RESEARCH ARTICLE

WILEY

Contemporary Czech migration policy: 'Labour, not people'?

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Abstract

This paper offers an analysis of the Czech migration policy since the so-called European Union (EU) migration crisis in 2015 and its key instruments when it comes to migrant workers from third (non-EU) countries. On the basis of semi-structured interviews with 80 experts on various aspects of migration policymaking, we identified three key features of Czech migration policymaking: (i) perception of migration as a threat, (ii) orientation on temporary labour migration and (iii) lack of coherent and systematic conceptual approach towards migration. Jointly, these features explain a central paradox of the contemporary Czech migration policy: the contradiction between a strong anti-immigration political discourse and the actual numbers of immigrants that has been rising steadily. Similarly to other European countries, there has been a growing tendency towards selectiveness in Czech migration policy, manifested in recent instruments specifically focused on attracting highly qualified migrants. However, the selection criteria are mainly based on the country of origin, and the quotas for incoming migrants reflect the existing administrative capacities and short-term needs of the current Czech labour market for low- and middle-qualified professionals rather than long-term economic goals and demographic needs. Since the global economic recession (2008–2010), Czech migration policies have still not genuinely considered the fact that it is people, rather than just 'labour', who come to the Czech Republic.

KEYWORDS
Czech Republic, Europe, international migration, labour migration, migration policy

1 | INTRODUCTION

Migration policies in Europe since 2015 have been looking for ways to cope with the arrivals of millions of immigrants. Between 2015 and 2019, more than 4.8 million residence permits (first issued, for work purposes) and more than 4.7 million asylum applications were issued in the European Union (EU, 28 members, including the United Kingdom). This represents a significant increase from the 2010–2014 period when less than three million work permits and about two million asylum applications were issued (Eurostat, 2020). In most EU countries, often referred to in the media as the 'migration crisis', it has prompted changes in the composition of parliaments, governments and presidential posts through the elections. Therefore, many European governments are still searching for

suitable approaches to deal with potential future immigration waves. A genuine pan-European solution to migration is necessary, going beyond the national immigration plans. Nevertheless, it is also important to understand the respective national migration policies of individual EU member states. Although there are already numerous studies of migration policies of Western European countries (Duszczyk et al., 2020; Hampshire, 2016; Scotto, 2017), the current migration policies of the Central and Eastern European countries (CEECs) have been relatively understudied thus far. This study seeks to fill this gap by focusing on the Czech Republic's migration policy, which, along with the migration policies of other CEECs (especially Hungary and Poland), has been perceived as more restrictive, at least on the level of political and public discourse (Duszczyk et al., 2020).

Along with the other members of the so-called Visegrad Four countries (V4; Poland, Hungary, Slovakia and the Czech Republic), the Czech Republic has been a vocal critic of EU-wide immigration measures, and it can be described as one of the flagships of European anti-migration policy. This is not only because of the repeated rejection of all proposals to share the immigration burden with southern European countries. The Czech Republic was also the first country that closed its borders in September 2015, before the arrival of any immigrants from the first massive wave (Wintour, 2018), albeit it did not record a significant immigration increase from countries that made up the largest numbers of immigrants coming to Europe in this time period. Furthermore, successive Czech governments have been among the most anti-immigrant actors in the EU, refusing to accept 'even only one refugee' within the proposed EU quotas. This resulted in a lawsuit by the European Commission against the so-called Visegrad Four countries for violating EU law (iDNES 2020; Rankin, 2020). Because a vast majority of Czech citizens support the governmental anti-immigration stance (Červenka, 2018; European Commission, 2017; Jurečková, 2020; MI CR, 2020a), the Commission's legal action sparked several anti-migration protests in the Czech Republic. In 2016, as in the following years, the Czech government refused to accept 2691 asylum seekers (only 12 were accepted) (Antošová, 2019; MFA, 2017). In contrast, during the 1991–1997 period, the Czech Republic granted temporary refugee status to 5676 citizens of the former Yugoslavia countries. After the Balkan conflicts, a significant part of them returned home (including via a voluntary repatriation programme), but some remained and obtained permanent residence (Trachtová, 2016). As recently as 2001, the Czech Republic still recorded over 18,000 asylum applications (MI CR, 2018).

However, the historically record high numbers of migrants coming to the Czech Republic in the last years (see Figure 1) reveal a contradiction between the strong anti-immigration political discourse and the prevalent practice of extensive temporary labour recruitment. In this context, the primary goal of this article is to identify the key features of the contemporary Czech migration policy, with a specific focus on workers from the so-called third (i.e., non-EU) countries. Specifically, we posited the following research questions:

1. What are the main features of the Czech migration policy since the so-called EU migration crisis in 2015?
2. What are the key instruments of the Czech migration policy regarding migrant workers from third (non-EU) countries?

For purposes of this study, we consider migration policy as rules (including laws, regulations and measures) that national states define and implement to manage the volume, origin, direction, and internal composition of immigration flows, as well as government's statements of what it intends (such as decisions or orders) regarding the selection, admission, settlement and deportation of foreign citizens residing in the country (Bjerre et al., 2015; Czaika & De Haas, 2013). In this case study, we focus more on praxis and actual implementation of the rules, political tools and statements.

2 | EUROPEAN MIGRATION POLICIES

Several attempts have recently been made to evaluate migration policy developments through large-scale quantitative cross-country comparisons aiming to observe general trends (Beirens et al., 2019; de Haas et al., 2018; Helbling & Kalkum, 2018; Peters, 2015). A significant body of literature has also focused on qualitative case studies or comparisons of targeted migration policies (e.g., Cerna, 2016; Duszczyk et al., 2020; Givens & Luedtke, 2005). According to this literature, multiple factors shape the formation of migration policies and attitudes towards migration. Apart from the obvious needs to fill labour market gaps and respond to demographic trends such as population ageing, migration policy is influenced by processes of globalisation, trade links and trade policies (Castles, 2004; Peters, 2015), national political and institutional set-up (Abou-Chadi, 2016), development cooperation and post-colonial ties (Raghuram, 2009). In addition, domestic policies, public attitudes towards migration, electoral
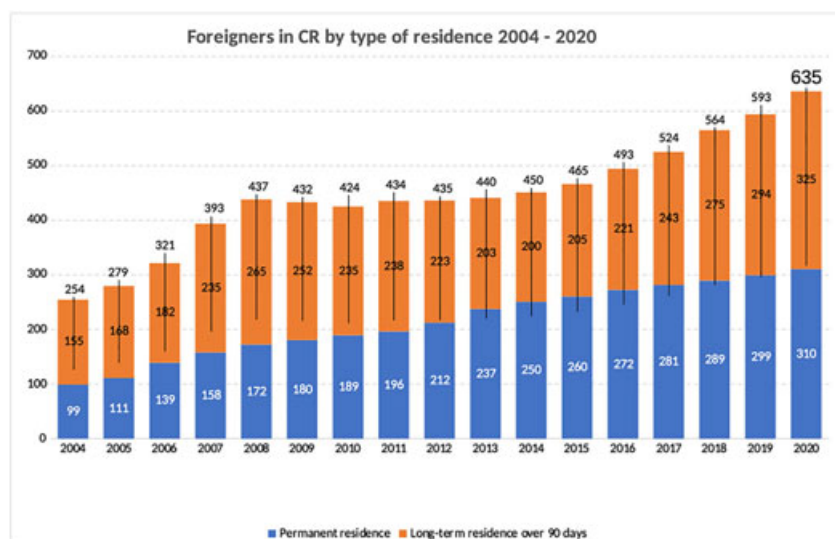

