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Beyond borders: Understanding the inclusion challenges and motivators of foreign employees: Suggestions for sustainable human resources practices

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Abstract: This study critically examines the multifaceted dynamics of foreign employee integration within the Czech Republic, with a specific focus on the Mladá Boleslav region. Conducted prior to the Ukrainian crisis, this research serves as a crucial baseline for understanding integration in a pre-crisis context and provides comparative insights into the evolving challenges and opportunities amid the subsequent migration movements. The study explores various aspects of integration and inclusion, drawing upon migration theories, economic factors, and sociological perspectives to understand the motivators and challenges faced by foreigners, particularly in light of the majority society's perception, which often leans towards skepticism and negativity. The research methodology builds on grounded theory and integrates both quantitative and qualitative approaches, utilizing surveys and semi-structured interviews to explore the experiences of foreign nationals, with an emphasis on immigrant women. A key finding of the study is the significant role of employers in facilitating integration. The paper discusses how businesses, through inclusive policies and practices, can profoundly influence the integration experience. Cooperation between employers, local integration centers, and other relevant organizations emerges as vital, providing additional resources and support systems to enhance the integration process. The study concludes by emphasizing the critical role of various stakeholders, particularly employers, in shaping sustainable human resources practices that foster a more inclusive and harmonious society.

Keywords: sustainable human resources management; diversity; equity; inclusion; belonging (DEIB); integration challenges; pre-crisis migration dynamics; role of employer; immigrant women; grounded theory

1. Introduction

This academic paper focuses on identifying the motivators and challenges that influence the integration of foreigners into Czech society. The research was conducted before the invasion of Ukraine and the subsequent significant influx of war-affected migrants to the Czech Republic, concretely from January 2019 to November 2021. As such, the findings and discussions within this paper provide a valuable baseline and reference point for understanding the integration dynamics in a pre-crisis context. This makes it particularly relevant for comparison and analysis against the backdrop of the massive migration movement caused by the Ukrainian conflict, offering insights that could be instrumental in addressing the challenges and opportunities presented by this new wave of migration.

At the time of the research, the local majority often perceived foreigners as a threat, influenced by negative news from various sources. The Czech population, being relatively homogeneous, was not fully prepared for migration waves from Slovakia, Ukraine, and other countries, showing reluctance to accept new members into their society. This is evident in cities like Mladá Boleslav, a hub for the automobile

manufacturing industry, where a significant foreign population has led to apprehension among local residents about foreign nationals and their cultures. It focuses on the lengthy process of foreigners' integration and the potential elimination of barriers to this process, building on quantitative and qualitative research.

Firstly, the article explores migration theories, economic aspects of migration, and the integration process from a theoretical perspective, including the most utilized migration theories to date. Particularly, it focuses on the theory of push and pull factors in migration, applying it to the research part of the paper. It examines which factors most influence economic migration from Slovakia, Ukraine, Russia, and Belarus to the Czech Republic. Secondly, it describes the research methodology, focusing on the direction of quantitative and qualitative research. In concordance with the grounded theory, it defines the tools for performance, analysis, and subsequent application of the research. It addresses the relationship of the majority society to foreigners in the Mladá Boleslav district and the experiences of female foreigners with migration and integration into Czech society. The quantitative research, through a survey, aims to explore the relationship of the majority society to foreigners in and around Mladá Boleslav. It seeks to uncover the main reasons for this relationship. The qualitative research, on the other hand, focuses on the perspective of the minority, gathered through in-depth semi-structured interviews with immigrant women living, working, or studying in Mladá Boleslav or its surroundings. The interviews are analyzed using coding of the most frequent themes and aim to identify factors influencing foreigners' willingness to immigrate to the Czech Republic and subsequently integrate into its society.

Finally, the paper highlights the crucial role of employers in facilitating the integration of immigrants, particularly in the Mladá Boleslav region. It discusses how businesses, through inclusive policies and practices, can significantly influence the integration experience of these groups. Employers are seen as key players in creating inclusive work environments, offering language support, ensuring non-discriminatory recruitment practices, and providing legal and cultural orientation. The paper underscores the importance of social integration through workplace initiatives like team-building activities and mentorship programs. Additionally, it emphasizes the role of employers in offering professional development opportunities, advocating for the rights of immigrant employees, and collaborating with local integration centers and organizations.

2. Literature review

The literature review in this study offers an extensive and detailed examination of the multifaceted aspects of global migration, with a particular emphasis on the context of the Czech Republic. It aims to provide a thorough understanding of the myriad factors influencing migration patterns and the integration of migrants especially within the specified region. This review is structured into six distinct sections, each focusing on a unique dimension of migration studies.

2.1. Theories and models in migration studies

In the realm of migration studies, a diverse range of theories and models merge

to form a comprehensive understanding of the intricate dynamics driving global human movements. Central to this discourse is the interplay of various factors that motivate individuals to migrate, encompassing economic, social, environmental, and personal dimensions. Lee (1966), a renowned theorist in the field of migration, is well-known for his systematic categorization of the push and pull factors of migration. He organized these factors into four fundamental categories: factors associated with the area of origin, factors linked to the destination area, intervening obstacles, and personal factors. Push factors, according to Lee (1966) and Lewis (1982), include changes in the natural environment, economic factors, political factors, and social factors, i.e., the migrant's feeling of deprivation, while the pull factors refer to better economic opportunities at the new destination, the acquisition of better education and working conditions, better living conditions, and going after someone who attracts the migrant in any way, thus strengthening social migrant networks. This classification provides a structured approach to understanding the various elements that influence migration. Building upon Lee's model, authors like Frič et al. (2009), Švejdarová et al. (2020), and Van Hear et al. (2018) have emphasized the significance of personal motivation and the perception of one's situation in migration behavior. This approach acknowledges the importance of individual perspectives and motivations in the migration process.

