

Are Czech citizens interested in working abroad?

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Recently we have voted for the accession of our country to the European Union. One section of the agreement about our accession concerns certain transitory periods, which refer, apart from other things, to the so-called free movement of workers. In countries that will put these transitory periods into effect Czech citizens will still be allowed to work only with a work permit. Some member states declared already in advance that they would fully liberate their labour market immediately after the accession of the Czech Republic to the EU, namely Great Britain, the Netherlands, Sweden, Denmark and Ireland. It is expected that Norway and Greece will also liberate their labour markets for our citizens.

The majority of EU member states currently face increasing rates of unemployment. Total rate of unemployment in the Euro-zone (Euro-zone is represented by 12 EU member states, which have accepted Euro as their official currency) in June 2003 amounted to 8,9 %, which means an increase by half of a percentage point compared to June 2002 figures.¹ It is not surprising then that these states try to protect their labour markets against foreign workers.

Is Europe really threatened by influx of Czech labour force? How will the accession of our country to the EU affect interest of Czech citizens to work outside the territory of their homeland? Will they try to work abroad more frequently once the administrative barriers are to a large degree removed? I will try to answer these questions by analysing several issues concerning interest of Czech citizens in working abroad, which have been part of the survey conducted in May by the Centre for Public Opinion Research of the Institute of Sociology of the Academy of Sciences of the Czech Republic within Our Society 2003 (Naše společnost 2003) project.

What experience do the Czech citizens have so far with working abroad? 4 % of respondents over 15 years of age (N = 42) answered positively the question "Have you already worked abroad?" One third of them started working abroad already before 1989, the remaining two thirds left for foreign countries only after the change of the regime. Almost half of the respondents with experience of working abroad stayed abroad on the basis of an interstate agreement (43 %). Others characterized their last employment abroad as commuting to work daily or weekly, seasonal employment not lasting more than three months or an employment on yet a different basis.

11 % of the respondents state that someone from their family is currently working abroad and a quarter of the respondents (24 %) have some of their friends working in a foreign country. In both cases Germany was the most frequently visited country. Other countries appeared less frequently in the answers of the respondents (see Table 1).

¹ Data come from Internet pages www.evropska-unie.cz.

Table 1: In which foreign country do friends and family members of the respondents work (in %).²

	From family (N = 148)	From friends (N = 390)
Germany	31	42
Austria	15	13
USA	13	14
Great Britain	11	10
Slovakia	5	3
Italy	4	4
Others	21	14

Source: CVVM, Our Society 2003 (Naše společnost 2003) survey

Are respondents interested in working abroad? Has the proportion of citizens considering working abroad changed in connection with the approaching accession of our country to the European Union? CVVM has found answers also to these questions. In May 2003, altogether 15 % of inhabitants of the Czech Republic considered working abroad. 62% of respondents do not consider this possibility. 32 % are not concerned or they cannot answer the question.

Almost half of the respondents (45 %), who consider the possibilities of working abroad, are young people between the age of 15 and 19, and it is therefore not surprising that from the point of view of professions, students prevail among them (they amount to 48 %). More than three quarters of the respondents, who consider working abroad, are single people (76 %), respondents living without a partner (81 %) and people, whose children are provided for (they amount to 83 % of all respondents, who answered positively the given question). Men are twice as much interested in working abroad than women (66 %; 34 %).

From the point of view of education structure, respondents with basic education prevail among those interested in working abroad (38 %). However, considering the high proportion of students, we can presume that part of the respondents want to work abroad only after completing another level of education. One quarter of people interested in working abroad (26 %) consist of high-school graduates without A-levels or people from vocational schools and another quarter (24 %) consist of high-school graduates with A-levels. Proportion of University educated people is 12 percent.

Results of our survey suggest that in our country working abroad is most commonly an opportunity for young people to acquire new practice and experience. Knowledge (especially of foreign languages), acquired while working abroad, is an important advantage of job applicants and it increases their possibilities to find a job at the labour market. A whole fifth of respondents from 15 to 19 years consider working abroad. In the age category from 20 to 29 it is one tenth.

The suggested results were also confirmed by the answers of respondents to the question concerning the role of individual factors in deciding about working abroad. It should be said that only 58 respondents, who represent the 6 % of citizens of the Czech Republic considering working abroad, answered this question.

