

## **Foreigners in the Czech Republic**

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Prior to 1989, the Czechs had only limited opportunities to meet foreigners. Except for tourists, only students and workers from socialist countries came to our country in small numbers and for limited periods of time. After the borders opened, foreigners took advantage of the relatively liberal approach of the Czech Republic towards them. In addition to transiting foreigners, attracted by our border with Western Europe, we were also a lure for work migration. The Czech Republic was able to offer better life standard and political stability to people from the East – especially younger men arrived from these countries, leaving behind their families and doing especially unskilled work in the Czech Republic. To the contrary, incomers from the West were a more heterogeneous group and they applied their education in more intellectual professions. Currently, the number of foreigners with legal residence in the Czech Republic amounts to 238,000. Their participation in the population however falls short by far of the level usual, for example, in Austria or Germany – it amounts to one-tenth of this level.

### **1. Residence of Foreigners in the Czech Republic**

The Czechs do not have very clear picture about how many foreigners reside in our country. A survey<sup>1</sup> investigating, among other matters, how people estimate the numbers of foreigners living in the Czech Republic – both legal foreigners and those who live here without residency permit – demonstrated this fact.

According to data from the Ministry of Interior, 222,000 foreigners had residency permits for the Czech Republic (permanent residence and long-term visa /over 90 days/) in March 2002<sup>2</sup>. Only 18% of the interviewed estimated the number of foreign legal residents at least between 150,000 and 300,000. Other citizens tended to underestimate their number, 70% of them guessed lower values – an estimated 300 legal residents of other nationalities in the Czech Republic was an extreme. On the other side, the number of foreigners with residence permit was overvalued by 12% of respondents. Most frequently mentioned values were 100,000, 50,000, and 10,000 persons.

Exact numbers of foreigners living in the Czech Republic without residency permits is obviously not known, but, for example, Doc. Dušan Drbohlav from the Natural Science Faculty of the Charles University estimates their number to approximately 300,000. A third of those only pass through our country – not wishing to stay longer. For foreigners living in the Czech Republic illegally, the estimates of the respondents were even worse. Only 12% of the interviewed

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<sup>1</sup> The author of the survey, RNDr. Milan Jeřábek, PhD., is a researcher in the Czech Border Region research department of the Institute of Sociology of the Academy of Sciences of the Czech Republic. The survey was implemented with support from GA ČR č. 205/02/0321, project titled "Pracovně podmíněné migrace jako součást mezinárodního (přeshraničního) trhu práce Česka v kontextu evropské integrace /Work-conditioned migrations as part of the international (cross-border) Czech labour market in the context of European integration/" in co-operation with research teams from Západočeská univerzita in Plzeň, Univerzita Karlova in Prague, Masarykova univerzita in Brno, and Ostravská univerzita in Ostrava. The investigation was performed by the Public Opinion Research Centre (CVVM) of the Institute of Sociology of the Academy of Sciences of the Czech Republic as part of the Our society 2003 (Naše společnost 2003) survey, 03-05.

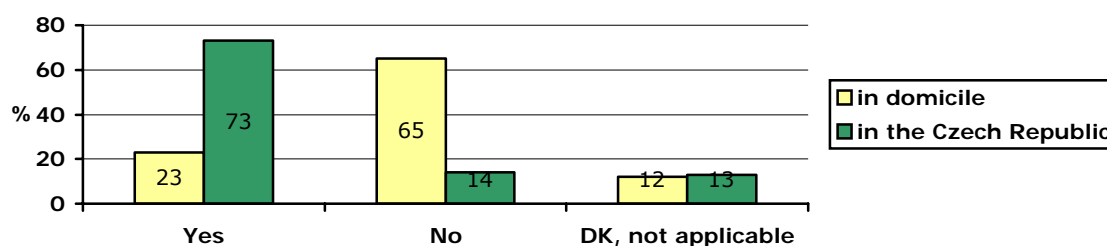
<sup>2</sup> The year-on-year growth in the number of citizens legally residing in the Czech Republic amounted to approximately 5% in recent years. Therefore, at the time of performing our survey, their numbers could have been around 230,000.

mentioned their numbers at least in the range between 200,000 and 400,000. Lower numbers were mentioned by 78%; most frequently, the mentioned figures were again 100,000, 50,000, and 10,000 persons.