2.2. Factors influencing migration

Economic factors frequently emerge as the primary drivers of migration. Researchers such as Parkins (2010), Zoelle (2011), Djafar (2012), Krishnakumar and Indumathi (2014), Lang and Nadler (2014), and Carbajal and Calvo (2021) consistently point to the unemployment rate and low income as common push factors compelling people to leave their home countries. Conversely, the allure of higher living standards, better wages, improved working conditions, and greater career opportunities act as significant pull factors, drawing individuals to new destinations in pursuit of economic betterment.

Parallel to economic motivators are social and political factors that significantly shape migration patterns. The quality of education, healthcare systems, religious tolerance, the presence or absence of corruption, legal stability, and political integrity profoundly impact individuals' decisions to migrate. Issues like crime, violence, discrimination, and security concerns, as discussed by authors like Parkins (2010), Lang and Nadler (2014), Carbajal and Calvo (2021), and Urbanski (2022), also play dual roles as push and pull factors, influencing people's choices to leave or choose a particular destination.

Environmental and demographic factors have also gained prominence in recent migration discussions. Climate change, natural disasters, overpopulation, and demographic shifts, such as aging populations in developed countries and a lack of jobs in developing ones, are increasingly recognized as significant influences on migration trends, as highlighted by Martínez-Zarzoso et al. (2022).

2.3. Personal evaluation and decision-making in migration

Complementing these perspectives emphasized by De Jong and Fawcett (1981)

highlights the role of personal evaluation in the migration decision-making process. The authors consider psychologically meaningful categories of values or goals that people wish to attain and are labeled wealth, status, comfort, stimulation, autonomy, affiliation, and morality. Those seven individuals assess various options and choose the one that they perceive to offer the greatest utility, highlighting the subjective nature of migration decisions (De Jong and Fonesca, 2020).

Similarly, the place utility model, discussed by Wolpert (1965), focuses on personal aspirations and satisfaction. This model posits that potential migrants evaluate their current living conditions in terms of usefulness and aspirations. A mismatch between these two factors can motivate individuals to consider migration as a viable solution to fulfill their aspirations. Additionally, factors like war, political revolutions, and religious conflicts are highlighted as the predominant push factors in forced or involuntary migration. These elements underscore the compelling nature of migration under duress and the complex interplay of external circumstances and personal experiences, as discussed by Hager (2021).

This cohesive overview of migration theories, enriched by the contributions of various authors, illustrates the multifaceted and complex nature of migration. While economic and social factors are often at the forefront, the influence of personal aspirations, environmental changes, and demographic shifts cannot be overstated. Each model and theory offer unique insights into the myriad reasons behind migration, reflecting the varied and dynamic nature of this global phenomenon.

2.4. Migration situation in the Czech Republic Prior to 2021

Before 2021, the Czech Republic has been following an integration policy since 1999, which is based on two key government documents: the “Principles of the concept of integration of foreigners” and the “Concept of integration of foreigners.” These documents are regularly updated, with the most recent update occurring in 2016. In January of that year, the Czech government approved the “Updated concept of integration of foreigners 2016—In mutual respect,” commonly referred to as the Concept. Moreover, the government annually approves an “Implementation procedure for the concept.” It’s essential to highlight that within these government materials, the emphasis is on the mutual benefit of integration for both the state and its citizens, as well as for foreigners residing in the Czech Republic. Notably, unlike certain other European countries, integration in the Czech Republic is regarded as a right for foreigners rather than an obligation. The concept outlines five fundamental areas of integration for foreigners in the Czech Republic, which include: proficiency in the Czech language, economic self-sufficiency, orientation of foreigners in society, fostering relationships between communities, and the gradual acquisition of rights based on the length of stay.

For the year 2020, specific priorities and tools were established for each of these areas. Regarding language preparation, the government focuses on supporting children and adults with insufficient knowledge of the Czech language and introducing a Czech language proficiency test at the A2 level for obtaining permanent residency in the Czech Republic. In terms of economic self-sufficiency, the aim is to prepare foreigners for life and work in the Czech Republic by informing them about their rights and

obligations and enabling them to financially support themselves and their families without state assistance. The government supports community projects focused on employing foreigners, providing language courses, and other activities to achieve this objective.

To orient foreigners in Czech society, the government offers pre-arrival information, one-day adaptation and integration courses for newcomers, and socio-cultural courses for individuals interested in long-term settlement in the Czech Republic. To foster relationships between communities, the Implementation Procedure provides government grants and support for relevant projects, including the operation of the website (www.mezikulturnidialog.cz), which aims to inform both local and foreign communities. The final area addresses the acquisition of rights by foreigners based on their length of stay, defining the attainment of any legal status as a primary motivator for integration into Czech society. Additionally, the Implementation Procedure focuses on various other aspects related to the integration of foreigners, offering guidance for local and regional support. At the local level, this involves municipality projects aimed at integrating foreigners, such as the “Komplex in MB” project, which is supported by EU funds and the state budget. This project assists unemployed foreigners in Mladá Boleslav and includes discussion clubs focused on work-related topics for foreigners.

