SJPS | Slovak Journal of Political Sciences
Scientific article
sjps.fsvucm.sk I ISSN 1335-9096 (online)
2022 The Faculty of Social Sciences
University of Ss. Cyril and Methodius, Trnava.
DOI: https://doi.org/10.34135/sjps.250201

BEYOND BORDERS AND DIFFERENCE: HIGHLY SKILLED SLOVAK MIGRATION TO CZECHIA

Lucie Macková[1], Luděk Jirka[2], Ondřej Filipec[3], Nikola Medová[4] and Nela Przetaková[5]

Abstract
This paper investigates the migration of highly skilled slovak professionals to czechia, an understudied form of intra-regional mobility within central europe. In contrast to migration research that prioritises long-distance or global movements, this study examines mobility between two culturally, linguistically, and historically proximate societies. Situating slovak mobility within a post-czechoslovak and central european context, the analysis draws on demographic and educational data as well as semi-structured interviews with highly skilled slovaks living and working in czechia. The findings demonstrate that this migration flow is shaped by both proximity and persistent boundaries. Shared language and cultural familiarity significantly ease mobility, integration, and labour market entry. Yet slovak identity continues to function as a marker of symbolic difference, producing moments of perceived foreignness in professional and social interactions. While many slovaks do not self-identify as migrants, subtle forms of czech centrism and hierarchical representations contribute to differentiated experiences of belonging. By foregrounding an intra-regional mobility often presumed to be socially and politically neutral, the paper challenges dominant assumptions in migration studies and political science. It shows how processes of migratisation operate even within highly similar societies and argues that identity, symbolic hierarchies, and centre–periphery dynamics remain salient in shaping mobility and belonging in the czech–slovak context.

Keywords: *Czechia, Slovak Migration, Intra-Regional Mobility, Identity, Belonging, Symbolic Boundaries*

[1] Palacky University Olomouc, Faculty of Science, 17. listopadu 12, 779 00, Olomouc, Czechia, E-maial: lucie.mackova@upol.cz, ORCID ID: 0000-0002-1077-7476..
[2] Palacky University Olomouc, Faculty of Science, 17. listopadu 12, 779 00, Olomouc, Czechia, E:mail: ludek.jirka@upol.cz, ORCID ID: 0000-0002-2630-4550.
[3]Palacky University Olomouc, Faculty of Law, 17. listopadu 8, 779 00, Olomouc, Czechia, E:mail: ondrej.filipec@upol.cz, ORCID ID: 0000-0002-9046-1577.
[4] Palacky University Olomouc, Faculty of Science, 17. listopadu 12, 779 00, Olomouc, Czechia, E-mail: nikola.medova@upol.cz, ORCID ID: 0000-0001-5070-3239.
[5] Palacky University Olomouc, Faculty of Science, 17. listopadu 12, 779 00, Olomouc, Czechia, E-mail: nela.przetakova@upol.cz, ORCID ID: 0009-0001-7795-1897.

INTRODUCTION

In recent decades, the mobility of highly skilled professionals has become an increasingly important subject of migration studies (Bailey and Mulder, 2017; Czaika, 2018; Koser and Salt, 1997). While much attention has been devoted usually to global flows of people across distant borders, regional and intra-national migration within culturally and linguistically close contexts remains less explored. One of these examples is the case of Slovak migrants in Czechia. Despite the dissolution of Czechoslovakia in 1993, the two countries continue to share deep historical ties, geographical proximity, and cultural similarities. Language is another point of similarity. Slovak and Czech, as mutually intelligible languages, create a context in which language does not function as a traditional obstacle to settlement or professional advancement. Instead, the linguistic proximity can serve as a facilitating factor in many aspects of the migrant experience, including access to employment, integration into society, and, more broadly, the sense of being "at home" in the host environment. Most Slovaks in Czechia do not consider themselves "migrants," but some of them admit being "foreigners." However, speaking the Slovak language in public settings in Czechia can also serve as a marker of difference.

Migration between Czechia and Slovakia must be understood against the backdrop of their shared statehood within Czechoslovakia (1918–1992). From its foundation in 1918 until its peaceful dissolution on January 1, 1993, except for five years during the Second World War, movement across the internal Czech–Slovak border was free and frequent. From a historical perspective, it can be stated that the Czech lands were more industrialized and urbanized, while Slovakia remained predominantly agrarian. This structural imbalance generated significant flows of Slovaks into Czech regions for employment and education, while a smaller but also a notable flow of Czech migrants, especially teachers, engineers, and doctors, moved to Slovakia (Drbohlav 1994; Halás 2014). After the dissolution of Czechoslovakia, these movements formally became labelled as "international migration," yet reciprocal agreements preserved the right of citizens of both states to live, work, and study in the other country without restriction. The important threshold is the entrance of Slovakia and the Czech Republic to the European Union (2004) and subsequently to the Schengen zone (2007), which enables free movement of people across borders. Although mobility has always been two-directional, the intensity and scale have been markedly asymmetrical: Slovak migration to Czechia has consistently outweighed Czech migration to Slovakia.