For almost a quarter of the citizens, other nationalities arriving in the Czech Republic in recent years present a problem in their domiciles. People living in Prague, in the northwest of Bohemia, and in larger towns (with population of 30,000 to 50,000) have expressed this opinion more frequently. Their estimates of the numbers of foreigners (living here legally and illegally) tended to be over-valued.

The conviction that foreigners pose a problem in the domicile of the Czechs is also related to the attitude that the same situation applies throughout the country. Citizens of other nationalities are considered to be a problem in the entire Czech Republic by 73% of respondents, 14% of respondents are of an opposite opinion. People with university education (20%) are the largest opponents of the opinion that they present a problem. However, further data will show that such problematic vision of the presence of foreigners in the Czech Republic is not sufficiently based on a real personal experience.

**Chart 1. Citizens of Other Nationalities Present a Problem**



Note: Source CVVM (Public Opinion Research Centre), Our Society (Naše společnost) survey.

Almost three quarters of respondents agree that foreigners should have the option to stay for a long period in the Czech Republic but only under certain conditions. The opinion that foreigners should not have the option to stay here for long period at all was expressed by 17% of respondents. Especially people who would place themselves more to the left on the left-right scale, people who judge their living standard as bad, and also those who see the presence of foreigners in their domicile as problematic express such opinion. To the contrary, mainly supporters of our accession into the EU support unlimited residence of foreigners. Also those who know a foreigner living in the Czech Republic for a long term and who think that it is correct to employ foreigners support this opinion.

**Table 1. Long-Term Residence of Foreigners in the Czech Republic (in %)**

	In %
Should not have any possibility whatsoever	16.8
Should have the possibility under certain conditions	72.9
Should have the possibility without limitations	5.5
DK	4.7
Total	100

Note: Source CVVM, Our Society survey.

More than half of all citizens think that foreigners in the Czech Republic should adapt to our life habits to the maximum possible degree. This attitude has huge support among KSČM proponents and those who think that the presence of foreigners in the Czech Republic is problematic. To the contrary, the opinion that foreigners should have the possibility to live here entirely in line with their life habits is supported by only a few – approximately 7%. These people also support unlimited long-term residence of foreigners in the Czech Republic.

**Table 2. Foreigners in the Czech Republic should ... (in %)**

	In %
Adapt to our habits to the maximum possible degree	55.7
Partially adapt to our habits	33.7
Have the possibility to live entirely in line with their life habits	6.5
DK	4.1
Total	100

Note: Source CVVM, Our Society survey.

We can compare the data because the same question was posed in 2001 as well<sup>3</sup>. Our attitude has shifted slightly towards bigger tolerance – back in 2001, more than 60% of respondents expressed an opinion that foreigners should adapt to our habits to the maximum possible degree.

## 2. Our Relationship Towards Other Nationalities

The overall attitude of our population towards foreigners living in the Czech Republic is not very friendly. It is, however, good to look at our attitude towards different groups of foreigners – individual nationalities. A survey<sup>4</sup> addressed the attitudes of the Czechs to nationalities living in our country (by asking a question “How would you describe your relationship towards groups of people living in the Czech Republic?”) and also attitudes of citizens towards nationalities in general (“How would you describe your relationship to people of the selected nations and nationalities?”). Respondents revealed their relationship towards individual nationalities by classifying them on a 7-point scale where the marginal points meant “very amicable” and “very non-amicable”.

**Table 3. Relationship Towards Nations Living in the Czech Republic (From the Most Amicable to the Least Amicable)**

Czechs
Slovaks
Poles
Germans
Jews
Vietnamese
Citizens of former Soviet Union
Citizens of Balkan countries
Romanians

Note: Source CVVM, Our Society survey.

<sup>3</sup> CVVM SoÚ AV ČR – survey 01-05.

<sup>4</sup> CVVM SoÚ AV ČR – Our Society 2003 survey, 03-02.

The table suggests that we have the best relationship towards Czech nationals, and only slightly worse relationship towards the Slovaks. The Czechs consider the Germans and the Poles to be amicable, and also the Jews. However, in the last mentioned case of Jews, the responses varied a lot and more than 10% of citizens were not able to express their attitude towards them. In principle, respondents described Vietnamese citizens, citizens from the former Soviet Union, and citizens from Balkan countries as rather not amicable (the share of "not amicable" responses was higher than the share of "amicable" responses). Definitely, the Czechs have the worst relationship (from the nationalities offered) to Romanians.

