

ETHNICAL MINORITIES IN CZECH REPUBLIC MINORITY OF ROMA

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Abstract

The object of this essay is a brief insight in to area of ethnic groups living in Czech Republic throughout history, specially focuses on Roma ethnicity throughout period of last hundred years, for it is the most important minority in Czech society and last part is dedicated to immigration and asylum policy.

The aim of this essay was to define the situation and think about the development status of ethnic groups in the Czech Republic since 1918, but the primarily the current situation of ethnic minorities in Czech society, and coexistence between minority and majority. Special focus is on the situation of Roma in Czech society, the Roma living habits and also the greatest problems of coexistence with the Czech population.

It is a fact, that Czech society, parted from greatly ethnical different groups, with different cultural ways, both ethnically and politically, religiously and socially, has passed during the 20th century considerable changes that have affected its current form, as the coexistence of people of different minorities within the local community is not always completely smooth.

Migration of large numbers of the population and relatively the high level of ethnic destabilization of the situation are characterized as main aspects which gave rise to a completely new shape to Europe. By this was created a new model of interethnic contact, where a relatively large number of diverse ethnicities live "side by side". It is a fact, that nowadays, cultural pluralism is a real modern social trend. This phenomenon is due to significant growth of migration over the last few decades, but also at the same time it significantly supports and shapes the ideology of multiculturalism, which is in today's modern society widely enforced.

The basic idea of multiculturalism condition is especially the certain respect to differences of ethnic cultures in a way that allows the company live side by side with more ethnic groups, which is shown as an easy concept, for which, although the society nowadays is still not entirely ready, we are moving and be preparing.

Key words : *Ethnical Minorities, Czech Republic, Roma, Social-Cultural Ethnicities, Asylum Policy*

Introduction

The object of this essay is a brief insight in to area of ethnic groups living in Czech Republic throughout history, specially focuses on Roma ethnicity throughout period of last hundred years, for it is the most important minority in Czech society and last part is dedicated to immigration and asylum policy.

History of ethnic minorities in Czech Republic

Migration of big groups of population and destabilization are main characteristics of social, cultural and political development in Europe. This relatively strong migration trend has caused many impacts on the Czech Republic. With it there was an influx of large groups of migrants, mainly from Eastern and Southeastern Europe, followed by Asian, African and Arab countries, and even from some of the States in Western Europe.

All residents of the above mentioned countries have caused a situation that in the Czech Republic was the creation of a new inter-ethnic, cultural contact situation. Based on this new situation thus created a climate of interethnic that was not the Czech Republic and its people completely unknown and foreign.^{12,13}

Large changes in the structure of population of foreign nations living in the Czech lands greatly influenced the basic relationship of the Czech population towards ethnic minorities, ethnic groups and immigration. In the Czechoslovak Republic in the years 1918-1938 formed the basis of this relationship, the principle of equality and the principle of co-existence of the permanent political dialogue with gradually advancing the influence of national and ethnic minorities.

In a time of war and in the years following the First World War was a defining interethnic position of all national and ethnic entities, which at that time housed in the Czech lands.

Nationality	Bohemia	Moravia and Silesia	In sum
Czechoslovak	35 418	7 251	42 669
German	23 660	11 997	35 547
Jewish	15 463	21 315	36 778
Hungarian	802	407	1 209
Polish	488	179	667
Russian, Ukrainian	161	39	200
Different	309	62	371

Source: BITTNEROVÁ, Dana, MOROVCOVÁ, Miriam and collective. *Kdo jsem a kam patřím?* 1.version. Prague SOFIS., 2005. 459 s. ISBN 80-902785-8.2.

In the Czech lands around the year 1918, to create relatively complex, but well-marked spatial distribution of specific national structures. In addition to the majority of the Czech population, it was also the people of Germany, Poland, and the Jews. Germans lived in a holistic settlement in the border areas of Bohemia and Moravia and Silesia. Poles were mostly in Těšín or Ostrava. The Jewish population was found in all cities and villages of Czechoslovakia.^{14,15}

¹²BITTNEROVÁ, Dana, MOROVCOVÁ, Mirjam. *Who Am I and where do I belong?* 1st edition. Prague: SOFIS., 2005. 459 s. ISBN 80-902785-8.2.