Migration from Slovakia to Czechia can be interpreted in different ways. Following the neoclassical economic theory (Harris and Todaro, 1970), Slovaks migrate to Czechia in order to maximize their incomes and opportunities. However, from the structuralist perspective, this migration can strip Slovakia of its talent, and it can lead to the loss of human capital (Docquier and Rapoport, 2012). In the ideal scenario, highly skilled Slovaks can be transnational actors (Glick Schiller et al., 1992; Faist, 2013) who contribute to both sending and receiving societies.

This asymmetry in the movement is usually related to international student migration and economic migration, but it can also point to the phenomenon of brain drain as migration from Slovakia often involves young and highly educated Slovaks seeking better career opportunities (Bahna, 2013) or students (Fischer and Lipovská, 2015). Looking at it through the lens of postcoloniality, we would like to inquire about Czech-centrism (cf. Polish-centrism by Balogun, 2020) in this bidirectional migration flow and its specifics. In the wake of postcolonial scholarship about Central and Eastern Europe (Pickels, 2005; Varkočková, 2025), this paper attempts to critically inquire about the migration of highly skilled workers from Slovakia into Czechia. While being treated unproblematically and almost as a silent spot in the Central and Eastern European migration scholarship, we would like to point to its salience and show that even this least problematic migration can become "migratised" (Tudor, 2023), and there can be difficulties encountered by the Slovak migrants in Czechia. The central research question asks how highly skilled Slovak migrants in Czechia understand and articulate their sense of belonging and identity vis-à-vis the Czechs. The close contact between the nations during the Czechoslovak period can lend some support to the contact hypothesis (Allport, 1954) and why Slovaks are perceived most favourably among foreign nationals by the Czechs (CVVM, 2025). Similarly, the dichotomy of "insiders" and "outsiders" (Bannerji, 2000; Carling, Erdal, and Ezzati, 2024) does not necessarily apply to Slovaks as they can be seen as an extended in-group.

This article begins by outlining the background and specific features of Slovak migration to Czechia. Although data on highly skilled Slovak workers are not available, we provide an overview of overall migration statistics and the number of Slovak students enrolled at Czech universities. These figures establish the broader context for the main argument of the paper. The article then introduces semi-structured interviews as the primary research method, followed by an analysis of findings concerning perceived cultural similarities and differences, as well as the role of language. Finally, the discussion and conclusion sections synthesize the key insights of this study.

1 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The Czech and Slovak nations experienced distinct historical development, and only in 1918 they created a common state, Czechoslovakia. From 1918 to 1939, both nations lived together in one state, however, the demand for autonomy in Slovakia became strong, and Slovaks declared independence in 1939. The separation lasted for the whole period of the Second World War (1939-1945). In 1945, after the victory of Allied Forces in Europe, the Czech and Slovak nations reunited and restored a common state. In 1948, Czechoslovakia came under the rule of the Communist Party, which lasted until 1989. Under the Communist era, the Czech and Slovak borders could be crossed without any restrictions, and Czechs and Slovaks could freely move from one region to another. During that period, many Slovaks arrived in the Czech borderland to fill the population gap after the expelled Germans, and many others arrived in the Ostrava region to work in a developing industrial sector. Therefore, historically, mainly Slovaks migrated to the Czech territory and migration in the opposite direction was much less common.

On the whole, Czechoslovakia was a country of emigration (Seidlová, 2018). New arrivals to the country usually came under bilateral agreements, and due to unrest or unstable situations in their countries. Migrants leaving Czechoslovakia were typically intellectuals or simply citizens who disagreed with the Communist rule and were typically perceived as political refugees (Honusková et al., 2016). When Czechoslovakia split into two countries in 1993—Czechia and Slovakia—both countries had to develop their own approaches towards migration policy. Czechia was compelled to develop a migration policy as it became a destination for migrants, primarily from post-Soviet states (Ukraine, Belarus, and Russia) as well as from Slovakia. Unlike these countries (with the exception of Slovakia), Czechia successfully transitioned from a state-controlled to a market-oriented economy, largely thanks to its geographic proximity to Germany and other Western European countries. After the dissolution of Czechoslovakia, many Slovaks returned to Slovakia and at the same time, students and workers from Slovakia came to Czechia. Slovaks living in the territory of Czechia were granted a new status instead of Czechoslovak citizenship. If they did not accept Czech citizenship, they were not seen as citizens of the country but became a national minority. The Czech laws did not allow dual citizenship at that time, but after the amendment to the citizenship law in 2014, Slovaks were allowed to have Czech as well as Slovak citizenship (Rychlík, 2015). At the time of dissolution, most Slovaks living in Czechia opted for Czech citizenship (Šrajerová, 1999).