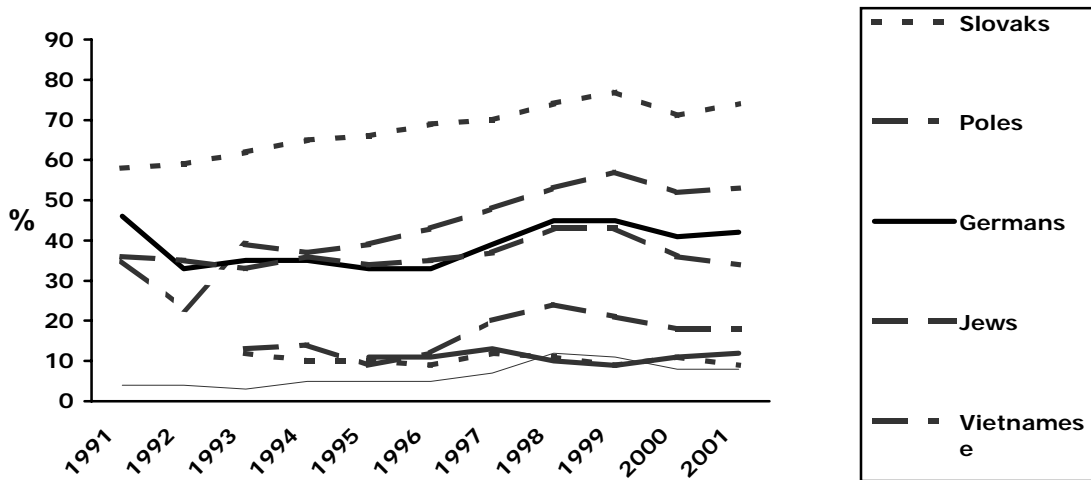
Generally speaking, people with higher living standard, university-educated, religious people, and people living in townships with 2,000 to 5,000 inhabitants have more positive attitudes towards citizens of other nationalities. There are no significant differences in the responses of the respondents by age groups; only people over sixty years of age have evaluated their relationship towards the Germans less positively.

The region, in which the respondent is living, plays a certain role. In the north of Bohemia and Moravia, people have a more positive relationship towards the Poles than in other parts of the country. Similarly, inhabitants of the northwestern Bohemia – especially the Karlovy Vary region, consider the Germans as more amicable. To the contrary, in southwestern Bohemia, people consider Vietnamese citizens and inhabitants of the Balkan countries as less amicable. Citizens from the Balkan countries are, along with the citizens from the former Soviet Union and the Poles, less amicable for people from towns with more than 100,000 inhabitants, especially people living in Prague.

Respondents with right-wing affiliation consider the Germans as more amicable than other people, and citizens from the Balkan and former Soviet Union as less amicable than the rest of respondents.

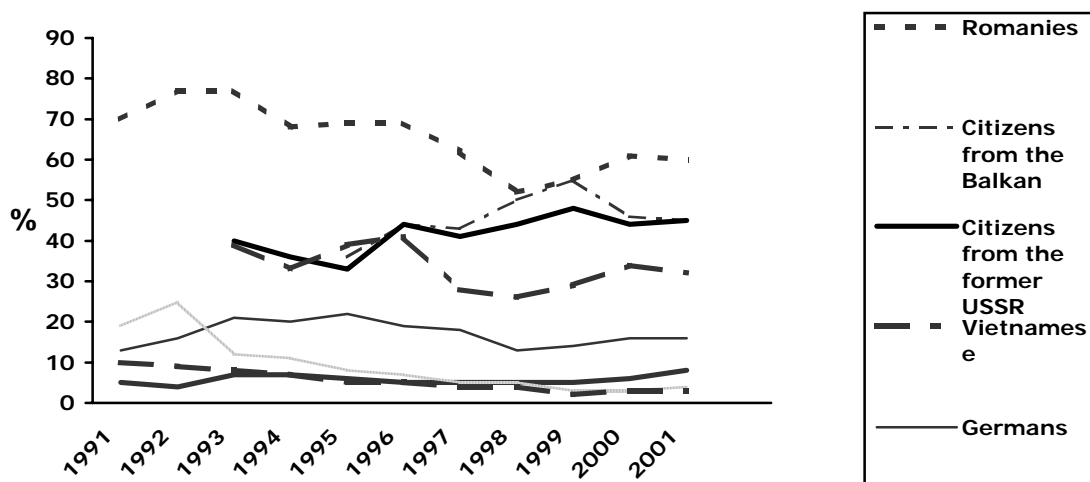
Relationships to nationalities living in the Czech Republic were investigated in previous years as well, but in a slightly different way. The same question was asked, but the respondents selected an answer from the following list: very good, quite good, neither good nor bad, quite bad, very bad. The two following charts demonstrate the development of the relationship of the Czechs towards individual nationalities in the years 1991 to 2001.

