies in the Czech Republic. Such an analysis requires a longer time lag and the collection of new data that is not yet available. However, according to available data (UNHCR, 2024), the Czech Republic is currently the country with the highest number of refugees per capita of its citizens with 340 thousand of currently living refugees from Ukraine, and 600 thousand of refugees from Ukraine registered for temporary protection (April 2024).

<sup>5</sup> There was an increase in both bilateral and total ODA, driven mainly by aid provided to Ukrainian refugees.

<sup>6</sup> The numbers of foreigners from developing countries range between hundreds to few thousands (eg. for Afghanistan, Ethiopia, the Philippines, India). For details see statistics <https://www.czso.cz/csu/czso/foreigners-in-the-czech-republic-9j236rjid1>.

<sup>7</sup> This perception is partially supported by data from the time of the interviews. In 2016, humanitarian aid formed app. 45% of development aid. By 2019, humanitarian aid was almost equal to the value of development aid at 90% its size. Since then the proportion of humanitarian aid has decreased, but still remains more significant than the pre migration crisis (OECD, 2023).

<sup>8</sup> In 2022, total outflow of remittances from the Czech Republic was 82 billion CZK (approx. US\$ 4.1 billion) according to the Czech Statistical Office (<https://apl.czso.cz/pll/rocenka/rocnkavyber.remit>).

<sup>9</sup> Social remittances are the ideas, behaviours, identities and social capital that flow from receiving- to sending-country communities (Levitt, 1998). For our purposes, let us mention in particular the skills and experience that migrant workers can bring back to their country of origin and use there to develop their economic activities.

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**How to cite this article:** Stojanov, R., Seidlová, A., Bureš, O., Klvaňová, R., Štěpánková, L. & Procházka, D. (2024) Synergy or disparity? Czech experts' insights on migration and development policies. *International Migration*, 00, 1–16. Available from: <https://doi.org/10.1111/imig.13320>