The establishment of borders between Czechia and Slovakia also meant that Slovaks needed a passport to arrive in Slovakia, which some of them bore with great difficulty (Šrajerová, 2001). The bilateral agreement between the Czechs and Slovaks allows the employability of citizens without official permissions (Rychlík, 2015).

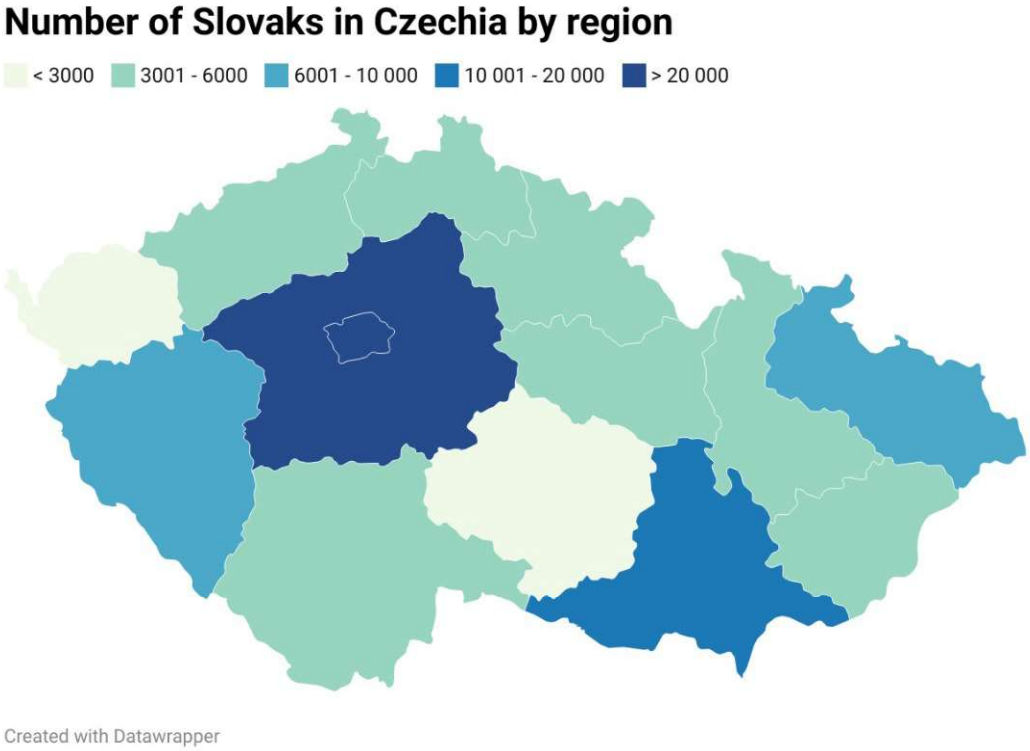
In 1991, Czechia was home to 314,877 Czech citizens of Slovak nationality and 166,363 Slovak citizens. By 2001, these numbers had declined to 193,190 Czech citizens of Slovak nationality and 24,201 Slovak citizens with permanent residence (ČSÚ, 2021a). From 1993 to 1999, migration policy in Czechia was marked by the absence of substantial state intervention. Scholars frequently characterize this stage as a "laissez-faire" period, in which governmental influence on migration processes was minimal, migrants retained considerable personal autonomy (Barša and Baršová, 2005; Drbohlav et al., 2008), and systematic incentive mechanisms were lacking (Drbohlav et al., 2010). One of the most evident consequences of this hands-off approach was the non-existence of a coherent visa regime combined with highly permeable borders (Barša and Baršová, 2005). Within this relatively unregulated environment, migration flows were dominated by Ukrainians, who gradually established themselves as the largest ethnic minority in the country. Finally, in 1999, Czechia introduced an "Act on the Residence of Foreign Nationals" (number 326/1999 Collection of laws) due to the necessary harmonization of the Czech policy with the legal norms of the European Union (Čermák and Lupták, 2015). After joining the European Union in 2004, Czechia became a more attractive country for foreign migrants.

According to data from the Czech Statistical Office, the entry of both countries into the European Union (Slovakia entered the European Union the same year as Czechia) triggered an annual increase of immigration of Slovaks to Czechia until 2020. The only exception was the impact of the 2008 economic crisis, which resulted in a decrease of Slovak immigration in 2009 (ČSÚ, 2020) and the year which is associated with the COVID-19 epidemic. In 2022, most Slovakian citizens lived in Prague (24,145), in the Central Bohemian Region (18,318), and in the South Moravian Region (12,698) (ČSÚ, 2021a). However, due to open borders between Slovakia and Czechia, it is difficult to analyse the number and conditions of the Slovak community due to dispersion and small cultural distance (Uherek, 2010).