¹³ On the crossroads of cultures. 1. Edition. Prague GAC inc., 2010. Page 21. ISBN 978-80-86784-91-5.

¹⁴BITTNEROVÁ, Dana, MOROVCOVÁ, Mirjam . *Who Am I and where do I belong?* 1st edition. Prague: SOFIS., 2005. 459 s. ISBN 80-902785-8.2.

¹⁵ ZBORILOVÁ, Dagmar. [Http://is.muni.cz](http://is.muni.cz) [online]. Discrimination against ethnic minorities in the Czech Republic in the context of finding a job. 2008 Available from: http://is.muni.cz/th/55731/pedf_m/Diplomova_prace_-_Zborilova_Dagmar.pdf

Generations of Czech Republic in the years 1950-1990 lived with the knowledge unambiguous existence of civil society, where there was superiority and most mainstream society, and in which ethnic minorities accounted for only a percentage of fault, which was diffused among all Czech population.

After 1990 there was a gradual change in interethnic contact ethnic groups with residents Czech Republic. Slovaks became a "foreign" minority and Roma considerably more visible on a national dimension as the unassimilated ethnic group. The multiple migration caused the country to Czech gradually getting new ethnic group, the Czech population still completely unknown. This occurred due to ethnic and political exodus at around the nineties of the 20th century, and for reasons that are often related to the opening of new economic and social activities in the Czech Republic. These activities allowed and also significantly supported the newly created political situation and certain economic transformation in the Czech Republic.¹⁶

Czech Republic in the last few years adopted many of the numerous ethnic groups that came from South Eastern and Eastern Europe, Asia, and Africa, as well as citizens from U.S. or Western Europe.

Some members of these groups come to the Czech Republic with a vision to live here permanently, others are active only for short periods, such as coming to work or study, etc. (see Table 2).¹⁷

Tab. 2: Studied ethnic minorities and ethnic groups with regard to their motivation stay in Czech Republic

Motivation of staying in CZ	Ethnic minorities and nations
Continuous settlement in several generations	Poles, Romani, Greeks (descendants of Greek families)
Temporary immigration and students from foreign countries	Ukrainians, Albanians, from Fyrom, Bulgarians
Notion of CZ as a transit station	From Fyrom*
New living space	
a) Immigration withing Czechoslovakia	Slovak, Roma, Hungarians
b) Economic motives - the attractiveness of the CZ	Bulgarians, Ukrainians, Cubans
c) Economic motives - the attractiveness of the Europe	Vietnamese, Chinese, Nigerians
d) Political emigration	Belarusians

Source: BITTNEROVÁ, Dana [Http://lidemesta.cz](http://lidemesta.cz) [online]. Výzkum identity národnostních a etnických skupin žijících na území České republiky. 2012 [cit. 2012-09-19]. Link: <http://lidemesta.cz/index.php?id=665>

Characteristics of ethnical minorities and ethnical groups in Czech Republic

- The Ukrainian minority is relatively numerically small group. The first migration wave that minority occurred around the turn of the 19. to 20. century.
- The German minority has started to present to the collapse of the Austro-Hungarian Empire and the subsequent establishment of the independent Czechoslovak Republic. At this time

¹⁶ BITTNEROVÁ, Dana, MOROVCOVÁ, Mirjam . Who Am I and where do I belong? 1st edition. Prague: SOFIS., 2005. ISBN 80-902785-8.2.

¹⁷ BITTNEROVÁ, Dana, MOROVCOVÁ, Mirjam . Who Am I and where do I belong? 1st edition. Prague: SOFIS., 2005. ISBN 80-902785-8.2.

(around the year 1918) Germans were very much involved in the overall composition of Czechoslovakia.