Regionally, there is a network of 18 centers dedicated to providing support for the integration of foreigners, with one center in each region of the Czech Republic. These centers offer social and legal counseling, language courses, and socio-cultural training. In addition to these government institutions, numerous non-profit organizations in the Czech Republic also play a crucial role in assisting foreigners in their journey towards successful integration. Some examples of such organizations include the Integration Center Prague, the Center for Foreigners in South Moravia, the Integration Advisory Center, the Diocesan Catholic Charity Hradec Králové, the Center for Integration of Foreigners, and People in Need. All of these organizations offer valuable assistance related to migration and integration issues.

2.5. Economic growth and demand for foreign workers

Furthermore, in the context of economic growth, there has been a growing demand for foreign workers, both globally and in the Czech Republic. The number of foreigners registered with the Labor Offices in the Czech Republic increased significantly from 2004 to 2017. Additionally, there was an increase in the number of foreigners with business licenses during the same period.

One of the primary reasons why employers turn to hiring foreigners is often due to a perceived shortage of domestic job applicants for certain positions or ongoing difficulties in meeting the labor market demand domestically. These positions may be less popular and often involve unskilled work with limited financial prospects or opportunities for career advancement. In most cases, hiring foreigners serves as a supplement to the labor market when there is an insufficient domestic labor supply. However, it is crucial to differentiate between individuals considered foreigners under the law and those who are not, as the legal conditions for non-Czech citizens significantly vary. Different requirements are also imposed on employers when hiring

foreign nationals.

2.6. Broader European context

Europe's aging population is significantly impacting labor markets, healthcare, and pension systems, leading to a dwindling workforce and a rise in the elderly population. To combat this, European countries and companies are adapting their strategies. Ortlieb and Sieben (2013) discuss the implementation of migration policies to recruit foreign workers. Simultaneously, several European nations are increasing retirement ages to maintain economic stability, a solution that only partially addresses the issue. Authors like Schmidt and Müller (2021) and others emphasize the need for European companies to find new labor sources to maintain operational viability. Managing a diverse workforce presents challenges, such as cultural and linguistic differences identified by Risberg and Romani (2022), but also offers opportunities for innovation. Effective integration of migrant workers is crucial, requiring a focus on cultural understanding, language skills, and unique competencies in recruitment, socialization, and training. The many studies (e.g., Schmidt and Müller, 2021; Risberg and Romani, 2022; Faaliyat et al., 2020) further highlight the importance of developing specific management policies to accommodate the varied backgrounds of foreign workers.

2.7. Attitudes towards foreigners in the Czech Republic

During periods of economic downturn, immigration tends to be associated with predominantly negative attitudes among the majority of the population. This is primarily due to concerns about employment, with migrants often perceived as taking jobs away from citizens of the host country or as a burden on the domestic social system. Despite research suggesting these beliefs are unsubstantiated, they persist in people's minds. In addition to the above-mentioned factors the results of a 2018 study by the Public Opinion Research Center, focusing on the attitudes of Czechs towards various aspects of life, reveal a high level of intolerance towards culturally diverse individuals. During this research, 1061 respondents were interviewed in person. When asked about undesirable neighbors, 31% of respondents indicated they would not want a person of a different skin color, 29% a foreigner living in the Czech Republic, and 18% someone of a different religious belief. These responses ranked fifth, sixth, and eighth most frequently mentioned out of fifteen evaluated criteria. For context, the worst-rated categories were drug-addicted neighbors at 87%, alcohol-dependent neighbors at 73%, and those with a criminal past at 72% (Ortlieb and Sieben, 2013). Such findings can be viewed as unfavorable from the perspective of minorities and their potential and motivation to integrate into the host society.

During economic recessions, fears of foreign nationals' influx are somewhat justified due to rising unemployment concerns. Foreigners are often among the first to lose jobs, leading to issues with legal residency in the host country and other EU countries. However, during economic growth, demand for foreign workers increases due to a domestic labor shortage, as currently observed in the Czech Republic and the region of Mladá Boleslav in particular. Despite these predominantly negative attitudes towards foreigners, including their employment, behavior, education, and other areas,

persist due to prejudices and reluctance in the majority society, even in times of economic prosperity. Efforts to support the influx of foreign nationals, typically seen during economic growth, are hindered by a lack of awareness among the host society, leading to issues in the integration potential and satisfaction of different nationalities. This can result in the formation of separate communities, disinterest in societal integration, and an emphasis on cultural differences, further fueling dissatisfaction among the country's citizens.

3. Materials and methods

This research study adopts a multi-faceted approach, integrating both quantitative and qualitative research methods, to examine the integration of foreign nationals in Mladá Boleslav, Czech Republic. The methodology is deeply rooted in grounded theory, a robust framework developed by Glaser and Strauss (1967), which emphasizes the derivation of theory from empirical data through a disciplined and systematic inquiry process.

Grounded theory, as conceptualized by its founders, Glaser and Strauss (1967), represents a paradigm shift from traditional deductive testing of preconceived theories to an inductive approach, where theories emerge organically from the research data. This approach emerged from their groundbreaking work studying the experiences of terminally ill patients. Over time, grounded theory has branched into several genres, each with unique characteristics: Traditional grounded theory, as developed by Glaser and Strauss (1967), Strauss and Corbin (1990), emphasizes staying close to the data and minimizing preconceived notions. Evolved grounded theory, as seen in the works of Gasler and Strauss (1967), Strauss and Corbin (1990), Clarke (2005), and Gasler (1992), incorporates more structured coding and acknowledges the researcher's influence. Constructivist grounded theory, championed by Charmaz (2011), focuses on the interpretive nature of inquiry and the co-construction of knowledge between researcher and participants. These variations signify the evolution and adaptability of grounded theory, making it suitable for diverse research contexts.