FIGURE 1 Trend in the number of foreigners in the Czech Republic (CR) by type of residence (2004–2020). *Source*: CSO (2021)

campaigns, and business interests usually play a crucial role. As a result, the discourse on migration, actual policy formation and its implementation are often separated (Czaika & De Haas, 2013), which can lead to confusing and incoherent policies.

The existing literature identifies several challenges regarding the admission of labour migrants and long-term 'migration management': problems with qualification recognition of immigrants, resulting in their position in precarious low-level jobs and worse socio-economic status than the majority population (Duszczyk et al., 2020), the need for more transparent and swift entry procedures (Beirens et al., 2019), as well as managing the needs of the labour market and demographic ageing of the population along with public discourse on migration and fears of irregular migrants (Beirens et al., 2019; Scotto, 2017). However, there are also other challenges, such as the needs of immigrants on a regional level, work permissions' rule for asylum seekers, the selection systems for migrants, and coherence of migration and development policies. Moreover, the discourse around migration and (to some extent) the national migration policies have also been impacted by significant events during the last two decades: the EU enlargement process, the global financial recession of 2008–2010, the perceived massive immigration (so-called migration crisis) since 2015–2016, and the COVID pandemic since 2020.

Although it is too early to assess the impact of the COVID pandemic, the prior events led to concerns about excessive politicisation and securitisation of migration, including growing hostile attitudes towards immigrants in European societies and the rise of populist political parties in many European countries (Grande et al., 2019; Lutz, 2019). The relevant literature includes both analyses following the securitisation theory formulated by the Copenhagen school focusing primarily on elite-level securitising discourses ('speech acts', see Buzan et al., 1998) and the more recent Paris school variant, which highlights the importance of routinised security practices by security practitioners (Bigo et al., 2006). Specifically, when it comes to migration, the classic securitisation studies have documented the attempts of key securitising actors (especially governments, political parties and state bureaucracies) to portray migration as an existential threat that can negatively influence the very existence and wellbeing of a community (Bourbeau, 2011; d'Appollonia & Reich, 2008). In most EU countries in the last decade, this involved discursive articulation of three lines of argument on migration: (i) the idea that immigrants threaten the values and the culture of the community; (ii) the link between immigration, crime and terrorism; and (iii) the negative impact immigration has on the economy. The Paris school studies have emphasised who does what and how and in what context when it comes to the actual handling of migration flows in Europe (Bigo, 2002; Huysman, 2000). They also explore how security policymaking, institutional competition and political struggle turn issues like immigration into security problems.

According to de Haas et al. (2018), however, the political discourse around migration might have seemed to become increasingly restrictive, but at the same time, their analysis of policy changes in 45 countries after 1945 shows that policies have evolved from general restrictiveness to a more selective approach. In general, there are fewer nationality-based or general entry restrictions that characterised the migration policies of developed countries before the 2000s. However, this does not necessarily result in a less restrictive immigration policy overall. The increased selectiveness is manifested by tendencies to liberalise entry and stay conditions for highly qualified labour migrants,[1] while controlling those who are not welcomed, for example, the often mentioned 'irregular' and low-qualified migrants (Helbling & Kalkum, 2018). Those who are not involved in the targeted policies may end up with fewer ways to access the country of destination than before (Cerna, 2016; Ip, 2020).

Most countries, including the Czech Republic, declare a preference for highly qualified migrants in their official political discourse (though usually, their labour markets demand both highly qualified and low-qualified migrant) and therefore put in place various point-based systems to attract them during the last two decades (the Netherlands, the United Kingdom and Sweden in 2008; Germany in 2009; Austria in 2011, see Cerna, 2016). According to Cerna (2016), the nature of attitudes towards highly qualified migrants in different European countries after the most recent financial crisis depended on three main factors: the impact of the financial crisis on unemployment and economic output, the extent of labour shortages, and the influx of migrants before the crisis. Whereas the United Kingdom, Italy or Spain adopted a more restrictive approach (fewer options to enter, increased selectivity, higher wage, and skills cap, lowering entry quotas, stricter conditions for job advertising by employers, work permit renewals and labour market tests), other countries such as Germany or Sweden continued to liberalise their policies in response to employers' demands (Beirens et al., 2019; Cerna, 2016; Heckmann, 2016).

However, even if the entry conditions for selected labour migrants seem to have liberalised, resulting in 'more channels for legal immigration', it does not mean the rights to stay or live in a specific country (i.e., the integration policies) did as well (Duszczyk et al., 2020). The right to stay and pathways to citizenship can differ tremendously based on the qualification category to which a specific migrant belongs (Ruhs, 2011). de Haas et al. (2018) point to growing restrictiveness since the 2000s towards those seeking family reunification, which is an important strategy for regular labour migrants or refugees who aim to settle in the new country (Kibria, 2020) and lead a 'normal' life. Across the EU and other major immigrant destinations, emphasis is increasingly placed on temporary (or circular) migration and its proper 'management' (Collins, 2020; Costa & Martin, 2018).

