

## EWSI Analysis on Voluntary and Citizens' Initiative: Czech Republic

### 1 INTRODUCTION

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Are considered as citizens' initiatives all activities mobilising large numbers of volunteers (e.g. in workplaces, schools, local communities, etc.) to support immigrants' long-term integration and/or open up the public to integration matters and diversity. **These initiatives most notably involve people-to-people or mutual learning activities** matching migrants with mentors, peers or people volunteering their time or space. These initiatives may concern housing, mentoring, child or university-level education, extracurricular activities for children, lifelong learning, language learning, information provision, assistance with public services, translation, job preparation, awareness-raising/advocacy, etc.

Given EWSI's thematic focus, the emphasis is placed on citizens' initiatives focusing on long-term reception (e.g. during the asylum procedure) and integration (of beneficiaries of international protection and/or other categories of migrants), and not on the **initial front-line humanitarian reception for asylum-seekers** (e.g. food, clothing, shelter before entering the reception phase).

### 2 LONG-ESTABLISHED VOLUNTEERS/CITIZENS' INITIATIVES

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*Description of initiatives that have been running for several years.*

Most long-term volunteer programmes supporting the integration of immigrants have been run by NGOs specialised in the provision of social, legal and other services to immigrants. In many of these organisations the volunteering programs have professionalised over the years.

In the nine presented below, almost 500 volunteers are involved each year. Many focus on peer-to-peer education support, assistance in Czech language instruction, assistance in socio-cultural orientation or communication with state authorities. The organisation of leisure-time activities such as trips, social and cultural events and meetings of immigrants with ethnic Czechs are important as well. There are also specific programmes, e.g. the community action Clean up the World.

Most of the volunteers are ethnic Czechs. However, some programmes (e.g. by Amiga association) have focused on having immigrant volunteers. Most have developed in cooperation with other institutions; many have been financially supported by grants of the Ministry of Interior.

The Regional Integration Centres (existing at the level of administrative regions), which have become a priority in the Czech integration policies in the last few years, have not led to the creation of State volunteer programmes.



The Regional Integration Centres (administered by the Refugee Facilities Administration of the Ministry of the Interior) have instead made use of an external specialised organisation in volunteering, the Volunteer Centres, for peer-to-peer mentoring, individual pedagogical assistance or organisation of cultural and social events, etc. The Integration Centres for Foreigners run by non-governmental organisations, however, have their own volunteering programmes (e.g. Caritas Hradec Králové with its Rafael volunteering program or the below-mentioned Counselling Centre for Integration in Ústí n. Labem).

## 1. [Meta](#)

Volunteer programme: Volunteers in Meta

Place and year of inception: Praha, 2006

Target group: Third Country Nationals (TCNs)

Volunteering activities focused on:

- **Mentoring** – education and assistance (peer to peer Czech language learning, tutoring, assistance in dealing with authorities, interpreting), Czech language courses
- **Organizing** cultural activities and meetings between immigrants and ethnic Czechs

Potential inspiration from abroad: European organisations participating in the [i-Youth](#) project

Geographic development: Praha, Central Bohemian Region

Average number of volunteers: 30/year.

Average number of beneficiaries: 100.

Partnerships: with schools.

## 2. [Organisation for Aid to Refugees](#) (Organizace pro pomoc uprchlíkům - OPU)

Volunteer programme: OPU Volunteer Programme

Place and year of inception: Praha, 1991

Target group: TCNs, including beneficiaries of international protection and asylum seekers

Volunteering activities focused on:

- **Leisure** activities at Refugee Facilities of the Ministry of the Interior
- **Mentoring** – education and assistance (peer to peer Czech language learning, tutoring, assistance in dealing with the authorities, interpreting)
- **Organizing** cultural activities and meetings between immigrants and ethnic Czechs

Geographic development: Praha, Brno, Havířov. Further expansion expected in 2016.

Average number of volunteers: 100/year.

Average number of beneficiaries: 200.

Partnerships: with the Refugee Facilities Administration of the Ministry of the Interior and schools.