Slovaks living in Czechia are diversified and they are represented by manual workers working in manufacturing industry, the wholesale trade, retail, construction sites, transport, and warehouses, but they are also

doctors, intellectuals, entrepreneurs, students, or administrative workers (ČSÚ, 2021b). Slovaks often work in permanent roles and seasonal work is not prevalent (Ezzedine and Pažejová, 2006). The reason might be associated with searching for better jobs as the differences in salaries between Czechia and Slovakia are rather low and this affects the kinds of employment Slovaks are likely to migrate for (Bahna, 2011). Furthermore, the majority of Slovaks live in Prague, where the salaries are generally higher. According to the Czech Statistical Office (ČSÚ, 2025a), as of 31 December 2023, there were 119,182 Slovaks living in Czechia. Their regional distribution (Figure 1) shows that Slovaks mainly live in Prague, Central Bohemia, and South Moravia, together accounting for almost 60% of all Slovaks residing in the country.

Figure 1: Number of Slovaks in Czechia by region (as of 31 December 2023)



Source: Data retrieved from ČSÚ (2025a), created by authors via Datawrapper

Owing to the close cultural and linguistic ties between Slovaks and Czechs, mixed marriages between the two groups are relatively common (Šrajerová, 2012). Slovaks are able to communicate with Czechs by using their own native language, making the relations between both nations exceptional (Vranovský, 1999) and allowing for easier interactions (Graf et

al., 2015). The possible misunderstandings are mainly caused by the younger generation of Czechs, who are sometimes not able to understand the Slovak language. This is because the Czech language has a stronger presence in Slovak media and culture than the Slovak language does in Czechia (Graf et al., 2015). Graf et al. (2015) discuss cultural closeness and show how respondents referred to differences between both nationalities, which is usually the case in relations between majority and minority, but they mainly focused on what they have in common. Some respondents even mentioned the sense of brotherhood and others refused the category of "foreigners" (Graf et al., 2015). To summarize, Slovaks are not seen as exceptional from the perspective of migration policy, but their exceptional position is due to cultural closeness, language, and acceptance in public. In that regard, Slovaks are not publicly seen as migrants who threaten the Czech nation.

Slovak students represent an important category as many of them decide to stay in Czechia after finishing their studies. Their numbers have been increasing steadily since 1998, when an agreement about the common conditions for Slovak and Czech students was signed. As of 2024, Slovak students in Czechia accounted for 7.2% out of 17.8% foreign students studying in Czechia. Their relative share in comparison to Czech students is relatively stable, slightly increasing from 5.0% in 2005 to their current percentage of 7.2%. However, their relative share among foreign students is dropping significantly. While in 2005 there were only 7.2% foreign students in total (out of which Slovaks accounted for 5.0%), the share of foreign students increased to 17.8% in 2024, but the proportion of Slovak students remained almost the same (7.2%). In 2024, there were 314,850 students enrolled in study programs at Czech universities, out of which 55,996 were foreign students, including 22,699 Slovaks. In other words, there were approximately 18% foreign students in Czechia and Slovaks accounted for approximately 40% of all foreign students (ČSÚ, 2025b).

Notably, the enrolment of Slovak students at Czech universities shows considerable variation, with the majority concentrated in Brno and Prague. For example, at Masaryk University in Brno, 6,278 Slovak students are enrolled, accounting for roughly 19.6% of the total student population of 32,000, and a similar share (~18.5%) study at Brno University of Technology. On the contrary, there are fewer than 5% of Slovak students enrolled in JE Purkyně University in Ústí nad Labem, in České Budějovice, or in Liberec. There are approximately 10,000 Slovak students studying in Brno, and 8,000 students studying in Prague. However, Slovak students account for approximately. 19.2 % in Brno, in Prague it is only 6.3 % due to a very high

number of foreign students from other countries. Other important cities are Ostrava, Olomouc, Hradec Králové, Pardubice, and Plzeň, where the share oscillates between 6.0 and 6.7% (ČSÚ, 2025b; MŠMT, 2025). To sum up, the highest number of Slovaks study in Brno and Prague, but their share is more than three times higher in Brno, making Brno the most attractive city to study abroad.

2 METHODS

This paper is part of a broader study focused on highly skilled migrants' experiences in Czechia. The research was conducted between April and September 2024. For this study, we conducted 73 interviews with highly skilled foreigners in Czechia. The selection criteria were tertiary education, either gained abroad or in the Czech Republic, and living in Czechia for at least a year at the time of the interview. For the purposes of this paper, we use eight interviews conducted with highly skilled Slovaks living in Czechia, out of which there were four with women and four with men. Among them professionals working in business, as doctors, researchers, or IT specialists. Their individual characteristics are summarized in Table 1.