² RNDr. Milan Jeřábek, Ph.D, the author of the research, is a research worker of the Czech Borderland Research Department of the Institute of Sociology of the Academy of Sciences of the Czech Republic. Research was supported by project GA ČR č. 205/02/0321 "Work related migration as a part of international (trans-boarder) Czech labour market in the context of European integration" in cooperation with research teams of University of Western Bohemia in Pilsen, Charles University in Prague, Masaryk University in Brno and Ostrava University in Ostrava.

The chance to improve their language skills presents a significant factor for almost all respondents when they decide about the possibility of working abroad. Altogether 97 % of them have indicated this answer. Other factors play an important role as well. The opportunity to discover something new is an important motivation for 9 out of 10 questioned. Three quarters of respondents considering working in a foreign country perceive it as a chance to acquire new working skills and experience, to improve the possibility of their own self-fulfilment and as an opportunity to increase their income.

Thus in our country, people who have not established a family yet and who stand at the very beginning of their professional carrier most frequently consider working abroad. It is precisely the experience, knowledge, but also financial resources acquired by working abroad that can help them to find a job. The chance to make a fortune to help them live independent lives also plays a part in the decisions made by young people.

The workers who come frequently to work in our country come primarily from the countries of the former Soviet Union, because they are not able to find any job at home, without regard to their qualification. They are often women and men, who are awaited by their families at home, for whom the money earned in the Czech Republic is the only source of their income. Are the Czechs also willing to solve their possible unemployment by leaving for work to foreign countries? Are Czech citizens forced to look for work abroad because of the lack of financial resources, usually connected with unemployment?

Almost a third of Czech citizens over 15 years consider working abroad as a prospective solution of unemployment (31 %). As the CVVM survey confirmed in May, inhabitants of our country are very unwilling to move because of work or to commute to work and they are far more willing to make different “concessions”. The need to get practice or retraining, prospective overtime work and increased speed of work represent relatively small barriers in accepting potential work offer (more than two thirds of respondents expressed their willingness to overcome them). In comparison with working abroad, Czech citizens would rather reconcile with a job requiring lower qualification, with work during the weekends, at nights or with reduced working hours.

At the same time it should be noted that the unemployed amount to only 5 % of the respondents, who currently consider working abroad. It therefore seems that working abroad as a result of a difficult financial situation of a family or as a way out of unemployment is still far from being a common thing in our country.

In May 2001 respondents were asked in the survey of CVVM about similar issues, but in a different way and with a different range of answers. At that time we asked the respondents: “Do you personally consider going abroad to work before the accession of the Czech Republic to the EU?” (see Table 2).

Table 2: Interest of the citizens of the Czech Republic in working abroad in May 2001 (in %)

Yes, arranges all formalities	1
Wants to look for work in the course of following months	1
Wants to look for work in the course of following years	14
Certainly doesn't consider this possibility	84

Source: CVVM

16 % of Czech citizens displayed their willingness to work abroad two years ago. Seeming decrease of respondents' interest in working abroad is surprising with respect to the approaching accession of our country to the EU, which will make this possibility much more accessible. There may be one simple explanation. Respondents, who were serious about the

possibility of working abroad, have already left our country and found a job. This conclusion is also supported by a large proportion of young people up to the age of 20 among the applicants for work abroad. Older people have simply accomplished their plan or they abandoned it in later age.

In a survey conducted within Our Society 2003 project in May the respondents, who considered working abroad, were also asked about the time, when they wanted to carry out their plan. Only 19 % of respondents stated that they would like to start working within one year. 71 % would like to go abroad later and 10 % of the questioned were not sure about this question yet.

Germany has appeared most frequently as target country in future plans of the respondents (23 % of the questioned would like to work there). Anglophone countries, namely the United States, Great Britain and Canada appeared relatively frequently in their answers. The interest in other countries, such as Austria, Italy or Spain, was rather smaller (frequency of their occurrence did not exceeded 4 %).

In their answers to an open question “Do you take concrete steps to acquire work abroad? If you do, what steps do you take?” almost two thirds of respondents admitted (63 %) that they hadn’t taken any concrete steps so far. Other respondents most frequently try to find work with the help of their friends or acquaintances, through work offers or contacts from schools (students) or institutions, where they are employed, or where they at least gather information about work abroad.

More than a half of the respondents, who currently consider working abroad (56 %), admit their willingness to move abroad permanently because of work. 22 % of the questioned would certainly not be willing to take similar measures. Proportion of those unable to answer this question is the same. It doesn’t make sense to do any further analyses at this moment, since they cannot be regarded as statistically reliable due to the low number of the responding (N = 58). The answers to the questions answered only by respondents, who currently consider working abroad, have to be taken only as an indication of a trend.