- Hungarian minority had its declaration in the Czech Republic after 1989, when they were perceived as one of the ethnic groups located in Czech area. Hungarians founded the Union of the Hungarians who live in the Czech lands.
- Polish minority was very much concentrated just at the borders with Poland.
- Slovak minority arose because the Slovaks have established a national minority living in the Czech Republic, of the reasons for inter-republic migration, which took place from Slovakia to Czech and vice versa.
- Greek minority is considered a modern ethnic minority in Czech lands. Many Greeks migrated to the former Czechoslovakia, mostly as a result of the civil war and in 1946-1949. In this period Czechoslovakia guaranteed them certain political asylum.
- Vietnamese minority in Czechoslovakia and Czech Republic appears since the end of 1950'. Many Vietnamese lives there for long time and had passed their primary, secondary or higher education. Many of them are currently working in the field of trade, food production and other areas.¹⁸

Tab. 3: Ethnical minorities and ethnic groups in Czech Republic by place of origin.

Geographic Area	Ethnicity
Europe	Albanians
	Belarusians
	Bulgarians
	French
	Hungarians
	From Fyrom
	Poles
	Roma
	Slovaks
	Ukrainians
	Jews
Africa	Nigerians
	Ethiopians
America	Citizens of the USA
	Citizens of Latin America
	Cubans
Middle east	Syrians
	Armenians
Asia	Vietnamese
	Chinese

¹⁸ ZBOŘILOVÁ, Dagmar. *Http://is.muni.cz* [online]. Discrimination against ethnic minorities in the Czech Republic in the context of finding a job. 2008 Available from: *ttp://is.muni.cz/th/55731/pedf_m/Diplomova_prace_-_Zborilova_Dagmar.pdf*

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The Roma Minority in Czech Republic

Any presence of ethnic minorities in any society can cause the appearance of stress. This tension can be for instance different national, cultural experiences, as well, as concerns about the preservations of the identity of the major population and very often quite contradictory and different need and interests of individual citizens. The tension in Czech society nowadays can be caused by the fact that the differences in living standards between different population groups are getting more and more visible. These differences are often characterized by being member of a particular ethnic, cultural group, or the main population group. Another reason may be the fact, that very often the major society's perception of the needs and interest of minorities are only marginally and see them only as insignificant and often unimportant. These fact members of minor groups may take as a position of the majority towards them and consequently feel arrogance, intolerance or even oppression.¹⁹

Very similar situation has arisen in recent years in Czech Republic. Most common incidents of inter - ethnic intolerance are not directed against "foreigners", but against the natives, which inhabitants of Czech Republic calls Roma, Romani or gypsies.

History of Roma Minority in Czech Republic

Roma are an ethnic minority which is located in Czech Republic and that its anthropological characteristics vary considerably, not only from mainstream society, but also from other ethnic minorities, that are located in Czech Republic. Geographically and historically is known that Roma came from India. With that is linked not only anthropological characteristics, but also the language used and many other ethnic traits and characteristics. It is estimated that the Czech Republic has about 150 000 - 180 000 Roma, where most of them are concentrated mainly in large agglomerations, cities and areas with developed industry.²⁰

Almost throughout the Middle Ages and modern times, Roma have been subject to very sharp persecution from the mainstream society and from ruling class. Roma are very often considered outlawed from major society.

During the so called First Republic²¹ was seen as very important The Act of wandering Gypsies that showed significantly distancing attitude of society towards Roma, but also a political injustice and discrimination. This Act Roma stigmatized as the antisocial group against which to enjoy a variety of violent means and methods. In 1940' the creation and the enforcement of the repressive anti-Roma activities, which included for instance ban of wandering gypsies, violent transition to a settled way of life and also attempts to hold Roma in labor camps.