3.1. Application of grounded theory in this study

In this study, grounded theory principles are meticulously applied. The qualitative component, which includes techniques like semi-structured interviews, meticulous coding, and thoughtful analysis, aligns with the grounded theory's emphasis on theory emergence from data. The GT framework emphasizes deriving theory from empirical data through systematic inquiry; this is reflected especially in the approach to semi-structured interviews, meticulous coding, and thoughtful analysis of interviews with foreign women participants from diverse backgrounds, which aligns with grounded theory's emphasis on theory arising from data. This iterative process, which includes data collection, coding, and theory development, showcases GT's adaptiveness in exploring nuanced realms like attitudes, experiences, and motivations within the integration sphere. This involved an extensive iterative process, as we constantly moved back and forth between data and analysis, refining concepts and theories as new data emerged. To specify the codes representing key themes or issues relevant to the foreign population we constantly reflected on our role as researchers as well as on

how our biases and preconceptions might affect the research (Švejdarová, 2020). In addition, empowering research principles align with a focus on engaging subjects actively in the research process, allowing for the emergence of authentic and unfiltered perspectives from the respondents' experiences.

Despite the primary focus on the qualitative approach based on the grounded theory principles used in this study, mixed methods research was employed since it is ideal for exploring complex phenomena that require both numerical data and in-depth understanding. This approach allows the exploration of different aspects of a research problem, combining the objectivity of quantitative data with the richness of qualitative insights. In our particular case, it was chosen to reveal statistical trends concerning the majority population, while qualitative data provide deeper insights into individual experiences and perceptions of female migrant workers.

3.2. Qualitative research

The qualitative research segment stands as the cornerstone of this study, offering profound insights into the complex phenomena under investigation. The primary aim of the article is to comprehensively examine the multifaceted aspects of foreign employee integration in the Czech Republic, with a specific focus on the Mladá Boleslav district. This includes analyzing the push and pull factors influencing economic migration from Slovakia, Ukraine, Russia, and Belarus, and exploring how these factors impact the experiences of foreigners in terms of employment, legal issues, social integration, and personal adaptation. In addition, utilizing both quantitative and qualitative research methods, the study aims to understand the relationship between the majority society and foreign nationals and to uncover the real-world complexities and nuances in their experiences. Through this approach, the research seeks to provide detailed insights into the challenges and opportunities faced by foreigners living and working in the Czech Republic. Conducting in-depth, semi-structured interviews with 18 individuals, concretely 18 women foreigners, from varied backgrounds, thus ensuring a rich tapestry of perspectives on the integration process and related dynamics. The qualitative approach was carefully planned to ensure a secure environment for participants, addressing potential concerns about anonymity. This segment's methodology was particularly focused on capturing the contexts, attitudes, and lived experiences of individuals, thereby providing a depth of understanding that complements and enriches the quantitative data findings.

The study involved eighteen semi-structured, in-depth interviews, recorded on a voice recorder, with each session lasting from 60 to 90 min. The participants were diverse, including students, working students, employed women, and mothers on parental leave, providing a broad spectrum of perspectives reflecting different life stages and priorities. Grounded theory (Ortlieb and Sieben, 2013; Schmidt and Müller, 2021; Risberg and Romani, 2022; etc.), a methodology for constructing theories based on systematically gathered and analyzed data, was applied throughout the research process.

The research was also underpinned by the principles of empowering research as defined by Cameron et al. (1992), which emphasize changing the power dynamics between the researcher and the subjects. This approach involves the subjects actively

in the research process, allowing them to share their knowledge and experiences with minimal intervention from the researcher, thus treating them as equal partners in the study.

There was a set of 52 questions prepared for the participants of the study, which were categorized into various domains: basic personal information, work, and finances, relations with the majority society, employment agencies, employers, integration centers, legal aspects, and discrimination. The focus was on identifying the aspects most significantly influencing the motivation of these women to integrate into Czech society.

The demographics of the participants included seven women from Slovakia, six from Ukraine, four from Russia, and one from Belarus. The average duration of their stay in the Czech Republic was nearly ten years, with a range from one to twenty-four years. Post-interview evaluations assessed various aspects of their integration into Czech society, such as feeling at home in the Czech Republic, awareness of their rights, employment status, completion of education or other courses in the Czech Republic, completion of Czech language courses, having family or partners in the Czech Republic, and considerations for moving to other EU countries.