Funding: Ministry of the Interior, [EU Grundtvig Programme](#) and corporate donors (O2 Foundation)

## 3. [Counselling Centre for Integration](#)

Volunteer programme: Counselling Centre for Integration – Volunteering Service

Place and year of inception: Ústí nad Labem, Prague, 2007

Target group: TCNs, including beneficiaries of international protection and seekers

Volunteering activities focused on:

- **Mentoring** – education and assistance (peer to peer Czech language learning, tutoring, assistance in dealing with the authorities, interpreting etc.)
- **Leisure** activities for immigrant children
- **Clean-up of public spaces** on Clean Up the World day with migrant communities in Ústí n. Labem (local Salafi community) and in the spa-town Teplice (immigrants and Muslim community). The aim is to create a positive image of migrant communities in town with strong opinion of foreigners.

Geographic development: the Ústí Region, the Central Bohemian Region and Prague.

Number of volunteers: Activity started with 5 volunteers and involved 60/year + 20 (public cleaning).

Average number of beneficiaries: 100/ year + 40 (public cleaning).

Partnerships: with the Jan Evangelista Purkyně University established, the Dobrovolnické centrum (The Volunteer Center) and OSPOD (the Social and Legal Protection of Children Authority) in Ústí nad Labem.

#### 4. [Association for Integration and Migration](#) (Sdružení pro integraci a migraci)

Volunteer programme: Together for Foreigners (Společně pro cizince)

Place and year of inception: Prague, 2009

Target group: TCNs

Volunteering activities focused on:

- **Mentoring** – education and assistance (peer to peer Czech language learning, tutoring, assistance in dealing with authorities, interpreting)

Geographic development: Prague and to a limited extent the Central Bohemian Region too.

Average number of volunteers: 25/year, with a slight rise registration during the since June 2015

Average number of beneficiaries: 50/year

Partnerships: None

Funding: Ministry of the Interior

#### 5. [Slovo 21](#)

Volunteer programme: included in multiple projects such as [Next-door Family](#) (Rodina odvedle) which now is organised in several other [EU countries](#) (, At Six PM in front of your house (V šest před domem)

Place and year of inception: Prague, 2005

Short description:

Target group: TCNs

Volunteering activities are focused on:

- **Mentoring** – education (peer to peer English language tutoring)
- **Organizing** cultural activities and meetings between immigrants and ethnic Czechs, joint meals in people's homes and meetings in public spaces

Potential inspiration from abroad: none

Geographic development: Czech Republic.

Average number of volunteers: 2005 – 2010 cca. 5 volunteers/year; 2005 – 2015 cca. 15 volunteers/year.

Average number of beneficiaries: 200/ year.

Partnerships: none.

Funding: Ministry of the Interior

#### 6. [InBáze](#)

Volunteer programme: Dobrovolníci v InBázi

Place and year of inception: Prague, 2001

Target group: TCNs

Volunteering activities focused on:

- **Mentoring** – education (peer to peer tutoring), interpreting
- **Organizing** cultural activities and multi-ethnic meetings (RefuFest Festival)
- **Psycho-social help** – group psychotherapy for newly arrived immigrants
- **“Circles for women”** Open multicultural group
- **Leisure activities** for immigrant children



Geographic development: Prague

Average number of volunteers: 40 volunteers/year Since 2008

Average number of beneficiaries: 200/ year

Partnerships: with the Integration Center Prague

7. [Caritas Brno](#) (Diecézní charita Brno)

Volunteer programme: Tutoring of foreigners, material aid collection

Place and year of inception: Brno, 2010

Target group: TCNs, including beneficiaries of international protection and asylum seekers.

Volunteering activities focused on:

- **Mentoring** – education (peer to peer tutoring/teaching Czech language on long-term basis), interpreting
- **Material collection** – direct material help to foreigners in need

Geographic development: Prague.

Average number of volunteers: 50 volunteers/year Since 2010, with a slight rise of number of registration from both Czechs and foreigners in recent months

Average number of beneficiaries: 50/year

Partnerships: None. However, the Caritas Czech Republic was approved to be the general provider of integration services for refugees within the State Integration Programme in 2016. Volunteering activities may thus spread across the country.

8. [CIC Prague](#) (Centrum pro integraci cizinců Prague)

Volunteer programme: Dobrovolník jako průvodce azylantů a cizinců trvale usazených v ČR (Volunteer as the guide of asylum seekers and foreigners permanently residing in the Czech Republic)

Place and year of inception: Prague, 2003

Target group: TCNs, including beneficiaries of international protection and asylum seekers

Volunteering activities focused on:

- **Mentoring** – education (peer to peer tutoring/teaching Czech language on long-term basis), socio-cultural assistance, interpreting
- **Leisure activities** – site seeing, social events, debates

Potential inspiration from abroad: the programme TimeBanking UK (Great Britain)

Geographic development: Prague, the Central Bohemian and Liberecký region.