The most tragic situation for the Roma people was the time during the Second World War, when were almost all Roma people who lived in Bohemia and Moravia killed. Slovak Roma were

¹⁹ ZBOŘILOVÁ, Dagmar. [Http://is.muni.cz](http://is.muni.cz) [online]. Discrimination against ethnic minorities in the Czech Republic in the context of finding a job. 2008 Available from: [ttp://is.muni.cz/th/55731/pdf_m/Diplomova_prace_-_Zborilova_Dagmar.pdf](http://is.muni.cz/th/55731/pdf_m/Diplomova_prace_-_Zborilova_Dagmar.pdf)

²⁰ BITTNEROVÁ, Dana, MOROVCOVÁ, Mirjam . Who Am I and where do I belong? 1st edition. Prague: SOFIS., 2005. ISBN 80-902785-8.2.

²¹ Czechoslovakia since 1918 till 1938

socially, economically and humanly completely decimated. Of all the original Roma population in the Czech lands remained only around 500 people, the other succumbed to cruel systematic genocide.²²

Newly arriving Roma came to Bohemia and Moravia shortly after the Second World War. At this time effort was made to eliminate certain social and cultural backwardness. Examples of this was liquidation of Gypsy settlements and efforts towards education of Roma population and further integration to society, but these efforts have been very negatively affected by the lack of financial resources and also by the fact, that the authorities did not allow the native language of the Roma - Romani - taught in schools and also refused to accept the Roma community as a distinctive ethnic group, which is located within Czechoslovakian society. Despite various efforts in the field of education and culture, the illiteracy of the Roma population was significant. Problems began to appear gradually in places of new Roma focus, in industrial or border areas.

Fifties of 20th century are characterized by a considerable expansion of Slovak Roma to the Czech lands and efforts to spread Roma throughout Czechoslovakia. Through this measure was to prevent increasing, both social and cultural issues.

In sixties and seventies was subsequently defined a new concept in the field of social and cultural work with the Roma, which has been named as the Program of societal integration. The main idea of this program was, to suppress the existing ethnic identity of Roma and especially their particular social inequality. Then the Roma issues will be more easily resolved in the major society. In fact, was this program formed only on number of administrative measures, such as keeping records of Roma, but no cultural work with them? Then question of taking Roma children from their parents and placing them into special institutions, or so-called special or auxiliary schools. These interventions were very destructive and reflected in the society and social functioning Roma individuals and families for several generations.²³

The Current situation of the Roma in Czech Republic.

The position of the Roma minority in the Czech Republic in the long term may be quite problematic. In many studies that have been implemented in the past and focused on Roma issues revealed, that up to 80% of Czech population has considerably negative attitude towards the Roma minority.

It is also true, that when Roma minority is mentioned, reactions of major society are very different. It is interesting that in addition to personal experiences influence the members of the major society various myths, beliefs of prejudices of others.

In the Czech Republic, according to the research is to 330 so-called socially excluded localities, which occupies up to 60.000 – 80.000 Roma, which is about a third of the Roma population located in the Czech Republic.²⁴

Refugees and asylum seekers

²² ZBOŘILOVÁ, Dagmar. [Http://is.muni.cz](http://is.muni.cz) [online]. Discrimination against ethnic minorities in the Czech Republic in the context of finding a job. 2008 Available from: [tp://is.muni.cz/th/55731/pedf_m/Diplomova_prace_-_Zborilova_Dagmar.pdf](http://is.muni.cz/th/55731/pedf_m/Diplomova_prace_-_Zborilova_Dagmar.pdf)

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²⁴ On the crossroads of cultures. 1. Edition. Prague GAC inc., 2010. Page 21. ISBN 978-80-86784-91-5.

The basic definition of a refugee is listed in the Convention on the Status of Refugees or also in the Geneva Convention, which was adopted by the UN General Assembly in 1951 in Geneva. This definition is still valid and crucial in the determination of the refugee status, or for asylum in specific countries. Czech Republic is also bound by various obligations that are given under this Convention.²⁵

The Convention on the Status of Refugees is binding for the Czech Republic on the basis of international agreements. Convention on the Status of Refugees was ratified under Article 10 of the Constitution. Through ratification of the Convention is built on top of other legal norms of Czech Republic.