There may be a number of reasons why Czech citizens are not interested in working abroad. We have asked them: “How do the following circumstances affect your indifference to working abroad?” (see Table 3). Only the respondents who do not consider working abroad have answered this question (N = 631).

Table 3: Reasons for not being interested in working abroad (v %). The sum of 100 % is completed by answer “doesn’t know”.

	Very strongly	Strongly	Medium-strength	Weakly	Not at all
Insufficient language knowledge	36	21	21	10	12
Good job in the Czech Republic	15	23	27	14	19
Family, friends, background	63	25	7	2	2
This is my home, I am Czech	56	25	12	3	3
Higher age	30	13	16	13	27
Bad state of health	8	12	17	20	42
Fear of being discriminated in a foreign country	8	15	21	21	30

Source: CVVM, Our society 2003 research

For 88 % of Czech citizens their indifference to working abroad is caused by their family and friends, in short, their background. We can assume that for people up to the age of 20, who consider working abroad most frequently in comparison with other groups, these

links are not that strong. They are in an age when they often try to become independent from their family, but they do not establish their own families yet. The large proportion of single, childless people living without a partner among the applicants for work abroad suggests that relations to relatives present the most frequent cause of indifference of Czech citizens to working abroad.

The second most frequently stated cause of indifference to working abroad is a simple statement "this is my home". We can only speculate what exactly the respondents imagine behind this statement. Besides emotional links to close people it is most likely their relation to familiar places, things and perhaps even to the Czech Republic.

For more than a half of respondents (57 %) their insufficient knowledge of languages plays an important role in deciding about the possibility to work abroad. Let us have a look at the general knowledge of foreign languages among Czech people. More than a quarter of inhabitants of the Czech Republic over the age of 15 (27 %) cannot make themselves understood in any other language besides their mother tongue. This applies mostly to respondents over the age of 60. In comparison to other age categories, young people up to the age of 20 have best knowledge of languages. In their case, 10 % of the questioned admitted that they didn't know any foreign language. 36 % of the Czech citizens can make themselves understood in one foreign language, 24 % know two languages and the remaining 13 % are able to communicate in three or even more languages.

German is most widely known foreign language in the Czech Republic. 41 % of inhabitants over 15 can make themselves understood in German. The respondents considering working abroad most frequently mentioned Germany as their target country. If some relatives or acquaintances of the respondent work in a foreign country, it is most frequently Germany as well.

More than a quarter of the inhabitants of the Czech Republic can make themselves understood in Russian (29 %) and English (27 %). As regards these two languages, we can observe significant differences between the age groups of respondents. It is not surprising that knowledge of Russian is significantly more common among respondents between 45 and 59 years old, and on the contrary less frequent among respondents younger than 30. With the knowledge of English it is the other way round. More than a half of respondents from 15 to 19 (53 %) can communicate in English. Among respondents older than 45 years the proportion of those speaking English is significantly lower. Among other languages mentioned by the questioned was Polish (according to their own words, 4 % of the questioned can make themselves understood³), French (3 %) and Spanish (1 %). Other languages appeared only sporadically and frequency of their appearance did not reach even one percent. 15 % of respondents mentioned Slovak as another language in which they can make themselves understood apart from their mother tongue. Even though majority of Czech citizens understand Slovak, only one Czech out of seven can also speak the language.

Accession of the Czech Republic to the European Union will certainly extend the possibilities of the Czech citizens to work abroad. Many administrative barriers will disappear and it will therefore be easier for those interested in working abroad to carry out their plans. Will the accession of our country to the EU change attitudes of Czech citizens to working abroad? Will interest in working beyond the borders of our country increase? One third of the respondents currently considering working abroad admitted that the accession of our country to the EU will change their interest in working abroad. On the other hand, only 3 % of citizens, who haven't yet thought about working outside of the country, admit a change in their attitude.

³ It is quite probable that this is the case of the members of Polish minority living in our country, whose mother tongue is Polish.

It seems, then, that in spite of the approaching accession of our country to the EU, the interest of Czech citizens in working abroad will not increase dramatically and that the EU member states do not have to worry about massive influx of Czech labour force. Especially people, who have already established a family background in our country, have only minimum interest in working abroad.