Thus, the EU and policy developments in the other EU Member States are also essential factors in the European context. Whereas the Member States determine the numbers of legal migrants admitted for employment, entrepreneurship, or study purposes, the EU sets common procedures for the entry and rights connected to legal residence (European Parliament, 2018). In 2016, as its response to the migration crisis, the European Parliament published a communication calling for a holistic approach to migration across the EU in the face of population decline and emerging (as well as future) shortages in specific labour sectors, describing the current approach to labour migration as

fragmented and leading to low-level of qualification recognition and thus a possible 'brain waste' of third-country nationals (European Parliament, 2018). As a reaction to the migration crisis, the European Commission has also promoted the management of 'mixed flows' (through offering more legal pathways of entry) as a critical current policy issue due to the increasingly unclear distinction between asylum seekers and those labelled economic migrants making up a large part of the immigration flow into Europe in the recent years (Beirens et al., 2019).

Nevertheless, two major problems arise with the management of mixed flows as promoted by the EU. Firstly, there might be a mismatch between what types of immigrant host countries want to attract and those available (highly qualified vs. low-qualified). Secondly, more programmes are being implemented for highly qualified than lower qualified migrants (Beirens et al., 2019; EMN, 2019; Oxfam, 2020). One example is legal migration pilot projects focused on circular and long-term migration of young graduates and workers, so far agreed with four North African countries (Egypt, Morocco, Nigeria and Tunisia). The EU Member States are strongly encouraged to develop more such projects in cooperation with third countries and aim for a broader geographical scope (European Commission, 2019). Offering legal pathways for migrants is increasingly being perceived by European policymakers as an essential way to stem irregular migration (Hampshire, 2016). However, their impact in this regard has been minimal (Beirens et al., 2019), and the overall emphasis on the temporariness of migration has been questioned (Costa & Martin, 2018; Dauvergne & Marsden, 2014; Lenard & Straehle, 2010).

A large part of the aforementioned literature analysing migration policies' evolution aims to observe a general trend across many countries and draw lessons for cross-national comparisons based on secondary data or policy documents (normative level). As a result, they tend to neglect both the discourse gap (the difference between official discourse and actual policies put in place) as well as the implementation gap (the differences between policies and their translation into practice) (Czaika & De Haas, 2013). The key contribution of this study concerns the inquiry of these gaps: we address how migration policy is perceived, implemented and negotiated within a unique historical context and a specific political and institutional set-up, but also the degree to which it is influenced by global processes and EU-wide efforts to establish a common approach to migration. Furthermore, we present perspectives of the multiple stakeholders involved in migration policymaking and implementation, which makes our study rather unique. Therefore, the following section offers a concise overview of the critical developments in immigration to the Czech Republic and its national migration policy evolution.

3 | EVOLUTION OF THE CZECH MIGRATION POLICY: FROM OPEN MIND TO CLOSED BORDER

The origins of Czech migration policy can be traced back to the 1989 Velvet Revolution in Czechoslovakia and the subsequent attempts to liberalise all types of cross-border movements of people, culminating with accession to the EU in 2004. During this period, the Czech Republic became a target country for immigration in Central and Eastern Europe. While in 1993, around 78,000 foreigners were living in the Czech Republic, in 2020, the number of foreigners reached almost 635,000, that is, 6% of the total population (CSO, 2020; MI CR, 2021). Figure 1 illustrates the development of immigration to the Czech Republic between 2004 and 2020, with a steady increase of permanently settled immigrants—in 2020, almost half of the foreigners were permanent residence holders as well as those staying on long-term visas. In terms of country of origin, migrants from non-EU countries prevail over migrants from EU countries—in 2019, 59% (350,589) of all foreigners staying in Czechia came from non-EU countries (MI CR, 2020b). The majority of migrants came from Ukraine (165,654), Slovakia (124,544), Vietnam (62,884) and the Russian Federation (41,907) in 2020 (MI CR, 2021), reflecting the past geopolitical links of the country. Employment and entrepreneurship were the dominant purposes of stay for the 141,130 migrants from non-EU countries staying in Czechia on a long-term visa in 2019 (82,807), followed by family reasons (33,852), study (17,141) and other reasons (7,330) (MI CR, 2020b). The number of asylum seekers and international protection holders have been at low levels, with 1,922 new asylum applications accepted, 61 asylums and 86 subsidiary protections granted in 2019 (MI CR, 2020b).

The development of the Czech migration policy during the first two decades 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 the areas of both migration and integration throughout the 1990s (Baršová & Barša, 2005). 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 centralisation of migration policy decision-making within the MI's Department of Asylum and Migration Policy. Similarly, Kušniráková and Čižinský (2011) described the adoption of the Aliens Act of 1 January 2000, as an MI effort to strengthen its departmental powers and to increase its control over migration to remedy the overly liberal approaches of the 1990s which, in the eyes of MI officials, had caused undue chaos and risks to the security of the Czech Republic.

In this respect, Drbohlav (2011) argued that the trend in Czech migration policy during the first decade of the 21st century was moving towards an assimilation strategy, which was in line with the preferences of the majority of the public. His analysis confirmed a shift away from (at least officially declared) multiculturalism to a model of 'civic integration', which was also observed by Baršová and Barša (2005). Furthermore, according to Drbohlav, MI succeeded in building a highly centralised management model of both the migration and integration policy.

Previous research on the Czech migration policy has also identified many challenges and significantly fewer strengths at the time of the last economic crisis in 2008–2009 (Kušniráková & Čižinský, 2011).

Although several more recent analyses reflecting the current migration waves to Europe are already available (Bauerová, 2018; Beger, 2020; Jungwirth, 2018; Lebeda & Menšíková, 2016; Stojarová, 2019), they are not based on research reflecting the view of all key stakeholders, and they addressed only partial aspects of the Czech migration policy. For example, they have identified several significant strengths of the current Czech migration policy, including several projects from the end of the first decade of the 21st century, for example, green cards, a pilot project of managed migration from Ukraine (Stojarová, 2019) or the establishment of the State Integration Programme for Refugees in 2015 (Jungwirth, 2018). According to Beger (2020), even the politicisation of migration in the aftermath of the 2015 migration crisis can be seen as a somewhat positive development leading to a more proactive approach to migration policy and its conceptualisation. However, the missing long-term conceptualisation of the Czech migration policy's external dimension and lack of cooperation at the EU level are also among the most frequently mentioned shortcomings (Lebeda & Menšíková, 2016). Other critical challenges include the absence of a clear vision for the labour migration policy and associated differences among existing strategies of individual ministries within the Czech government (such as different interests about labour immigration among Ministry of Interior, Ministry of Economy and Trade, and MLSA), lack of attention to other categories of migration (study purposes or family reunification), insufficient improvement of integration services at the local level, neglect of political and other rights of migrants (Bauerová, 2018; Stojarová, 2019), and lack of engagement with the Czech population when it comes to sensitivity and social perception towards foreign workers (Bauerová, 2018; Drbohlav & Janurová, 2019; Jungwirth, 2018). Overall, therefore, the challenges have substantially prevailed over the strengths.