**Chart 2. Positive Relationship towards Nationalities Living in the Czech Republic (1991-2001)**



Note: Source CVVM, Our Society survey.

**Chart 3. Negative Relationship towards Nationalities Living in the Czech Republic (1991-2001)**



Note: Source CVVM, Our Society survey.

Our relationship towards the Slovaks and the Poles living in the Czech Republic has improved in the course of the 1990s. Although after 1999, our sympathies towards these nationalities went through a slight decrease, it seems that they are more or less at the same level today. Positive relationship of the Czechs towards the Germans had a slightly more turbulent development (apparently, it also reflected the momentary state of discussion concerning the Beneš decrees). In 1998 and 1999, it reached the level of the beginning of the nineties. Liking of the Jews by the Czechs was also at its top in 1998 and 1999. After that, however, it dropped more sharply than liking of the Germans. Our positive attitudes towards citizens from the former Soviet Union and citizens of the Balkan countries do not change dramatically. In the long run, however, the share of negative evaluations of the relationship towards these citizens grows. The attitude of the Czechs towards the Romanians, the worst of all mentioned

nationalities, has a positive tendency in the long run, although very gradual. And, also the share of negative evaluations of the relationship towards the Romanies decreases in the long run.

Attitudes towards nationalities in general were surveyed by enquiring about a total of twenty-three nationalities. Their arrangement from the most amicable to the least amicable nationality is demonstrated in the following table.

**Table 4. Relationship towards Nationalities (From the Most to the Least Amicable)**

Czechs
Slovaks, French
Swedes, English
Poles
Austrians, Japanese, Greeks
Americans, Mexicans
Indians, Germans
Lithuanian, Israeli, Chinese, Serbs, Russians, Turkish
Kurds, Ukrainians, Palestinians, Afghans

Note: Source CVVM, Our Society survey.

We like the Czechs, the Slovaks, and the French the most, followed by other European nations. On the other hand, we find citizens from the former Soviet Union and Asian people as rather not amicable. This scale of likes and dislikes of individual nationalities is probably difficult to interpret and grasp. What is behind these evaluations, based on what do people evaluate their relationship towards individual nationalities? Most of us clearly do not have any detailed information about the individual nations. And we cannot know nationals of all these nationalities. We have not even met properly most of them. A factor analysis referring to variables hidden behind the expressed attitudes to the individual nationalities from the large group may offer at least a basic answer to these questions. You may see the results in the following table.

**Table 5. Relationship Towards Nationalities - Factors**

Factor 1 ("distant countries")	Factor 2 ("developed world")	Factor 3 ("neighbours")
Afghans	Americans	Czechs
Chinese	English	Germans
Indians	French	Poles
Israeli	Japanese	Austrians
Kurds	Austrians	Russians
Lithuanian	Greek	Slovaks
Palestinians	Swedes	
Russians		
Serbs		
Turkish		
Ukrainians		

Note: Source CVVM, Our Society survey.

The first factor includes nationalities whose countries belong among less developed or poor but, above all, distant – geographically or culturally – countries. For the most part, they are almost unknown or exotic countries for us. Opposed to this factor is the second factor. It includes countries forming the developed world – Western Europe, the U.S.A., and Japan. These are countries among which we would definitely like to belong or to which we would like to come closer – economically and with the political system. The third factor covers our “close” countries, be it geographically or historically. They are our close neighbours or countries with which we are bonded by common history.

Our attitudes towards citizens of other nationalities are, however, influenced by the generally expressed content with life or the evaluation of personal relationships in our domicile. People who are more content with their life and with relationships among people have, generally speaking, a more tolerant attitude towards people of other nationalities. Wide complex of influences such as mutual familiarity conditioned by being neighbours, cultural closeness, similar political and economic direction, reflects in our “liking” of individual nationalities... Such a comprehensive framework requires further examination, not possible within the omnibus investigation performed by CVVM.