Recruitment of participants took place in multiple stages. Initially, an online survey exploring the experiences of foreigners in Czechia was distributed through our professional networks and relevant Facebook groups. In the second stage, participants who expressed interest in a follow-up interview and left their emails in the survey were subsequently contacted directly via email. Additional interviewees were recruited through the personal networks and snowball sampling. The majority of interviews were conducted in person in multiple Czech cities and two took place online. The specific localities for interviews were chosen according to participants' own wishes, usually in a calm environment well-known to participants.

The applied methodology was qualitative, and the method used was a semi-structured interview. This method enabled us to focus on deep insights into the research topic due to the subjective experience of participants. This fitted the purpose of our research to elaborate on the subjective perception of (non-)acceptance in Czech society. The method also enabled flexibility as it allowed for preparing a specific list of questions in advance and asking additional questions in the context of the interviews. The semi-structured interview was composed of 20 main questions related to discrimination, migration, and life in Czechia. We used the same list of questions for each participant, and the average interview lasted around 45 minutes. All interviews with Slovak participants were conducted in Czech or Slovak.

Interviews were audio-recorded with the permission of participants, transcribed verbatim, and saved in the authors' personal archives. The data was analysed using Atlas.ti software. We conducted a thematic analysis following Braun and Clarke's (2021) six-phase framework: familiarization with the data, generating initial codes, searching for and reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and producing the report. An inductive approach was adopted, allowing themes to emerge organically from the data rather than from predefined theoretical categories.

Regarding the authors' positionalities, all are affiliated with academia. They hold positions as assistant professors, while one is a doctoral student. These roles are considered highly skilled, providing insight into how participants in similarly skilled positions may navigate their roles and the challenges they may encounter. Furthermore, authors used their social networks to find participants for the research, which might have been easier given their social position. Informed consent was obtained from all study participants, securing their confidentiality and anonymity. Participants were informed about the purpose of the research, they could withdraw from the research at any time, and no data were given to third parties. The study was approved by the Ethics Committee of the Faculty of Science, Palacky University Olomouc (reference number 23-07).

Table 1: Participants' characteristics

Participant	Gender	Age	Field of Work	Place of Residence
P1	male	39	Business	Karviná
P2	female	40	Business	Havlíčkův Brod
P3	female	28	Business	Olomouc
P4	male	25	Medicine	Brno
P5	male	32	Business	Prague
P6	female	39	Research	Prague
P7	female	38	Medicine	Ostrava
P8	male	39	IT	Ostrava

Source: authors

3 RESULTS

3.1 Cultural familiarity and difference

For much of the 20th century, both nations coexisted within one shared state – Czechoslovakia (during periods 1918-1939 and 1945-1989). The official nationality was "Czechoslovak", rooted in the ideological concept of Czechoslovakism, which presented Czechs and Slovaks as "two branches of the same nation" (Henderson, 2002). The peaceful dissolution of the state in 1993 marked the beginning of two independent republics, yet the legacy of shared government, language development, and cultural exchange continues to shape mutual perceptions and interactions. Today, relations between the two nations are exceptionally close. This familiarity was reflected in the interviews, where participants emphasized that they do not feel like "foreigners" in the Czech Republic. As one participant shared: "I do not feel as a foreigner in the Czech Republic. There is still such a strong bond among us and many times I had the feeling that we did not split up. I never perceived that I should be from abroad." (P4, M, 25, Slovakia). This is in line with the findings of Sylvia Graf and her colleagues (2015). Such sentiment suggests that shared history and cultural proximity reduce the likelihood of "othering", allowing Slovaks to integrate more seamlessly into Czech society. Nevertheless, some participants did encounter subtle forms of stereotyping or reminders on their non-Czech status. Some infrequent acts of microaggression (Sue & Spanierman, 2020) emerged in public spaces.

For example, one participant recalled: "I was travelling by metro in Prague, I had to speak in Slovak language and I heard some voices that we are taking the jobs to the people in the Czech Republic. But that is all." (P2, F, 40, Slovakia). Another participant described: "It happened once in a pub. I was in the bathroom, and the waiter said to my mother: 'We're in the Czech Republic, we speak Czech here.' So I think it's because of how I come across – people wouldn't dare say something like that to me, but it happened to my mom." (P5, M, 32, Slovakia). Other respondents noted that even though they did not perceive open discrimination, subtle comments or questions occasionally made them feel othered. As one participant explained:

Sometimes people ask: 'Why are you here if you are from Slovakia, why don't you go back home?' I'm not even sure whether it's meant in a discriminatory way, but such questions do appear. I would call it minor unpleasantness rather than discrimination in the true sense of the word (P6, F, 39, Slovakia). Similarly, another participant reflected: "I've encountered

some negative reactions to the fact that I'm studying in the Czech Republic – comments like that I study on the money of Czech taxpayers. But otherwise, I don't feel anyone has discriminated against me because I'm from another country." (P7, F, 38, Slovakia).