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 CR, 2015). The most important cross-cutting topic in this strategy is the principle of security. However, according to Kušniráková and Čižinský (2011), the security emphasis in the Czech migration policy is much older. It is a consequence of path-dependency in migration policymaking dating back to the socialist state that delegated the agenda of migration to the MI whose main concern was to control cross-border movement and sanction all unauthorised mobility.

The entry and stay of migrants to the Czech Republic are regulated by the Foreigners Act (no. 326/1999), last amended in 2019 (MI CR, 2020b). 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, the MLSA and the Refugee Facilities Administration. The most recent key policy programmes of economic migration from third countries are summarised in Table 1. There has been a tendency to integrate a variety of projects into a smaller number of programmes. The recent programmes for highly qualified workers have become less geographically selective, perhaps to attract more professionals or due to the perceived safety of highly qualified migrants. Despite this, a recent report (MI CR, 2020b) shows that overall applications remain relatively low compared with the schemes for less qualified workers. The majority of applications still come from Ukraine, India or Russia, that is, countries targeted explicitly by one of the previous projects for highly qualified migrants.

4 | METHODOLOGY

To identify the main strengths, challenges and features of contemporary Czech labour migration policies, we employed an exploratory qualitative research approach. Specifically, in 2018 and 2019, we conducted in-depth, semi-structured interviews with 80 experts on various aspects of migration policymaking, representing the governmental sector (ministries and governmental agencies) as well as on regional level (municipal or county organisations and their agencies), non-profit organisations focusing on immigrants, private sector (business companies and business umbrella organisations, private lawyers specialising on migration law), the main unions, and academia (universities and research institutions).

Interviews took place with respondents mainly from Prague, Brno, and other regional cities, the main political, economic, and academic life centres in the Czech Republic. Some interviews took place online or via telephone. The main criteria for selecting respondents were their expertise, experience working in the researched areas and knowledge of the investigated policies, their influence over the drafting and/or implementation of these policies and their ability to shape professional opinions. In most cases, the interviewees could be described as 'top managers' within their organisations. In the academic sector, they were generally senior lecturers. Their selection was very deliberate, that is, we first identified experts based on their existing expertise in various aspects of the Czech migration policy, excluding representatives from the authors' home institutions. Approximately three quarters of our respondents were selected in this way. We then used the snowballing method based on the recommendations of already interviewed experts. Thus, in contrast to previous studies of the Czech migration policy, our interviewees include prominent experts from all relevant sectors. The number of respondents in leading (decision-making) positions (heads of departments in ministries and other public institutions; owners and top managers of private companies, directors of non-governmental organisations and academic institutions) in our sample is 41, that is, a little more than 50%. To encourage openness, all respondents were guaranteed anonymity, including the names of their organisations in ensuing scholarly publications. Neither the gender nor the age of the respondents was a criterion when selecting interviewees. These data are therefore not presented in Table 2, which provides basic information about the interviewees.

We did not experience significant challenges when accessing our respondents. The interviews took place in our or respondents' offices, in restaurants, or at home in case of online/phone calls, and they lasted 45 to 60 min. We received a combination of professional views and personal opinions. Both were very valuable since we conducted

TABLE 1   Overview of the main labour migration projects and programmes for third-country (non-EU) nationals

Duration/ Start	Name	Qualification*	Geographical target	Description
2012–2019	Fast Track	Highly qualified	All third-countries*	Specialists in IT, industry, services (intra-company relocations) faster permit procedure
2013–2019	Welcome Package	Highly qualified	All third-countries	investors, leading and specialised personnel
2015–2019	Project Ukraine and India	Highly qualified	Ukraine, India	EU Blue Card equivalent faster permit procedure
2016–2019	Regime Ukraine	middle to low-qualified	Ukraine	
2018–2019	Regime Other States	Middle to low-qualified	Mongolia, Philippines, Serbia	
2018–2019	Project Farmer	Low-qualified	Ukraine	Agriculture, food industry and forestry
2019	Program Highly Qualified Employee (substituting Project Ukraine and India)	Highly qualified, possibility of family reunification	All third-countries	Key management, IT, scientific and health personnel
2019	Program Qualified Employee (substituting Regime Ukraine, Other States and Project Farmer)	Middle to low-qualified	Philippines, Montenegro, Mongolia, Serbia, Ukraine, Belarus, India, Kazakhstan, Moldova	
2019	Program Key Scientific Personnel (substituting Fast Track and Welcome Package)	Highly qualified possibility of family reunification	All third-countries	Investors, start-ups, research institutions top personnel faster permit procedure
2019–2022	Program Special Work Visa for Ukraine citizens	Low-qualified	Ukraine	Agriculture, food industry and forestry (quota 125 workers/ month)

Source: Ministry of Interior of the Czech Republic (2020b).

TABLE 2   Respondents' characteristics

Expertise/Sector	Public (central) - PC	Public (regional) - PR	Academic - A	Non-profit - N	Private - P	Total
Leading (decision-making) position (L)	18 (PC1-5L)	7 (PR1-5L)	2 (A1-5L)	8 (N1-5L)	6 (P1-5L)	41
1. Immigrants' integration	3 (PC1)	11 (PR1)	6 (A1)	6 (N1)	0 (P1)	26
2. International migration	6 (PC2)	0 (PR2)	4 (A2)	10 (N2)	1 (P2)	21
3. Security	6 (PC3)	1 (PR3)	1 (A3)	0 (N3)	1 (P3)	9
4. Labour migration	6 (PC4)	0 (PR4)	0 (A4)	0 (N4)	11 (P4)	17
5. Migration and development	2 (PC5)	0 (PR5)	3 (A5)	2 (N5)	0 (P5)	7
Total	23	12	14	18	13	80

the first large-scale qualitative research project on the Czech labour migration policy.

The interviews' transcripts were coded using the Atlas.ti 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 this first step, we created 137 codes related to 6 main areas (policymaking actors; migration policy tools; dimensions of migration policy; migration-related social issues; regions and countries; types of migrants and their features) and evaluations by our respondents as positive/ negative or ambivalent. 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.

5 | RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section presents the following main topics identified during our research: (1) a negative perception of migration and securitisation of

migration, (2) emphasis on the temporary circulation of migrants and (3) long-term conception of migration policy.