In addition to liking, also completely reverse feelings were examined<sup>5</sup> - 16% of respondents gave a positive answer (“yes, often” and “yes, sometimes”) to the question whether they personally felt animosity against other people due to nationality in the last year, three-quarters of citizens gave a negative answer. Due to other race, 24% respondents felt animosity towards other people; entire two-thirds did not feel it. But we may be comforted a bit by the finding that the situation improved in the course of the nineties. At the beginning, less than 60% of respondents did not feel animosity due to nationality. In 1991, only 40% of people did not feel animosity due to another race.

In a specifying enquiry as to what nationality or race was involved, people mentioned especially the Romanians (two thirds of respondents) and, also, the Germans, the Ukrainians, the Vietnamese, the Slovaks...(always less than 10%). And when did the citizens feel animosity? This involved, especially, different assumptions as to how people should behave – vaguely described as “personal experience” (44%), noisy and unsuitable behaviour in transportation means and in the street (18%). Furthermore, negative feelings are caused by alleged high criminality of other nationals or other race (16%). 8% of citizens acquired such negative feeling based on information from the media – that is, only second-hand information. Here, it is necessary to point out that the media may even themselves create the feeling of higher share in criminality.

What solution would people propose to remove the causes behind the animosity? Especially, other nationals should adapt, more than one-fourth of citizens think, and they should comply with the law (15%). In the opinion of 15% of respondents, we should not let other nationals enter our country at all or we should move them back to their country. One-tenth of people find solution in applying the same attitude to everybody, not promoting anyone, and only 7% mentioned mutual understanding. Undemocratic procedures have relatively high support, while tolerance and friendliness from us is somehow tuned down.

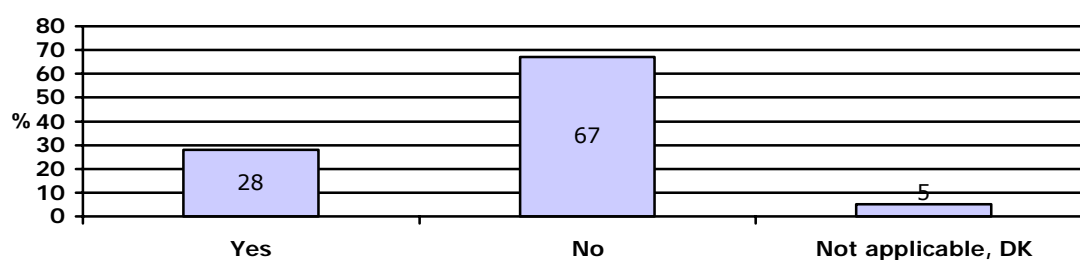
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<sup>5</sup> Public Opinion Research Institute (Institut pro výzkum veřejného mínění), 98-01 survey.

### 3. Do we Support Residence of Foreigners in Our Country?

The general public does not show very high share of personal knowledge of foreigners having long-term residence in the Czech Republic. 28% of the citizens have such experience.

**Chart 4. Do you Personally Know Closer any Foreigners with Long-Term Residence in the Czech Republic?**



Note: Source CVVM, Our Society survey.

Those who know some foreigners with long-term residence in the Czech Republic personally, mentioned citizens of the Ukraine and Vietnam. Other mentioned nationalities included the Slovaks, the Poles, the Russians, and the Germans. All other groups of foreigners were mentioned in frequencies below two percent.<sup>6</sup>

**Table 6. Where do the Foreigners you Know Come From? (In %)**

	In %
The Ukraine	25
Vietnam	20
Slovakia	12
Poland	7
Russian Federation	5
Germany	3
USA	2
China	2
Other	24
<b>Total</b>	<b>100</b>

Note: Source CVVM, Our Society survey.

The following table<sup>7</sup> suggests to what degree we have considered certain reasons as justified for settling in the Czech Republic in 2001.

<sup>6</sup> According to information from the Ministry of the Interior of the Czech Republic, the largest group of the total amount of 222,329 foreigners with residency permit as of 31 March 2002, were citizens of the Slovak Republic (26%) and the Ukraine (25%), followed by the citizens of Vietnam (12%), Polish Republic (8%), and Russia (6%). German citizens accounted for 2% and groups of citizens from other countries for always less than 2%.