Specific commitment to an asylum directly regulates the Charter of Rights and Freedoms, which in article 43 is stated that the Czech Republic is obliged to grant asylum to foreigners, who are persecuted, provided the application of certain political rights and freedoms. Asylum could otherwise be denied to the person who has acted in clear violation of the fundamental rights and freedoms.^{26 27}

The term refugee is defined as any person who is outside his country and has a legitimate fear of possible persecution based on his/her race, religion, political beliefs, etc., and is unable to accept protection of his/her original country for the reasons above, or is a person who of the above reasons cannot return to their homeland.²⁸

It is possible to distinguish several types of refugees, namely:

- de facto refugee is a refugee or refugees from the war or natural disasters, i.e., They had to leave their homeland, but are beyond basic definition of refugee under the Geneva Conventions. In the host country, their situation is dealt mostly by the Institute of temporary protection.
- Asylum seekers are another group of refugees. These are people who have lodged an application for asylum. In the Czech Republic is process of providing asylum adjusted by the relevant law. According to this law is an asylum seeker an individual who has expressed intention and applied for asylum in Czech Republic. Applicant waits until the Ministry of Interior of Czech Republic. In the applicant must be state the reasons that led applicant to find an asylum, or provide the necessary evidence for the claim.
- Accredited refugee or asylum seeker is the person who has shown that his fear of persecution in his home country is justified and was therefore subsequently granted asylum. The host country agrees to grant asylum that will provide this person with protection and assistance in intergrating into the society in the new country.

Very important is that the host country focus on refugee populations of these potentially vulnerable persons:

- children and adolescents unaccompanied by an adult
- women
- older people

²⁵ MATOUŠEK, Oldřich, KODYMOVA, Pavla, KOLÁČKOVÁ, Jana . Social work in praction. 1. Edition. Prague: Portal, 2005. ISBN 80-7367-002-X.

²⁶ MATOUŠEK, Oldřich, KODYMOVA, Pavla, KOLÁČKOVÁ, Jana . Social work in praction. 1. Edition. Prague: Portal, 2005. ISBN 80-7367-002-X.

²⁷ [Http://www.varianty.cz](http://www.varianty.cz) [online]. Refugees and asylum seekers in the Czech Republic. Available from: http://www.varianty.cz/download/doc/activities/71_0.pdf.

²⁸ MATOUŠEK, Oldřich, KODYMOVÁ, Pavla, KOLÁČKOVÁ, Jana . Social work in praction. 1. Edition. Prague: Portal, 2005. ISBN 80-7367-002-X.

- physically or mentally disabled, or chronically ill persons
- victims of extreme violence²⁹

The definition of target group

On the margins of society can get various people who may be at risk with dissimilar problems. A certain similarity between them is most often presents itself in the fact, that they are people who lost their homes and are now living on streets. On the margins of society occur even those, who were originally asylum seekers. These people may eventually become homeless.³⁰

The act of Asylum

Refugees and asylum seekers in Czech Republic is still relatively young and unusual phenomenon. Legislation concerning this issue, is constantly modified and adjusted according to actual problems. Currently, the law in force is called Asylum Act, No.325/1999 Coll. The latest amendment, which took place in 2002 (Act No. 2/2002 Coll.) aimed to harmonized and completed this Act, so it will be in harmony with law of European Union.

The area of asylum is the responsibility of the Ministry of Interior of the Czech Republic, where is established the Department for Asylum and Migration Policy Department and entitled Refugee Facilities Administration.