While Slovaks generally perceive Czechs as culturally similar, participants still noted differences in what they labelled as mentality and behaviour. These differences were often framed in terms of emotionality versus rationality, spontaneity versus precision, and regional variation within Czechia itself. One participant observed: "Czech and Slovaks are similar. It is hard to find some cultural difference. But in Prague, Czechs are sometimes somewhat perfectionists. It depends how you look at it. It is something inherited from Germans, being precise, to calculate everything, to plan everything. Maybe just individuals, but they are more present in population than in Slovakia, where it is more unrestrained and emotional. This is a slight difference, which might be considered an advantage or disadvantage. In Slovakia, the nation is more unrestrained and less rational." (P1, M, 39, Slovakia). Another participant expressed this contrast more vividly: "Czechs are… dry rusks. In meaning that you are pulled a lot to Germany: Ordnung (Order), Richter (Direction)… you are very, very serious usually. Slovaks are more unrestrained." (P2, F, 40, Slovakia). These interesting observations can be seen in the perceptions of Europeanness from the most rational (Western) countries to the less rational and 'backward' Eastern nations (Kalmar, 2022).

The emotional-rational divide was a recurring theme. Several Slovaks described Czech society as emotionally reserved, having a stronger attachment to money, and somehow influenced by the "German nature". They find these aspects challenging in everyday interactions. One participant, who had lived in Czechia for thirteen years, explained:

I do not like that Czechs are so cold. If I compare them with Slovaks, and I have lived here for thirteen years, it is cold. The difference in emotions. Slovaks are more emotional, which might bring its own problems, but it is closer to me. So this cold, that people have problems greeting you, to smile, to start some basic communication. This one thing I do not like it here and it is connected with the second issue – emotion vs. racio. Czechs are much more rational and Slovaks are more emotional" (P5, M, 32, Slovakia).

This contrast was also evident in attitudes toward money and social behaviour. The same participant elaborated:

"In Slovakia, I have never solved money like here. The attitude towards money is different. Here, people rely very on exact calculations, correct cash

back, and paying bills separately. I think that here people are much more attached to the many and are not letting the motion flow. This might be a native characteristic, but this is what I like about the Czechs. Slovaks are joking about it, that the Czechs are going for a holiday and they bring with them schnitzel in bread and are fully packed. This is what Slovaks don't like. But I see that the Czechs are going for two or three holidays per year and all fulfilling these things, reaching much more, while the Slovak is paying all inclusive. To sum up, I like that the Czechs are more ramblers and nature-minded. I like the idea of packing schnitzel and gaining more abroad. But I have significantly noticed the difference between Moravians and Prague people. I have lived [in Prague] for ten years and I have no friends from Prague. All my friends in Prague are from Moravia – from Ostrava, from Olomouc. People from Ostrava are very close to Slovaks. I see almost no difference there. So, the rationality and cold mind… sometimes it is a pro, but it is also the biggest difference that bothers me." (P5, M, 32, Slovakia)."

These perceptions of Czech rationality, precision, and material focus were consistently mentioned across interviews and can be interpreted through several theoretical lenses. These will be mentioned in the discussion.

3.2 The role of language

Slovaks occupy a unique position within the Czech linguistic landscape, primarily due to the close proximity of the Slovak and Czech language and the mutual understanding between them. Many Czechs understand Slovak well and vice versa. Despite this linguistic closeness, specific challenges arise in everyday communication, particularly in relation to generational differences and the use of Slovak language in the dominantly Czech environment.

One of the most prominent issues is the generational shift in language comprehension. Younger Czechs, born after the dissolution of Czechoslovakia in 1993, understand Slovak less fluently than older generations. This shift therefore influences how Slovaks choose to communicate in Czech society. The role of generation is highlighted by one participant: "It depends with whom I communicate. If I communicate with young people, who are more than twenty years old, then I use Czech and when it is someone older, then I use Slovak" (P2, F, 40, Slovakia). Another participant also confirms the role of generation as he points out:

I can communicate in Czech when it's necessary, but it's more useful with younger people who don't understand Slovak. With the older generation, you can easily communicate in both Czech and Slovak. Even when I write emails, I usually write without diacritics. I'm still old school, from the MS-DOS days, and there I wrote in Czech without diacritics…. because Slovak without diacritics, well, nobody would be able to read that. So, in some work communication, I probably send messages with grammar mistakes and in Czech. But so far, everyone seems to tolerate it, since our work is about numbers. It's not really a barrier. (P1, M, 39, Slovakia). It seems that some Slovaks are adapting their choice of language depending on the generation of their communication partners.