3.3. Quantitative research

The study's quantitative phase utilized an anonymous questionnaire survey. 850 completed questionnaires were collected from participants primarily from Mladá Boleslav. This survey aimed to dissect the majority population's perceptions of foreigners, probing into the underlying reasons shaping these attitudes. The questionnaire was meticulously designed, encompassing a range of question types to capture a holistic view of the respondents' attitudes, interactions, and demographic profiles. The extensive 119-day promotion of the survey via social media platforms underscores the commitment to achieving a representative sample. With a completion rate of 57.5%. In 42.5% of cases, the questionnaire was only viewed but not completed. The subsequent data analysis, employing frequency tables and graphs, played a crucial role in hypothesis testing and uncovering the deeper rationale behind the majority population's viewpoints. Concretely, the research focused on understanding how the majority society in Mladá Boleslav perceives the presence of foreign nationals in their vicinity. The primary aim was to identify the impact of the host country's inhabitants' biased attitudes on the integration potential of minority groups. The main target group for this survey was residents of Mladá Boleslav, representing the majority of society. This result is primarily attributed to two factors. Firstly, the survey was intended for residents near Mladá Boleslav, hence responses from other regions of the Czech Republic were deemed irrelevant. Secondly, the majority of society's detachment from migration and integration issues, not just in Mladá Boleslav, resulted in a lack of interest in participating in this research. The questionnaire comprised 11 simple questions, with a completion time ranging from two to ten minutes. Questions addressing sociodemographic data, such as gender, age, and educational attainment of respondents, were placed at the end of the survey. The remaining eight questions, mostly of a closed type, allowed for selecting one or more provided answers or indicating personal stances on a rating scale. Open-ended

questions were also included to allow the expression of personal thoughts. The types of questions were chosen to best reflect the real situation regarding the presence of foreigners in Mladá Boleslav.

3.4. Integration of quantitative and qualitative methods

The study's holistic approach, combining quantitative surveys with qualitative interviews, aligns with the best practices in social research as outlined by Tashakkori and Teddlie (1998). This blend not only enriches the data pool but also allows for a more nuanced and comprehensive understanding of the research problem. The research design, encompassing both quantitative and qualitative methods, is a testament to the robust application of grounded theory principles. It underscores a commitment to inductive theory generation from qualitative data, systematic inquiry, and a flexible yet rigorous approach to understanding the complexities of integration in the Czech Republic. Therefore, this study not only contributes significantly to the field of integration research but also exemplifies the practical application of GT in addressing complex social phenomena.

4. Results

4.1. Quantitative research analysis

It is important to mention at the very beginning of this section, that some respondents expressed personal opinions emphasizing individuality, highlighting the impossibility of evaluating a minority group as a whole but rather each person individually based on their personal characteristics, and the need to avoid stereotyping. Here is an example from an open-ended section of the survey: "There are decent foreigners, many work in higher positions than just labor jobs... "They have integrated and live here without bothering anyone or causing harm. Then there are the others, and it's worse with them. But I can't lump them all together in the survey" (Ms. A). "When assessing the behavior of foreigners, we must be objective about the behavior of the locals too. We can't assume locals are saints and everything should be easily forgiven for them" (Ms. B). Stereotyping and assigning significant weight to first impressions significantly influence our behavior and approach to minority groups, including foreign nationals. The purpose of this survey as designed by the researcher, was not to harm people of foreign origin but to reveal the attitude of the majority of society in Mladá Boleslav towards them.

Among the respondents, 61.1% were women, and 38.9% were men. Regarding age distribution, 89.4% (759 respondents) were between 18 and 45 years old. Only 0.6% (five respondents) were under 17 years old, while 10% (85 respondents) were over 46 years old.

Table 1 reflects educational background of the respondents varied: 56% (476 respondents) had secondary education with a high school diploma, 20.6% (175 respondents) had basic or secondary education without a diploma, and 22.9% (195 respondents) had higher education (bachelor's or master's degrees). Finally, 0.5% (four respondents) had postgraduate education.

Table 1. Educational background of respondents.

Education level	Percentage	Number of respondents
Secondary education with diploma	56.0%	476
Basic or secondary education without a diploma	20.6%	175
Higher education (bachelor's or master's)	22.9%	195
Postgraduate education	0.5%	4

Most respondents, nearly 97%, frequented the Mladá Boleslav area, ranging from several times a month to daily. This suggests that the respondents were familiar with the situation in the area and could assess criteria related to migration and integration of minority groups. The most commonly mentioned origins of foreigners were Ukraine, Poland, Slovakia, Vietnam, Russia, and Belarus, aligning with the actual statistics provided by the Czech Statistical Office in 2018 (Glaser, 1992).

Table 2. Interaction with minority groups.

Interaction location	Percentage
Public spaces (shops, streets, restaurants)	82.0%
Employment settings	69.0%
Schools	30.7%
Personal life (friendships)	21.3%
Personal life (partnerships)	6.0%

Table 2 reflects the interaction with minority groups (here, a choice of more opinions was possible), most encounters occur in public spaces such as shops, streets, and restaurants (82%). Employment settings where almost 69% of respondents encounter foreigners are also common. A smaller portion mentioned schools (30.7%), personal life in terms of friendships (21.3%), or partnerships (6%). Some respondents used the open-ended option to mention specific locations like “around my residence,” “in our apartment block,” or a recurring response of “everywhere.” A notable response was, “Unfortunately, they live in our apartment block, the estate is full of them and they make a mess, and noise, and there are many homeless people and addicts—Slovaks, Poles, Ukrainians, etc.” According to 2018 statistics, 139 homeless people in Mladá Boleslav had committed some offense, with 30 being Slovak, 35 being Polish, and only 4 being Ukrainian. In 66 cases, they were Czech citizens (Horáček, 2018).

Table 3. Perception of the number of foreigners.