<sup>7</sup> CVVM SoÚ AV ČR, 01-05 survey.



**Table 7. Approval with Settling of Foreigners in the Czech Republic (in %)**

	Practically to all	Only to a smaller part	Almost to none of them
Those who are directly in danger of their lives	54	34	11
Those who are persecuted due to their political, or race, ethnical reasons...	28	51	21
Those who search for better living conditions	12	39	50

Note: Source CVVM, Our Society survey. The percentage up to 100% in the lines is "Don't know" answers.

What conditions would these people have to meet in order to be able to settle in the Czech Republic? In the opinion of our general public, they should, above all, comply with our laws (30%). One-fifth of the respondents require them to demonstrate clear criminal record integrity. In the opinion of 10% of citizens, they should show efforts to integrate. Requirements that these people be educated, healthy, honest, and hard-working people, was only slightly less frequent. In the opinion of 8% of citizens, we should accept only foreigners in utter need. And every twenty respondent mentioned that we have enough of our own problems.

One third of citizens would agree with placement of a refugee camp near their domicile and more than half (55%) would not agree. The reason for disapproval involves mainly misgivings concerning criminality (33%) and feeling of peril (28%). As another reason, one-tenth of respondents mentioned mistrust against certain foreigners. Only slightly less frequently, people declared that refugees are disorderly and noisy, and abuse our hospitality. Less than three percent of people mentioned bad personal experience and others would not agree based on news from the media. It is interesting that here, personal experience with refugees, émigrés, or asylum seekers showed very prominently – if the refugees live in the vicinity of the domicile of the respondent, the support for establishment of a camp was much higher - 55% (as opposed to 29% of those who do not have any refugees in the vicinity of their domicile).

Until 31 August 2003, more than 67,000 foreigners asked for asylum in the Czech Republic (most of them from the Ukraine - 13%, from Romania, Afghanistan, Bulgaria, and Russia), less than 2,400 were granted the asylum, especially the Romanians - 20%, citizens of Afghanistan - 11%, and also citizens from the former Soviet Union and Russia, Vietnam, Armenia, and Byelorussia. In the opinion of 9% of citizens, granting asylum to foreigners, and their long-term residence mean a contribution to our society. For 33% of the general public, they are neither a contribution nor a danger, and the entire half of the respondents think that the granting asylum to foreigners presents a danger to our society. Those who have refugees in their vicinity consider the granting of asylum as beneficial much more frequently (24%). For those who do not have any refugees in their vicinity, this is represented by only 8%.

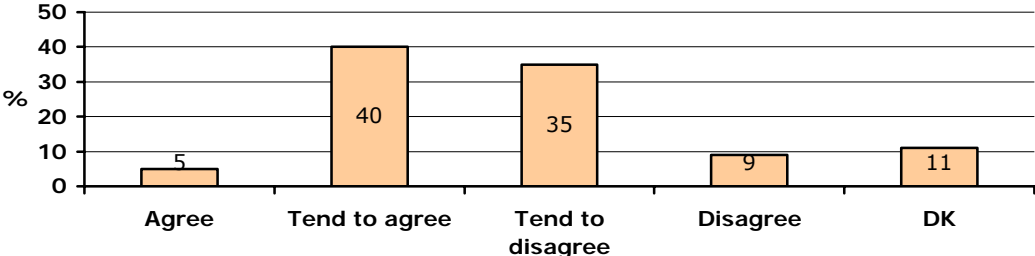
What is the benefit of asylum seekers, foreigners with long-term residence to our society in the opinion of the Czech public? Most often, we see a possible economic benefit (38%) and cultural diversity (27%). 15% of citizens see granting of asylum as a possible solution to decreasing population. Asylum brings us goodwill in the world (6%) and also contributes to growth of tolerance (4%).

And what threat could the asylum seekers and foreigners with long-term residence present to our society? Our public is convinced, above all, that they would commit criminal offences here (50%). Approximately one-tenth of citizens considers them inadaptable and is afraid of increase of unemployment. Only slightly lower support goes to the opinion that we have to pay for them, and also misgivings concerning increased health risks.