5.1 | The general negative perception of migration and its implications

As discussed above, migration has recently become one of the most contentious issues in the EU Member States and a substantial body of literature goes a step further, arguing that migration and asylum in Europe have been securitised. Although the literature on the securitisation of Czech migration is still relatively scarce, a few studies have already applied the Copenhagen school approach focusing on elite-level securitising discourses. Stulík and Krčál's (2019) analysis of stenographs of speeches held by members of the Czech Parliament during the 2013–2017 election period revealed a negative framing of migration as a problem with three main themes that largely echo the aforementioned findings from the other EU Member States: (i) the perception of migration as a crisis, (ii) pointing out the illegality of migration and (iii) linking migration with the economic situation in the Czech Republic and its adverse effects on the economy. Naxera and Krčál's (2018) analysis of election programmes of political parties that have succeeded in the October 2017 parliamentary elections concluded that in the light of moral panic related to the migration crisis in 2015–2016,[2] almost all parties were influenced by this topic and portrayed migration as a threat to the nation.

The analysis of the interview transcripts in our study revealed similar findings. 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, the prevailing approach to migration has substantially been framed by security concerns. As such, it has also exhibited numerous restrictive tendencies, which, according to a majority of our respondents, strengthened substantially during the so-called migration crisis in 2015–2016 and has persisted ever since. Specifically, our respondents noted that both political representatives and policymakers emphasised the predominant association of migration with various security risks and economic problems while failing to recognise and communicate the benefits of migration publicly, especially for the Czech economy and other spheres of life (PC3L18), as well as accepting migration as a regular part of the globalised world (PC5L08) and its necessity in demographic terms (P4L16). Moreover, following the 2015 migration crisis, the previously politically neglected topic of migration became one of the key topics of political discussion, with not only populist but also traditional parties promoting a highly restrictive migration policy:

> ... [T]he crisis led to a profound change of the public narrative and how the topic is perceived politically. It led to politicisation. Because for a long time, the migration and asylum policy was very technocratic. DAMP always played a big role. And after the migration crisis, the topic became part of the parliamentary

negotiations that were not necessarily expert debates but utterly political debates. (N211)

Another responded argued the securitisation of migration in the classic sense has already happened since 'the tendency in the last years is that in the Czech Republic, primarily from the perspective of the political representation, supported of course by the people, is that migration is something that can threaten us and our approach to migration will be that we don't want migration' (PC5L08).

According to some of our respondents, the prevailing negative ethos towards migration also has far-reaching consequences in practice. Specifically, the restrictive and securitised approach to migration has been reflected in specific practices when it comes to the day-to-day management of Czech migration policy, manifested in practice by complicated and lengthy administrative procedures, lack of transparency of the bureaucratic processes, lack of comprehensive and accessible information provision (e.g., in the language of the migrants), or in the recent emphasis on circular migration that we discuss below. Some respondents also perceived the barriers migrants face as a symbolic expression of the unwelcoming ethos towards migrants in the public sphere: 'Everything is set up in quite a repressive manner so that they don't get the sense of being wanted, welcomed here' (N1L04). Similar tools or procedures are also used in other countries, as Beirens et al. (2019) confirmed.

In contrast to both the Copenhagen and Paris school scholars, who tend to accentuate only the negative aspects and implications of securitisation, some of our respondents also recognised its benefits. For example, one respondent saw the long-term security emphasis by the Ministry of Interior as a form of prevention against populism that ensured relative stability of the Czech migration policy, which did not change profoundly in reaction to the 2015′ migration crisis': 'It helped in the sense that nobody really dares to attack the [Ministry of] Interior and it [migration policy] cannot be destroyed as easily as I would have expected' (PC4L49). Moreover, a majority of our respondents appreciated the recent development of public policies aimed at migrants' integration, especially the institutionalisation of the network of integration centres at the local level, where tensions occasionally arise between the migrant workers and the locals, especially in smaller municipalities (e.g., Kvasiny, Pardubice, Pilsen region to name some localities mentioned in the interviews) that were totally unprepared for these arrivals in large numbers. Respondent N211 specifically connected this development with the strong politicisation and securitisation of the Czech migration debate: 'As the awareness about the topic rose, it, on the one hand, led to polarisation and escalation of the debate and repressive approach, but it also led towards strengthening of the debate about integration, especially on the local level and many cities took part and began more conceptual approaches to the integration of foreigners.'

In addition, our respondents noted that the strong anti-immigration discourse developed during the 2015 migration crisis went hand in hand with large-scale admission of legal migrants, most of them labourers and family members, and the development of new programmes for labour migration that were pushed for by employers

in specific sectors experiencing a shortage of labourers (see above). Thus, there has been a significant contradiction between the prevailing negative and often securitised political discourse on migration and the actual policies enabling large-scale labour immigration (N211), which can be interpreted as an acknowledgement of migration as a necessity for the Czech economy (N2L22). Thus, according to one respondent, the Czech Republic should take a more pragmatic approach, draw inspiration from Germany, and accept refugees seeking refuge in Europe who match the Czech labour market needs (PC5L08).

In the view of another respondent, however, the anti-immigration discourse has not only targeted refugees but it also negatively affected labour migration by promoting the perception of the undesirability of permanent immigration: 'We can see that with the refugee crisis, the change of rhetoric using anti-immigration narrative also affected labour migration as it offered legitimisation for its temporariness and for these people not being able to obtain full-fledged status, even if they bring wealth to the society. There is a tendency to integrate them as little as possible so that their stay can be interrupted and they can quickly leave the country anytime it is necessary from the perspective of their employer or the state' (N126). This quote also indicates that the voices of proponents of using Czech migration policy for short-term (current labour market) goals have thus far prevailed over the proponents of using immigration for long-term (economic growth and demographic) goals. Most recently, this became apparent in the debates concerning circular migration in the Czech Republic.

5.2 | Circular migration or integration?

The Czech Republic has endorsed the model of temporary labour migration and the concept of circular migration[3] (Agunias & Newland, 2007; EMN, 2011; Hugo, 2003) since 2010 when a new system of migration, prioritising circular migration to fill labour shortages instead of longer term migration or permanent settlement, started to emerge. Specifically, the 2010 Czech Action Plan on Migration highlights the importance of (i) flexibility in planning migration for economic activities so that it is possible to respond and adapt to rapid changes in the economy and (ii) allowing low-qualified workers to work only temporarily (EMN, 2011).