Perception	Percentage
Excessive number of foreigners	56.0%
Indifferent	37.8%
Positive view	6.2%

In **Table 3**, it's important to note that a majority of survey participants view the number of foreigners living in Mladá Boleslav as excessive, with nearly 56% expressing this view. 37.8% are indifferent to this issue, not attributing any significant emotion to the presence of foreigners in their vicinity. Only 6.2% of respondents see

the number of foreigners in Mladá Boleslav positively.

The two areas identified as most disruptive to relationships with the minority society included the behavior of this group (72.6%) and the large number of foreign nationals in Mladá Boleslav (33.4%). Twenty-four respondents expressed their own opinions in the open-ended section, most of which were negatively tinted. The most common response was the language barrier between the minority and majority societies. Issues such as increased consumption of alcoholic beverages, different customs, and unwillingness to adapt were also mentioned. One respondent commented, “In the workplace, they occupy easy positions because the difficult ones cannot be explained to them.” This may be linked to the language barrier and prejudices associated with the work of foreign nationals in the Czech Republic. Another respondent categorized foreigners based on their family status/presence in the Czech Republic, “A family of Ukrainians are my best neighbors... but a large number of single men, who have no ties and families here, behave inappropriately.” Unacceptable behavior is often attributed to men who travel to the Czech Republic for work alone, spending their free time in ways judged negatively by the majority of society. There were also crude responses, such as “They have no business here (...),” with the rest of the quote containing only vulgarism. The responses to this and subsequent questions make it clear that the majority society’s approach to minority groups varies, influenced by different experiences and perceptions, ultimately affecting the majority’s behavior in a predominantly negative sense. The evaluation of foreigners’ behavior, was viewed as problematic by nearly 60% of respondents.

Table 4. Evaluation of foreigners’ integration.

Evaluation	Percentage
Good to excellent	11.3%
Average	29.5%
Poor to very poor	59.2%

Table 4 shows that only 11.3% are convinced that foreigners are integrated into society well to very well. An average rating was found in 29.5% of cases, and poor to very poor in nearly 60%. A significant failure of the majority of society is the lack of knowledge or misunderstanding of the concept of integration.

In the final section of the survey, respondents expressed their opinions on broader topics related to the impact of foreigners in the Czech Republic. For instance, as shown in **Table 5**, only 29.1% of respondents partially or fully agreed that foreigners contribute positively to the country’s economy. 29.9% were unsure of their stance, while a significant 41% disagreed with this statement. Additionally, 68% of those surveyed perceived foreigners as cheap labor, with 15.5% unsure and 16.5% disagreeing or strongly disagreeing with this view.

Table 5. Respondents' opinions on the impact of foreign nationals in the Czech Republic.

Aspect	Agree or partially agree (%)	Unsure (%)	Disagree or strongly disagree (%)
Foreigners contribute to the Czech economy	29.1	29.9	41.0
Foreigners are cheap labor	68.0	15.5	16.5
Foreigners take employment opportunities away from Czechs	43.0	15.1	41.9
Foreigners behave friendly	23.1	27.2	49.7
Foreigners engage in criminal activities	49.5	38.5	12.0

Nearly 43% of respondents believed that minorities in the Czech Republic were taking jobs away from Czech citizens. In another evenly divided response, 41.9% expressed disagreement, while 15.1% were undecided on whether foreigners' behavior towards the majority society is positive or negative. Only 23.1% of the participants viewed the behavior of foreigners towards themselves, as members of the majority society, as friendly. Meanwhile, 27.2% were unable to decisively categorize this behavior, and almost 50% gave a negatively toned response. Finally, the survey also explored the issue of illegal activities, with 49.5% convinced that foreigners engage in criminal acts. 38.5% did not know the answer to this question, and only 12% of the respondents disagreed with the statement.

As seen from the survey results, the prevailing views of immigrants in the Czech Republic in the Mladá Boleslav region are predominantly negative. These findings highlight a significant level of skepticism and negativity towards immigrants, reflecting challenges in social integration and acceptance within the Czech Republic. It is crucial to emphasize that the successful integration of foreign nationals into a society is a reciprocal process, requiring adjustments from both the minority (foreign nationals) and the majority (host society). This process is not solely about the transformation of the foreign nationals; rather, it involves mutual adaptation to the coexistence of diverse nationalities. An effective and mutually satisfactory outcome can only be achieved through this two-way process. However, the common expectation is often one of complete assimilation, where foreign nationals are expected to fully blend into the majority society, often at the cost of losing their unique cultural identities and individual differences. The prevalent negative attitudes, unsatisfactory conditions, and biases against foreigners in the host society not only hinder the integration process but also affect the willingness and quality of the integration outcomes.

4.2. Analysis of qualitative research

A comprehensive synthesis of qualitative research findings about the experiences and challenges faced by foreigners living in the Czech Republic. This table is the product of an in-depth study conducted using grounded theory, a robust qualitative research approach that emphasizes the discovery of themes emerging directly from the data. This method is particularly effective in uncovering the real-world complexities and varied nuances in the experiences of individuals in new and often challenging

environments.

The research aimed to focus on the multifaceted aspects of foreigners' lives in the Czech Republic, ranging from employment and legal issues to social integration and personal adaptation. The data was meticulously collected and analyzed, leading to the identification of specific codes, each representing a key theme or issue relevant to the foreign population. These codes provide insights into a broad spectrum of experiences, encompassing both the tangible and intangible aspects of living in a new country.