Average number of volunteers: cca. 50 volunteers/year since 2003

Average number of beneficiaries: 150/ year

Partnerships: schools, family centres, libraries in Prague and the Central Bohemian region

9. [Agency for Migration and Adaptation AMIGA](#)

Volunteer programmes: [Integration through volunteer](#) work in Prague

Place and year of inception: Prague, 2010

Target group: Retired Czech citizens.

Volunteering activities focused on:

- Developing the potential of migrants living in the Czech Republic as volunteers and improving social services for retired citizens of Prague

Potential inspiration from abroad: similar programmes in Germany and Italy

Geographic development: Prague.

Average number of volunteers: First cca. 5 volunteers/year, currently cca. 50 volunteers/year

Average number of beneficiaries: 1500/ year

Partnerships: with the Centre of Social Services Prague 2, Retirement Home Prague – Chodov, EACEA and Erasmus Plus projects. AMIGA volunteers also contribute to activities of other NGOs.

The list of volunteering programmes mentioned here is not exclusive, as there are many other migrant-assisting organisations that also make use of volunteers. It, however, illustrates the most relevant and known initiatives.

Apart from NGOs, there are also a great number of smaller initiatives, e.g. immigrants involved in all kinds of public issues in the localities where they live or migrant associations. Very often, these are quite informal and harder to grasp and analyse without existing research on this subject.

## 3 NEW VOLUNTEERS/CITIZENS' INITIATIVES

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*Description of major initiatives started only recently, particularly since the large numbers of refugee arrivals in 2015.*

Many new initiatives supporting and assisting refugees and immigrants have emerged despite the low number of refugees in the country, thus potential beneficiaries (the resettlement of the first group of the of 400 individuals was postponed by the Ministry of Interior most probably due to the recent Paris attacks).

Many of the initiatives have focused on mostly humanitarian efforts to refugees transiting the Czech Republic on their way to Germany: [I'm helping Refugees in the Balkans](#) and [Railway Station Initiative](#). Some collecting aid material and financial support – both formal and informal initiatives. Various initiatives aim to influence the public opinion, counter xenophobia as well as to do advocacy work. It's the case of the [Consortium of the Migrant Assisting Organizations in the Czech Republic](#) (Konsorcium nevládních organizací pracujících s migrant:

Volunteer programme: National Database of Volunteers for Refugees

Place and year of inception: Prague, functional since the summer 2015 but established in 2014

Target group: Asylum seekers and refugees

Primary goal: effective management of volunteers who want to participate in the integration of refugees in Czech society. The consortium (18 organisations) can search for registered volunteers and advertise its own offers. Volunteers can browse a map of opportunities on the database.

Geographic development: Czech Republic.

Average number of volunteers: Approx. 300 volunteers have registered at the end of 2015.

Average number of beneficiaries: N/A.

Funding: UNHCR Prague

2 awareness-rising initiatives are to mention. The new campaign called "[It is us](#)" by the Open Society Fund Prague, other NGOs, PR companies, volunteers' initiatives -) tries to improve the negative image Czech citizens have of refugees and immigrants, with the help of volunteers. The newly created [Student Movement for Solidarity](#) involving 15-20 active individuals started organising educational activities in secondary schools explaining the crisis in the Middle East and the situation of refugees as well as some activities at universities (especially Charles University in Prague).

Sometimes they have the character of a one-time event (e.g. a petition for the reception of refugees, against islamophobia, etc.). Anti-racist groups ([Initiative No to Racism!](#)), [Young Greens](#) and [Socialist Solidarity](#) have for example organised demonstrations against xenophobia. Sometimes they are more long-term. These include initiatives active within the Catholic church, such as exhibition "[People on the Move](#)", or by [academics against Hate and Indifference](#) and its [Facebook group](#).