The nature of one's profession also plays a significant role in determining language use. Certain jobs require a high level of proficiency of Czech language, while others allow for greater freedom: "Mainly, there are some practical things. For example, I could not be a moderator on the TV, as the Czech language is required. Slovak language is somewhat accepted, but I already delivered a lecture in Czech" (P1, M, 39, Slovakia). In medical settings, Slovak may be used predominantly, but Czech is sometimes necessary depending on the patient's needs. One participant working as a doctor in Czechia noted:

"In 95% of cases, I can manage to use Slovak, but in my position of doctor, the Czech language is merely a voluntary thing. But I have used it in hospital in some cases. For example, when we had a patient with a stroke or a child of small age, who might have problems with Slovak language. I have used Czech, but normally I am not using it and I use Slovak language on a daily basis. I have no problem with that. When I used Czech, it was from my own initiative (P4, M, 25, Slovakia)."

In other professional environments, the use of Czech may be more appropriate than necessity:

"I never needed it or my boss never required me to speak Czech. Maybe I, myself, sometimes felt that within education it was more appropriate to use Czech language, to make education more friendly to students. Or sometimes in the communication with my customers, I sometimes switched to Czech, because I was working for a Czech company. But it was not mandatory or required (P3, F, 28, Slovakia)."

While Czech may be preferred or expected in certain contexts, Slovaks often retain the freedom to use their language, especially when mutual understanding is not compromised. Unlike other immigrant groups, for Slovaks, geography (such as living in central versus peripheral regions) plays a relatively minor role in language use. The key factor remains generational understanding and situational appropriateness. However, regional differences do exist. One participant stated:

"Moravian-Silesian Region is somewhat a crossroad in between Czechia, Slovakia and Poland. Everyone here understands Slovaks. So far, I met nobody who does not understand, so I try to keep my Slovak and speak Slovak almost all the time. The majority of people who live here have somebody from Slovakia in the family. So far I listen to people here, this person has Slovak mother, that person Slovak father, someone else a grandma from Slovakia, someone else a husband or wife. I dare to say that half of the population here are half Slovaks. Historically, many Slovaks and Poles came here to work in coal mines, and they stayed here. In Prague, the situation is slightly different (P8, M, 39, Slovakia)."

Familiarity with Slovak language and culture therefore facilitates its continued use, particularly in areas with larger Slovak populations. Despite the linguistic closeness between Czech and Slovak, adapting to the host country's language is not always straightforward or even necessary. In some cases, attempting to speak the other language may feel unnatural or counterproductive:

"I do not think that in the Czech and Slovak case it is necessary that the immigrant knows the language of the country where he lives. And sometimes, it might be counterproductive in some cases. But if we talk about different languages and different migrants without this language proximity, it is absolutely necessary (P5, M, 32, Slovakia)."

Adapting to the host country's language is not always essential. In some situations, trying to speak the local language may even work against effective communication. This sentiment is also echoed by one of the authors, a Czech national who lived in Slovakia for seven years. In certain situations, a Czech person speaking Slovak, or a Slovak speaking Czech, may come across as awkward or forced. Nevertheless, despite this unique linguistic closeness, specific communication patterns between the Czechs and Slovaks persist.

It is to say that Slovak participants rarely described their personal experiences in Czechia as discriminatory. This apparent absence of perceived discrimination can be attributed to the deep cultural, historical, and linguistic proximity between Czechs and Slovaks. The participants remarked on how geographical distinctions between Silesia, Moravia, and Bohemia, together with the linguistic situation, shape regional perceptions within Czechia. Participants also differentiated between the generations with the older Czechs allegedly being more accustomed to hearing the Slovak language. The participants also mentioned possible cultural differences with some comparing Czechs leaning more towards Germans in some cultural aspects, reflecting longstanding historical influences. Taken together, these factors provide a framework for understanding the ways in which Slovaks can perceive Czechs but are not a definite guide or typology.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Based on recent critical migration scholarship, it has been suggested that scholars need to become more attentive to their own predispositions and positionalities (Minca, 2003). While being Czech and researching Slovak migration to Czechia, we must be mindful of how our national and cultural background might affect our analytical distance and interpretation. We understand the experience of Slovaks in Czechia as unique based on the shared historical experience of two nations under one country for the majority of the 20th century and hence, it represents a unique case study. However, given this proximity, there has been little research on Slovak migration to Czechia, and this migration is often seen as unproblematic. There are many highly skilled individuals among the Slovak migrants to Czechia, which can lead to wider structural inequalities and human capital flight from Slovakia. Highly educated and professionally accomplished individuals are seen as mobile, cosmopolitan actors whose transnational careers afford them privileged positions within the social hierarchy (Faist, 2013). In this sense, our participants were privileged compared to other migrants living in Czechia, first, because of their education and working positions, and second, because of the cultural capital (Sullivan, 2008) that was associated with being familiar with the Czech culture and language.