Each code is listed along with its frequency of occurrence, offering a clear and quantifiable understanding of the commonalities and prevalence of various experiences among the foreign population. This table serves not only as a reflection of the diverse challenges faced by foreigners but also as a window into their resilience and adaptability. It offers a nuanced understanding of the complex process of integration into a new cultural and social milieu, shedding light on both the struggles and successes encountered by women foreigners in the Czech Republic.

This detailed exploration aims to provide valuable insights into the factors that facilitate or hinder the integration process, thereby contributing to a deeper understanding of the dynamic interaction between foreign individuals and the host society.

Table 6. Results of qualitative research—frequency of occurrence of different codes.

Code	Frequency
Work-related issues	68
Majority perspective from foreigners' view	55
Integration	55
Home country (all mentions)	54
Adaptation (stress, internal struggle)	53
State and authorities	46
Czech language	44
Partner/family	38
Discrimination	35
Residence status	31
Education	28
Friends	24
Stereotypes and biases	23
Employment agencies	21
Financial compensation	21
Relationship with minorities (relations with other foreigners)	17
Success/self-realization	16
Violation of working conditions	16
Mafia	3

As seen from **Table 6**, the qualitative research findings offer a detailed and nuanced view of the experiences of foreigners in the Czech Republic. grounded theory, pivotal in qualitative research, allows for the emergence of themes directly from data,

providing an authentic and unfiltered perspective of the respondents' experiences. This approach has successfully identified a range of codes, each signifying specific challenges and aspects of life faced by foreigners, going beyond mere categorizations to reflect the complexities of their lived experiences.

The study covers a wide array of issues, encompassing both professional and personal challenges. On the professional front, it focuses on employment conditions, job searching difficulties, and interactions with employment agencies, highlighting economic migration as a key driver for foreigners seeking better opportunities in the Czech Republic. Personal and emotive aspects such as family relationships and discrimination, pivotal in the integration process, are also examined. These aspects underscore the interplay of personal experiences and societal dynamics in the immigrants' journey.

Language proficiency emerges as a critical factor, influencing not only employment opportunities but also social interactions and dealings with government agencies. The research notes disparities in language acquisition, particularly between Slovak-speaking women and those speaking Russian and Ukrainian, which directly impact their integration process. The study also sheds light on the relationships between minority groups and the majority Czech society, revealing prevalent stereotypes and prejudices. These perceptions significantly affect the sense of belonging and integration of these groups into Czech society. Varied experiences with government offices, especially the immigration police, highlight issues such as language barriers and a lack of clear information, affecting the understanding of rights and obligations in the Czech Republic.

Integration centers form another crucial aspect of the study. The findings point to a lack of awareness among some immigrants about these centers and the services they offer. Those who are aware of and utilize these services often encounter challenges like limited capacity in language courses and other programs. Overall, this qualitative research provides a comprehensive understanding of the multifaceted challenges and factors influencing the integration of immigrant women, particularly in the Mladá Boleslav region. It underscores the importance of factors such as employment conditions, legal awareness, and language proficiency. Additionally, the study highlights the critical role of support from government institutions, integration centers as well as employers in facilitating the integration process. This rich, in-depth analysis reveals the complex realities of life as a foreigner in the Czech Republic, offering valuable insights into the challenges they face, as well as their resilience, adaptability, and diverse experiences in navigating their new environment.

5. Discussion

Both quantitative and qualitative research conducted before 2021 in the Mladá Boleslav region revealed a concerning trend: the prevailing attitude of the majority society towards immigrant groups was predominantly negative. This finding underscores the challenges faced by these minority groups in their quest for integration into the local community. To counteract such prejudice and bias, the role of government bodies and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in the area should be undeniably significant. However, another key player in this scenario is the business

sector. Employers, through their practices and policies, wield considerable influence in shaping the integration experience of these vulnerable groups.

In response to these challenges, the qualitative research study has identified several strategies that can serve as an inspiration for businesses looking to support the integration of immigrants, and immigrant women in particular, in the Mladá Boleslav region. These strategies, derived from a detailed analysis of the data and the coding process, aim to address the specific needs and barriers faced by these groups. They reflect a comprehensive approach, encompassing various aspects of workplace integration, language acquisition, social inclusion, and professional development.

Employers have a significant role to play in facilitating the integration process. Their involvement extends beyond merely providing job opportunities, it should also include the creation of a more inclusive, supportive, and growth-oriented environment for these immigrants. They can foster inclusive work environments by implementing diversity and inclusion policies. This effort involves promoting a culture of respect and acceptance, ensuring that the workplace is a safe space for employees from different cultural backgrounds. Such an approach not only nurtures a sense of belonging among immigrant employees but also enriches the organizational culture with diverse perspectives. Recognizing the importance of language proficiency in the integration process, employers can support their immigrant employees in acquiring the local language. This support could range from offering language courses to providing language learning resources or creating opportunities for language practice within the workplace. Such initiatives can significantly ease the communication barriers that immigrant workers often face. The role of employers extends to providing fair and equal employment opportunities. Ensuring non-discriminatory and inclusive recruitment practices gives equal chances to immigrant women, acknowledging the value they bring to the workforce. Additionally, offering legal and cultural orientation helps immigrant employees navigate the nuances of working in the Czech Republic, including understanding local labor laws and societal norms.

Social integration is another crucial aspect to which employers can contribute significantly. Facilitating social connections and networks through team-building activities, social events, or mentorship programs can help immigrant employees build relationships with longer-term residents or citizens, fostering a sense of community and belonging. Professional development opportunities are vital in making immigrant employees feel valued and integrated. Employers can offer training, workshops, and opportunities for career advancement, including taking on new responsibilities. Such initiatives not only aid in the personal and professional growth of immigrant employees but also contribute to the overall productivity and innovation within the organization.