**4. Attitudes of the Czech Population to Employing Foreigners**

One of the reasons why people have negative attitude towards immigrants is a rooted opinion that they take away work from us. The Czech public does not have a clear opinion on employing foreigners according to the above-mentioned survey: 45% of citizens think that it is correct and the same percentage - 44% - is of an opposite opinion.

**Chart 5. Do You Think that it is Correct to Employ Foreigners in the Czech Republic?**



Note: Source CVVM, Our Society survey.

More often, those who think that foreigners present a problem in their domicile are against employing foreigners in the Czech Republic. To the contrary, those who would allow them to live here entirely in line with their habits support their employment and 53% of those who know a foreigner with long-term residence in the Czech Republic personally support employment of foreigners in the Czech Republic.

From the statements included in table 8 related to the issue of employing foreigners, four-fifths of respondents agreed with the fact that cheap foreign labour force represents threat for employing Czech citizens. The opinion that employing foreigners should be limited in areas with high unemployment has same support (81%). Almost two-thirds of the respondents further think that foreigners should be employed only in professions in which the citizens of the Czech Republic are not interested. People usually do not think that it is correct for recruiting to give preference to foreigners from EU countries over other foreigners (55%). And the influx of foreign capital is usually considered a possibility for improving the situation at our labour market (58%).

**Table 8. Attitudes Towards Employing Foreigners in the Czech Republic – Agree/Disagree with the Statements (in %)**

	AGREE	DISAGREE	DK
When recruiting, it is correct to give preference to foreigners from EU countries over other foreigners.	29	55	16
Cheap foreign labour presents a threat to employing Czech citizens.	82	12	6
Influx of foreign capital improves the situation at our labour market.	58	26	16
Foreigners should be employed only in professions in which the citizens of the Czech Republic are not interested.	63	28	9
Employing foreigners should be limited in areas with high unemployment.	81	12	7

Note: Source CVVM, Our Society survey.

The links between the individual statements are as follows: we should not employ foreigners in areas with high unemployment and in professions in which the Czechs are interested. Citizens who see the situation as this also frequently think foreign capital as well as cheap foreign labour threatens our labour market. Therefore, we should probably give preference to foreigners from EU countries.

Problems of people living beyond the borders of the Czech Republic affect our public. At least our willingness to participate in collections of cash, in material donations – food, clothes – suggests this. But the notion that somebody would settle in the Czech Republic does not meet with such a degree of openness. Situations when citizens rebel and sign petitions against the establishment of an accommodation facility for refugees in their municipalities have been described in media many times. Suddenly, our prejudices come to the surface (they will make disorder here, the criminality will increase etc.). However, direct personal experience shows that these are rather unjustified misgivings. Presence of foreigners calls up disapproval in us also because their customs sometimes differ from ours, they could allegedly “take away our jobs” (that we do not want to do anyway), and anyway – “the state should take care primarily of its own citizens”.

Media has also played its role in creating our attitudes, unfortunately. The presentation of foreigners living in the Czech Republic in the media focuses mainly on negative aspects that, provided they are described repeatedly, acquire distorted but huge dimensions. A typical mention about a foreigner in the press was a description of a criminal conduct, mentioning the nationality of the offender, while for the Czech nobody has ever mentioned it. This, however, has started to improve recently. And articles about the life of foreigners, their customs, traditions, and festivals, are becoming more and more frequent.

Yes, we are xenophobic. However, this is nothing strange – feeling of danger from the foreign is present throughout the world. Nevertheless, it is important to try to soften the fear – we have to bear in mind that foreigners will live in the Czech Republic (we will achieve the 10% share usual in the western world whether we want or not) and that migration is a normal thing.

We would extinguish xenophobia only by expelling the last foreigner from the country. We do not have to fear this, fortunately, and it would also be a pity for us. Profit from presence of foreigners in the Czech Republic prevails over the losses – foreigners are often educated (and it was not our country who paid for their education), they work hard – very often they do the manual work that the Czechs do not want to do at all, they operate their businesses here, they enrich us with their culture, they tend to be younger, thus healthy, and we could continue on and on with the list.

Another important argument why we need foreigners is the fact that the number of the Czechs is decreasing – for the first half of this year there were 10,000 more deaths than births. Like in Western Europe, fewer and fewer children are born and, with the growing life expectancy, we have currently a negative population growth. For the same period, over 20,000 foreigners moved in (legally).