The concept of circular migration has become increasingly popular among Czech policymakers (Kušniráková & Čižinský, 2011) as a response to a growing demand for labour in the Czech economy before the COVID crises. The positive elements of the concept include the potential for repeated legal returns to the Czech Republic and the receipt of a work permit for a longer period. There is also a belief that the circular concept should include a flexible tool to deal with economic crises and incorporate options to enable permanent settlement under certain conditions. In contrast, negative aspects include the objections to ethical implications of circular migration, highlighting the need to leave the Czech Republic after a couple of years when people are already settled in a familiar environment and have children attending Czech schools and so on.

As discussed above, large numbers of labour migrants in the Czech Republic, especially from Ukraine, have been recruited by labour agencies. They have frequently used the 3-month Schengen visa to come to work in the Czech Republic, responding to employers' demand for the quick arrival of the labour force that could not be satisfied by lengthy procedures for obtaining labour permits for longer periods and limited quotas for labour migrants. These migrants had to reapply for a new visa after 3 months, which caused an administrative overload and brought uncertainty for both migrant workers and employers concerning the possibility of continuation of employment. Respondent P4L66 argued that the procedures for obtaining regular labour permits are extremely slow in order for the consular offices to be able to regulate Schengen visas: 'Since we are members of Schengen, we can't stop the 90-day stays. However, we all know that the 90-day stays twice a year substitute work visas. And I say it openly that there is undoubtedly corruption.' In this context, it is not surprising that one of the aims of the more recent governmental labour migration projects was to eliminate the long-term corruption allegations at Ukrainian consular offices associated with the previous Visapoint programmes. Still, the data provided by the MLSA show that the proportion of short-term labour migration has been rising unprecedentedly in recent years. The rise of short-term work permits in the past 5 years (especially those under three months used by workers recruited by labour agencies) is shown in Table 3 below. In June 2019, there were around 56,000 valid work permits for over 12 months (mainly Employee Cards), and 49,000 short-term work permits under 3 months. As the data only show the permits valid in the month of June (stock data), we can assume that the actual number of workers from third countries with short-term visas throughout the entire year was at least double. The number of short-term work permits dropped significantly in June 2020, presumably due to the COVID-19 situation. Still, in December 2020, the number of work permits under 3 months rose again to around 30,000.

As a reaction to this situation, in the process of the 2019 novelisation of the Foreigners Act that occurred at the time of our field research (2018–2019), a new instrument of migration policy, 'Special work visa', was proposed. It targets circular migration from Ukraine, enabling a quick administrative procedure for obtaining a work permit for a maximum of one year without the possibility of prolongation.[4] Some respondents stressed the advantages of this new temporary work and residence permit for Ukrainians who can use it for an exploratory journey for 1 year and then decide whether, upon return, they want to apply for an employees' card for a more qualified job that allows its holders to bring families and settle for long-term (1–2 years with the possibility of prolongation from the Czech Republic, PC2L01). The representatives of employers among our respondents held diverse views on this policy, some supporting the circular migration model (P4L54), others accentuating the benefits of long-term migration for the employers (P4L67).

According to Cerqueirová (2019), the amendment of the Foreigners Act brought a new tool that should allow the Czech government to effectively manage the volume of migration via the specification of numbers of foreigners that can be admitted to the

TABLE 3 Foreigners with valid work permits (1–30 June)

Foreigners with valid work permit	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
Stay under 3 months	3283	10,218	29,343	49,343	12,855
Stay 3–12 months	4560	4520	7376	23,142	8292
Stay 12–24 months	13,760	20,312	32,640	55,628	64,083
Total	21,603	35,050	69,359	128,113	85,230

Source: Authors' calculations based on data provided by the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs of the Czech Republic.

Czech Republic every year (on a per-country basis). However, these numbers are dependent on the capacities of the Czech consular offices rather than the needs of the labour market.

In this respect, particularly, the interviewees from non-governmental and academic sectors were predominantly critical of this policy. For example, respondent N1L42 thought that in practice, many Ukrainian migrants would not have other options than applying for the special work visa repeatedly because obtaining the employment card was not possible for most individual migrants since it was granted to workers selected by employers participating in governmental projects. Respondents who were familiar with migration patterns from Ukraine also pointed out that since the last economic crisis, circular migration has become a risky strategy because of the low probability of obtaining new labour permission after returning home. This also limited the accessibility of permanent residence as a more secure status that can be granted after an uninterrupted series of long-term residencies (after 5 years). Thus, many Ukrainians, who have been previously circulating, started aiming at permanent residence (A141), and the programmes of short-term labour migration (special visa) were criticised from this perspective as 'anti-integrationist' by our respondents (PR1L35, N1L42). While acknowledging that circular migration may be a good option for specific labour sectors as well as a particular group of migrants, a large part of the respondents emphasised the features of circular migration and short-term employment, such as exploitation (PR1L31), associated in the Czech Republic especially with the widespread use of labour agencies (PC4L80), lack of the long-term perspective for settlement and incentives for integration (A136), and the risk of falling into illegality (N211). For example, respondent A277 argued that 'it will again bring problems and a whole group of people with minimal rights. And it will end up with an illusion of return when these people stay anyway but illegally … and there will be zero integration.'

According to some of our respondents, the recent introduction of the 'special work visa' can be seen as a part of the currently prevailing trend of the Czech migration policy to prefer circular migration over the integration of migrants. One respondent considers the last economic recession of 2008–2010 as the turning point in the state's perception of migration: 'There is an attempt to have temporary projects such as Ukraine that will limit migration, and they will instrumentally use the labour force of foreign workers only for the purpose of temporary labour' (N126). Another respondent aptly characterised the Czech migration policy's prevailing ethos as 'we want to labour, not

people' (A152). The emphasis on temporariness is also manifested by the lack of incentives for settlement and integration of the newly arrived migrants with short-term visas, the persistence of specific integration barriers (e.g., lack of information provision to certain groups of migrants) and difficulties to obtain permanent residence permits.