Employers can also act as advocates for the rights and needs of their immigrant employees, both within the organization and in the broader community. This advocacy is essential in shaping a more understanding and accommodating societal perspective towards immigrants. Collaborating with local integration centers and other relevant organizations allows employers to access additional resources and support systems, further aiding the integration process. Lastly, sharing experiences, feedback, and success stories related to the integration of immigrant employees can contribute to a broader understanding of these challenges and successes. In the context of sustainable

HR practices, employing the Critical Incident Technique can prove highly beneficial. Specifically, leveraging intercultural critical incidents enhances cultural sensitivity and awareness in diverse scenarios (Švejdarová et al., 2020). To conclude, this sharing of best practices can inspire other businesses and influence policymakers, leading to more effective integration strategies at a larger scale. Employers have the potential to significantly impact the integration of immigrant groups, not only by providing employment but also by creating a nurturing, inclusive, and development-oriented environment. These efforts benefit not only the immigrants but also the workplace and the community as a whole.

6. Limitations of the study

The study offers insights into the integration of foreign employees in the Czech Republic. However, to provide a more detailed understanding, overcoming the regional focus would be necessary. The research focused exclusively on the Czech Republic, specifically the Mladá Boleslav region. While this regional specificity allows for in-depth analysis, it limits the broader applicability of the findings to different geographical contexts. The dynamics of foreign employee integration can vary significantly across regions and countries, and the study's findings may not fully capture these variations. The study was conducted before the Ukrainian crisis, which marked a critical turning point in global migration patterns. This specific timeframe could impact the study's relevance to the current landscape of migration and integration. The Ukrainian crisis and subsequent events may have introduced new challenges and opportunities that are not addressed in the study. While valuable for qualitative research, the sample size may be limited in its representativeness. A larger and more diverse sample could offer a more comprehensive understanding of the experiences of foreign employees in the Czech Republic. In addition, this study relied deeply on a qualitative approach, including interviews and an analysis of the open-ended questions from the surveys. While these methods provide rich insights into individual experiences, they may not capture more detailed quantitative data or generalize findings to a broader population. External factors and policy changes that occurred after the study's timeframe are not addressed. Migration policies and societal attitudes toward foreign employees have evolved, potentially impacting integration experiences. The study does not account for these post-study developments, limiting its ability to reflect current realities accurately.

7. Generalizability of the study

Despite the specific regional and temporal context of the study, it offers valuable insights with potential applications in various contexts as it underscores the importance of considering both universal principles and local nuances when striving for successful integration outcomes. While the research explores the integration of foreign employees in the Czech Republic, future endeavors can be extended to other European countries that share similarities in immigration patterns, economic conditions, and labor market dynamics. While each country may have unique aspects of integration, the overarching principles of addressing language and cultural barriers remain pertinent across these contexts.

The emphasis on the important role of employers in the integration process transcends geographic boundaries. Employers worldwide are central to fostering inclusive workplaces, providing language support, and promoting diversity. In addition, the study's recommendations for robust and empathetic integration strategies can serve as a blueprint for organizations and policymakers in diverse settings. The emphasis being placed on tailoring approaches to local contexts is a valuable lesson with broader implications. It encourages stakeholders to adopt a nuanced and context-specific approach to integration, acknowledging that one-size-fits-all solutions may not be effective. While the specific implementation of these strategies may vary, the fundamental principles of creating inclusive environments and addressing language and cultural barriers are adaptable to different regions and countries. To conclude, although the study is rooted in a particular regional and historical context, its findings and insights possess generalizability and relevance to similar contexts, particularly within Europe.

8. Conclusion

The research on foreign employee integration in the Czech Republic, focusing on the Mladá Boleslav region, offers a critical pre-Ukrainian crisis baseline for understanding integration dynamics. It illuminates the complex interplay of economic, social, and personal factors in integration and highlights the pivotal role of employers. The study emphasizes the need for comprehensive integration strategies, underscored by the significant influence of employers in shaping inclusive workplaces and fair practices. These strategies are particularly crucial for supporting immigrant women, encompassing workplace integration, language support, social inclusion, and professional development. The research advocates for active employer involvement in championing immigrant rights and needs within the organization and in broader societal contexts. It also stresses the importance of social integration activities, including team-building and mentorship, to forge meaningful connections between immigrant employees and the wider community. Professional development opportunities are highlighted as key to making immigrant employees feel valued and integrated. Collaborations between employers, local integration centers, and universities are identified as crucial for effective integration, providing additional resources and support systems. Sharing experiences and success stories related to immigrant integration is a powerful tool for broadening understanding, inspiring other businesses, and influencing policy decisions. This paper delineates the complexities of foreign employee integration and underscores the critical roles of various stakeholders, particularly employers, in this process. The role of employers extends beyond providing job opportunities to creating a holistic environment that supports the growth, dignity, and well-being (Holman and Švejdarová, 2023) of immigrant employees. The insights from this research provide a compass for developing sustainable human resources practices that foster an inclusive, supportive, and productive environment. As migration dynamics continue to evolve, especially in the post-Ukrainian crisis, these findings and recommendations present a strategic framework for adapting to and embracing these changes, contributing to a more cohesive and harmonious society.

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