In addition to these new initiatives, the long-standing programmes have registered an increase in the number of volunteers, although the greatest majority has taken part in humanitarian efforts whether than integration activities. New initiatives by the established organisations:

1. **Caritas Czech Republic** was chosen to be the general provider of integration services for refugees within the State Integration Programme for the year 2016. It is expected that there will be a rise in the number of volunteering activities and their extension across the Czech Republic. The organisation is undergoing preparations in this direction. A small rise of volunteers (both Czech and foreigners) has already been observed in relation to the refugee crisis.
2. **CIC Prague** has organised several public debates with volunteers assisting refugees during the current refugee crisis at various venues both in Prague and other parts of the country.
3. **Meta** has been implementing new programmes “I Jan Ámos chodil do školy v cizině” and “Nebud’me si cizí!” (anti-bias workshops for pupils on migration and related issues led by 4 migrant volunteers) and “Čekuj” (leisure club aiming to provide migrant children with Czech socio-cultural background in an entertaining manner), inspired by Convivial (Brussels)

## 4 PROFILE OF VOLUNTEERS

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*Description and comparison of the profile of volunteers active in old versus new initiatives.*

The interest is notable and there has been a rise in their number of volunteers since the summer 2015.

Age structure: from 18 to 75 years (sometimes even younger within the new initiatives), predominantly 20-30 years, no substantial differences in the age structure of Czech and migrant volunteers.

Education structure: mainly university graduates and students.

Gender structure: predominantly women (cca. 80 % of the volunteers mentioned in part 1; there is no information on the gender structure within the new initiatives).

The Proportion of migrants and ethnic Czechs varies. Most volunteers within professional NGOs assisting migrants (mostly run by ethnic Czechs) are Czech (especially in the Czech language assistance, etc.). On the other hand, NGOs run by migrants have more migrant volunteers (e.g. 50 % within the Slovo 21; 85 % of migrants and most of them from the ex-Soviet Union countries within the AMIGA association).

## 5 INNOVATION ASPECT

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*Description and comparison of innovative or entrepreneurial aspects of the old versus new initiatives.*

A number of points can be made. First, due to the low numbers of refugees currently in the Czech Republic there has not been a substantial change in the long-established volunteering programmes. Second, the greater informality of the new initiatives allows them to be more flexible in their reactions than the older ones. Third, the character of some of the new initiatives has been more transnational than the older ones.

## 6 ADDED VALUE

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*Description of the added value of such initiatives (both long-established and new), including the uniqueness of their activities compared to the existing practices of the (1) state and (2) NGOs.*

A number of unique volunteering activities were identified, not all of which are new, e.g. voluntary cleaning of public spaces especially in areas with existing tensions between ethnic Czechs and immigrants/tourists (e.g. Teplice Spa town); longer existing migrant assistance to Prague retired citizens (Amiga); creative ways of tying the relatively positive image of some volunteering activities (e.g. Czech humanitarian aid along the “Balkan route”) to campaigns and educational activities taking place in the Czech Republic to change the image of refugees and immigrants for the better.

There has been attempts to create more systematic ways of organising voluntary work (e.g. the idobrovolnik.cz database). Some of the activities such as peer-to-peer activities are becoming a part of the standard portfolio of professionalised services provided both by the state and NGOs.

## 7 IMPACT

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*Description and comparison of the impact of old versus new initiatives.*

The citizens/volunteer initiatives are currently a very dynamic field, in which the existing structures and more formal organisations intermingle in some ways with less formal ones. This can create new synergies or frictions due to different institutional cultures and ideologies. In general, there seems to be a tendency to coordinate better (since autumn 2015) some of the activities organised by volunteers and by professional NGOs.

The longer established organisations have enlarged their database of potential volunteers. There has, in addition, been a change for many of the long-established NGOs in the field of immigrant integration due to the rise of citizen involvement and a general interest in migration issues. This has had both a positive (support from new groups and individuals) and a negative impact (attacks from anti-immigrant groups) on the NGOs. The new initiatives have in general been important in complementing the lack of activity in some areas; this includes for example activities in support of refugee integration in specific institutions (e.g. within churches).

The Ministry of Interior has, however, been selective in respect to the parts of civil society it cooperates with; meaning that it has not involved many of the NGOs active in the field of refugee and immigrant integration in the planning of reception of refugees from the “EU quotas”.

To conclude the volunteering activities have become a part of the portfolio of programmes of NGOs assisting immigrants in the Czech Republic. The numbers have been growing slightly within the old initiatives while they have especially risen within the new ones.