Despite the gradual proliferation of short-term labour migration and the circularity and persistence of many barriers for integration, our respondents also acknowledged substantial progress in developing and institutionalising integration policies. Respondent P221 argued that on the one hand, the state prevents integration of newly arrived migrants by creating barriers for obtaining secure residence but on the other hand, it improved support of integration of long-term settled migrants, for example, by making the naturalisation procedure more transparent and accessible for certain groups of migrants. This is in line with the fifth principle of the Conception of Integration of Foreigners in the Czech Republic (Czech government, 2016), stressing the gradual strengthening of migrants' rights associated with acquiring higher residential statuses (permits). Moreover, the institutionalisation of regional integration centres was perceived as an outstanding achievement by most of our respondents (e.g., A277, N211 and N153) and an important sign that the state accepts its responsibility for the integration of foreigners (PC1L24). For example, it led to improved information dissemination and cooperation with employers in the process of migrants' reception and integration (N2L23). Employers are nowadays expected to contribute to the integration of migrants; those who employ more than 50 foreigners are obliged to cooperate with the regional integration centres, and there have already been some examples of successful cooperation: 'The awareness improved. Also, thanks to the centres for integration under the Ministry of Interior. New branches emerge and they really work on informing, advising, and warning the foreigners. Helping them. We observe how beneficial it is' (P475). Moreover, from 2021, all newly arrived migrants from non-EU countries planning to stay longer than 1 year are obliged to participate in integration–adaptation courses. This, however, does not solve the problem of lack of information among the migrants working on short-term labour permits, who are often dependent on the services of labour agencies, thus lack information about their rights and duties, which increases the risk of exploitation (PR1L35).

The emphasis on temporariness brings another challenge frequently mentioned by our respondents, that of the period of economic recession and migrant workers' loss of employment. According

to respondent PR1L33, the state as well as the employers are not prepared for what will come with the economic downturn and the fact that recruitment of large numbers of temporary workers, many of them with families, may bring serious social problems when they lose their jobs. Policymakers should take this into account also according to respondent PC5L59: 'And there is exactly this problem that these people are recruited in large numbers and at the moment when they are not needed, they start firing them. And this is something that we should point to—that it is important to have a more elaborated migration policy.' The lack of a long-term conception of migration policy was one of the main challenges brought forward by our interviewees, as we discuss in the next section. In this respect, it is also crucial to understand how migrants shift between different types of permits to stay, as pointed by respondent A152. A systematic analysis of these shifts in the long-term perspective would allow for a better understanding of migration policy regulations' (often unintended) effects and their depreciation.

5.3 | A long-term conception of migration policy?

Although the Czech migrants' integration policy had been formulated already in the 1990s as a part of the EU accession process and developed since into a relatively systematic approach based on the infrastructure of regional integration centres financed by the central government, the official conception regulating the selection and admission of migrants was only formulated much later, in 2015 (MI CR, 2015).

In recent years, the government adopted several labour migration programmes that enabled the arrival of migrant workers of different qualifications (see Table 1). In contrast to the past, they were not recruited by labour agencies who used to dominate labour recruitment but by the employers themselves. Many of our respondents perceived this as a significant improvement (e.g., PC4L14 and N2L22). According to one of them, the current diversity of types of residence permit for work and study reflects not just the requirements of the EU but also the new types of labour programmes matching the specific needs of the Czech Republic: 'I think that the legislation moved forward. We have migration projects such as Fast Track, Welcome Package, Regime Ukraine, India ... that emerged from the needs of the Czech Republic. And these needs were identified, solutions were found and implemented.' (P4L73).

Moreover, these programmes were prepared in cooperation with employers that started to play a more significant role in migration policymaking: 'What changed is that the economic migration started to be perceived as something that has to be grasped systematically. And that they let us in as employers. (...) Before, it was the game of the [labour] agencies, and we were the last segment and nobody talked to us' (P4L66). Thus, not only employers but also representatives of the non-governmental sector and different ministries acknowledged that despite some animosities and persistent departmentalism, there had been a significant shift in the nature of communication and cooperation among different actors in the field of migration policymaking

towards a more open dialogue and exchange of opinions (PC4L14, N2L22, N2L23 & N251).

Besides these positive trends, our respondents identified several features related to the development of the official migration policy strategy. One of the main weaknesses is the lack of a conceptual approach and prevalence of ad hoc reactive measures instead of proactive and long-term migration policy goals: Unfortunately, we can't speak about some conception or strategy. The politics is just reactive (...) ad hoc projects such as Serbia or Philippines are created only based on the demand of employers (M028). Many respondents across different sectors, such as PC4L80, A152 and N2L25, noted that the Czech approach to migration lacked a clearly formulated long-term strategy translated into the everyday reality of migration processes. According to respondent A2L40, the decision on how to systematically address migration is still missing in the Czech Republic: 'There is no clear declaration whether we want long-term or short-term migration. Whether we want individuals or families. Whether we want to integrate them or want them to come for a short time and return back. ... The other thing is that there is no proactive policy. It is reactive.' Respondent A548 saw the problem in the lack of coordination of activities of different actors in the migration policy and an absence of a strong actor who would define long-term goals, while also considering the wider cross-national context: 'There are just partial steps, but nobody reflects comparison with other countries or what Czechia needs.' Similarly, respondent P4L66 argued that there should be a special office for migration that would systematically deal with migration, thus overcoming partial interests of each of the three key ministries (Ministry of Interior, MLSA and Ministry of International Affairs).

Migrants' qualifications and their match with the needs of priority economic sectors were among the most critical problems discussed by the respondents concerning migrants' selection and defining what types of migration are in the Czech Republic's interest. The main criteria that emerged from the interviews were the *countries/regions of origin, qualification profiles, economic sectors, and family status*. Respondents PC2L01 and PC2L03 confirmed that the Czech Republic prioritises highly qualified migration like other developed countries globally. In practice, however, a key feature of the Czech migration policy is the contradiction between its proclaimed orientation to highly qualified migration and the real needs of the Czech labour market, where the demand for low- and middle-qualified labour is high due to the structure of the Czech economy, which is predominantly export-oriented. In 2019, unqualified workers (elementary occupations) formed the largest category of migrant workers (181,933), followed by plant and machine operators and assemblers (139,774), and craft and related trades workers (70,555) (CSO, 2020).

Many respondents also noted that selectivity is still very underdeveloped both on the conceptual and practice levels. Some respondents appreciated that the selection of migrants and the employers who have priority in employing migrant workers increased in recent years (PC4L14). However, other respondents thought that a more nuanced selection is still needed, emphasising the applicants' qualification profiles and their match with the Czech labour market needs, rather than their ability to comply with relatively rigid administrative

requirements (P4L70, P221 & P4L67). Respondent N113 argued that migration policy does not reflect the needs of the Czech labour market and respondent P474 added that: 'The problem starts with the state not being able to say what sectors are crucial.' Moreover, our employers' respondents pointed out that highly qualified migrants and investors should have less demanding administrative procedures and that the emphasis on security in labour visa procedures has been exaggerated with respect to the geopolitical position of Czechia (PC4L64). The lack of a systematic analysis of Czech labour market data in the EU context as the basis for the long-term conception of migration policy was also raised by respondent P4L66 who argued that this could undermine the Czech Republic's competitiveness internationally.