The Asylum and migration policy decisions in the administrative proceedings on the request for asylum. Department of Refugee Facilities Administration deals with the establishment and management of refugee camps, where they are provided social services for the basic needs.³¹

The Asylum Procedure

The asylums seeker is a person who submits an application for obtaining asylum in a country, to the competent authority that is authorized by the management to make decisions. The applicant shall submit an application for asylum, at a border crossing, or directly at the reception center of the Ministry of Interior of the Czech Republic. Once the applicant gets to the reception center, which is designed for applicants, he/she must stay there for a period about three weeks. During this time, the applicant is subjected to a detailed medical examination and also interviewed, about the reasons that led him or her to apply for asylum.³²

After this initial procedure, the applicant can accommodate either at the residential center of the Ministry of Interior of the Czech Republic, or in layman's terms in a refugee camp, or take an advantage of the opportunity to stay on the private address.

Department for Asylum and Migration Policy decision on the application within the statutory time period which is ninety days, but it is possible to extend the deadline.

²⁹ MATOUŠEK, Oldřich, KODYMOVÁ, Pavla, KOLÁČKOVÁ, Jana . Social work in praction. 1. Edition. Prague: Portal, 2005. ISBN 80-7367-002-X.

³⁰ [Http://www.varianty.cz](http://www.varianty.cz) [online]. Refugees and asylum seekers in the Czech Republic. Available from: http://www.varianty.cz/download/doc/activities/71_0.pdf.

³¹ [Http://www.varianty.cz](http://www.varianty.cz) [online]. Refugees and asylum seekers in the Czech Republic. Available from: http://www.varianty.cz/download/doc/activities/71_0.pdf.

³² [Http://www.varianty.cz](http://www.varianty.cz) [online]. Refugees and asylum seekers in the Czech Republic. Available from: http://www.varianty.cz/download/doc/activities/71_0.pdf.

In the cases of clearly unfounded applications for asylum, the reasons for applying for asylum are economic, or when person comes from a country that is considered "safe" is the whole process for asylum applications accelerated and decision is issued within thirty days.³³

It is known that the high number of applicants waits for a decision for several years. It is true, that asylum is granted in the event that during procedure is the applicant persecuted on the grounds that states Convention on Refugees. Seekers then get even some family members of the applicants, or an asylum seeker, but only in very exceptional cases, such as poor health status of relative of the applicant, or age (low or vice versa high). Department for Asylum and Migration Policy may also grant asylum so-called humanitarian reasons.³⁴

The reasons for not granting asylum may include the following:

- If the applicant states, that the reasons are only economic reasons.
- If the applicant knowingly provides false or falsified information.
- Or, if the applicant comes from a country, that is considered safe.³⁵

If asylum procedure ends up with negative decision, applicant can repeat request for asylum after two years.³⁶

Conclusion

The aim of this essay was to define the situation and think about the development status of ethnic groups in the Czech Republic since 1918, but the primarily the current situation of ethnic minorities in Czech society, and coexistence between minority and majority. Special focus is on the situation of Roma in Czech society, the Roma living habits and also the greatest problems of coexistence with the Czech population.

It is a fact, that Czech society has passed during the 20th century considerable changes that have affected its current form. The original community greatly different groups, both ethnically and politically, culturally, religiously and socially, who lived in the Czech Republic remained a relatively ethnically homogeneous population group.

In conclusion, the coexistence of people of different ethnic groups with different cultural ways within the local community is not in today's modern times completely smooth. This situation may be influenced by a large number of factors, that can be quite realistic and supported by actual experiences of member of the major society, or it may be a certain prejudices, or completely individual factors.

Migration of large numbers of the population and relatively high level of ethnic destabilization of the situation were the main aspects which gave rise to a completely new situation in Europe, including Czech Republic. By this has created interethnic contact, the unusual situation where "side by side" lives a relatively large number of diverse ethnicities. There is therefore the establishment of the cultural plurality. It could be said that cultural pluralism is a modern trend in today's situation of the company. This phenomenon may be due to significant growth of migration over the last few decades, but it significantly supports and shapes the ideology of multiculturalism, which is in today's modern society widely enforced.

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The basic idea of multiculturalism condition is especially respecting certain cultural differences of ethnic cultures in a way that allows the company live side by side with more ethnic groups, which is shown as an easy concept for which is society nowadays still not entirely ready, but we are getting there.

Resourses

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