In terms of the selection of migrants, there has been a big emphasis on regions and countries of origin in the Czech migration policy, reflecting the securitised approach described above. In recent years, migrant workers have been recruited predominantly through special programmes called 'regimes', targeting labourers from countries associated with relatively low-security risks—Ukraine, Serbia, Philippines, Mongolia and India. In practice, quotas for each country were allocated by governmental resolutions that were based mainly on the estimates of available administrative capacities for processing the visa applications. Our respondents held contrasting views on this type of migration policy. For example, P4L67 thought that the emphasis on security and selection based on the country's security profile ensures the Czech Republic's long-term security. The argument of selection based on the country of origin was also related to the integration of immigrants—whereas some nationalities were seen as hard-working and compatible with the Czech workers (especially Ukrainians mentioned, for instance, by respondents P474 and P4L16), others were perceived as less willing to work hard and difficult to integrate (P4L66 mentioned especially migrants of Arabic origin, but also Romanians and Bulgarians). This 'logic of the population' focusing on who potentially settles in the Czech Republic and what social and cultural consequences it will bring in the long-term has been a salient feature of the Czech migration policy also observed by Čaněk (2014), who adds that it is also related to the geographical distance of the countries of origin of the migrants and expectations of their return back home. Contrasting perceptions argued for a focus on the individual profile of the migrants and their qualification rather than their country of origin (A152). Moreover, concerns about immigrants' integration prompted some respondents to argue for the preference of family migration and support of family reunions over individual (male) migration associated with security risk (PC3L07 and A329).

6 | CONCLUSION

In the previous sections, we explored experts' perceptions on how the Czech state has handled migration since the 2008–2010 economic crisis. Our analysis of 80 interviews conducted with key Czech stakeholders in the field of migration identified the following three crucial features for migration policymaking: (1) prevailing perception of migration as a threat, (2) prevailing orientation on temporary labour migration and (3) lack of coherent and systematic conceptual approach towards migration.

Regarding the first feature, our research revealed a central paradox of the contemporary Czech migration policy: the contradiction between the strong anti-immigration political discourse and the actual policies of extensive labour recruitment through ad hoc governmental projects and labour agencies bringing labour migrants on short-term visas. To a large degree, this is a consequence of the long-term securitisation of migration and the formally restrictive administrative approach, which was further reinforced during the so-called 2015–2016 migration crisis. Moreover, although migration in the Czech Republic has recently reached record levels, our findings indicate that migration continues to be perceived as an unwelcomed necessity: although migrant workers are highly demanded in the Czech labour market, their presence is tolerated rather than welcomed. As such, it is expected that most migrants will leave once they are no longer needed on the labour market, rather than encouraged to settle and integrate into the Czech society.

Our respondents expressed serious doubts about such expectations, referring to Western European experiences with labour migrations in the post-World War II period as well as the more recent impact of the economic recession of 2008–2010 on labour migration in the Czech Republic. At the same time, despite the predominantly critical perspective towards migration policymaking in the Czech Republic, our respondents appreciated the recent efforts to take migration as a crucial agenda and the attempts to engage stakeholders from different sectors to discuss and implement the migration policy. In particular, the progress made in the institutionalisation and decentralisation of integration policies was highlighted as a significant achievement.

Regarding the second feature, our research indicates that the most recent migration policy instruments are focused explicitly on highly qualified migrants from selected 'secure' countries, such as Ukraine or India. Most of these programmes have been established following extensive lobbying by private businesses, especially by the large employers in the automotive industry and the agricultural, construction, and service sectors. In line with the current labour market needs in these priority sectors, the current Czech government is increasingly inclined to grant short-term stays and work permits to citizens of third (non-EU) countries. This temporary migration is advantageous for Czech employers in the event of a sudden decline in production (as was the case during the first phase of the current COVID crisis) and for seasonal work. At the same time, however, it is also preferred by the Czech government because it can exercise greater control over temporary migrants' arrival and departure. Moreover, according to some respondents, this strategy is 'appropriately supplemented' by the still rather cumbersome administration when it comes to obtaining the required residence and work permits.

Regarding the third feature, respondents across different sectors strongly criticised the lack of long-term systematic and evidence-based migration policy strategy. Although it remains to be seen

whether any significant progress can be made without a substantial shift in both the political and the broader public perception of migration, similar to other European countries, there has been a growing tendency towards selectiveness in the Czech migration policy. Orientation on highly qualified migration is among the key objectives at the conceptual level, recently also translated into particular governmental projects that aim at attracting highly qualified migrants to settle with their families in the Czech Republic. However, the numbers of highly qualified migrants remain relatively marginal in their proportion among all incoming migrants (MI CR, 2020c). Migrants from so-called middle-qualified and low-qualified professions still represent the vast majority of incoming migrant workers, reflecting the current structure of the Czech economy. The selection criteria are mainly based on the country of origin and the quotas for incoming migrants reflect the administrative capacities and short-term needs of the current Czech labour market rather than long-term economic goals and demographic needs. As such, the Czech migration policies since the global economic recession (2008–2010) have not genuinely considered the fact that it is people, rather than just 'labour', who come to the Czech Republic.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

Authors of the paper do not have any conflict of interest.

DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

The authors guarantee the anonymity of the respondents for their more open answers, and that is why the interviews are not available. Due to the small size of the Czech migration expert community, the addition of more specific information about our respondents would likely enable their identification and we promised all respondents strict anonymity.

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ENDNOTES

[1] We use the official classification of the Czech Ministry of Interior on low-, middle- and high-qualification within CZ-ISCO, which is based on the international ISCO-08 classification (type of employment and qualification level); for each category, a certain minimum wage amount must be guaranteed by employers.

[2] However, we believe that the so-called term 'migration crises' from 2015 to 2016 is not the correct term, we understand this term for specific migration from Asia and Africa through the Mediterranean Sea in 2015 and early 2016. The term is very frequently used in media, within the public and political debates, as well as in scholar literature (e.g., Hutter & Kriesi, 2021; Newsome et al., 2021; Slominski, 2021).

[3] Defined as 'a repetition of legal migrations by the same person between two or more countries' (EMN, 2011).

[4] The special work visa programme was approved by the Parliament on 29 October 2019.

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