There are various theories which show how the findings of our study can be framed in the wider field of social sciences. Social identity theory (see, for example, Tajfel, 1970, 2010; Tajfel & Turner, 1978) interprets these characteristics as culturally endorsed values within Czech national identity,

while intergroup contact theory (see, for example, Kenworthy et al., 2005; Pettigrew & Tropp, 2006, 2013a, 2013b) sees them as outcome of repeated social interaction, often with positive connections. With increased contact, there is the likelihood of fostering more positive relationships and reducing prejudice (Allport, 1954). Importantly, the perception of Czech-Slovak differences has evolved over time. In 1990, Slovaks stereotyped Czechs with traits such as cunningness, snobbery, dominance, laziness, materialism, volubility, great talkativeness, egoism, or greed (Frič, Bútorová & Rokosová, 1992: 54-55).

On the other hand, Dumetz and Gáboríková (2017) find that Czechs tend to see Slovaks as more relationship-oriented and more openly expressive of emotions in both professional and private settings. Conversely, Slovaks perceive their Czech colleagues as more rule-focused, task-oriented, and emotionally restrained. We have found similar perceptions among the participants but not exclusively. While the participants did not often emphasize differences, there were still perceptions of Czechs as more "rational" and "less emotional". Broadly speaking, Slovaks are often associated with the more emotional, collectivist, and patriarchal East, whereas Czechs are linked to the more rational, individualistic, and egalitarian West (Pospěch, 2021). However, these geographies can be interpreted as reflecting different positions and aspirations toward greater "Westernness" among Central and Eastern European countries, as conceptualized by Kalmar (2022). Some participants also encountered subtle forms of microaggression, e.g. insisting on speaking Czech or asking why they were living or studying in Czechia.

During the communist era, Czechs were often seen as "older brothers," associated with rationality, while Slovaks were viewed as "younger brothers" with emotional reactions (Holý, 2010: 11). This paternalistic view does not seem to prevail. Today the negative views described by Frič, Bútorová and Rokosová (1992) have softened considerably, reflecting a more respectful relationship. Although certain stereotypes persist, the boundaries of "otherness" have become increasingly blurred. The relationship between Czechs and Slovaks is arguably strong, marked by mutual respect and high levels of positive perception (Jaworsky et al., 2023; Rapoš Božič et al., 2023). Slovaks have been consistently ranked by the Czechs as the most preferred nationality (CVVM, 2025). These suggest that cultural familiarity not only facilitates integration but also fosters a sense of shared identity that transcends.

REFERENCES

Allport, F. H. (1954). The structuring of events: outline of a general theory with applications to psychology. Psychological Review, 61(5), 281.

Bahna, M. (2011). Migrácia zo Slovenska po vstupe do Európskej únie. Veda.

Bahna, M. (2013). Intra-EU migration from Slovakia: an evaluation of new economics of labour migration and migrant networks theories. European Societies, 15(3), 388-407.

Bailey, A., & Mulder, C. H. (2017). Highly skilled migration between the Global North and South: gender, life courses and institutions. Journal of ethnic and migration studies, 43(16), 2689-2703.

Balogun, B. (2020). Race and racism in Poland: Theorising and contextualising 'Polish-centrism'. The Sociological Review, 68(6), 1196-1211.

Bannerji, H. (2000). The dark side of the nation: Essays on multiculturalism, nationalism and gender. Canadian Scholars' Press.

Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2021). Thematic analysis: A practical guide. Sage Publications.

Carling, J., Erdal, M. B., & Ezzati, R. (2014). Beyond the insider–outsider divide in migration research. Migration Studies, 2(1), 36-54.

ČSÚ. (2020). Cizinci v ČR v letech 2004-2020. https://www.czso.cz/csu/cizinci/4-ciz_pocet_cizincu

ČSÚ. (2021a). Sčítání 2021. https://www.czso.cz/csu/scitani2021/statni-obcanstvI

ČSÚ. (2021b). Cizinci v České republice. Český statistický úřad. https://csu.gov.cz/produkty/cizinci-v-cr-2020-5u6c6k4pxo

ČSÚ (2025a). Počet cizinců, demografické události. Czech Statistical Office. https://csu.gov.cz/pocet-cizincu-demograficke-udalosti?pocet=10&start=0&podskupiny=291&razeni=-datumVydani#regionalni-data

ČSÚ (2025b). Studenti a absolventi vysokých škol v České Republice. Analytická část. Czech Statistical Office. https://csu.gov.cz/produkty/studenti-a-absolventi-vysokych-skol-v-ceske-republice-78mlzzdn03

CVVM (2025). Tolerance k vybraným skupinám obyvatel – květen 2025. https://cvvm.soc.cas.cz/cz/tiskove-zpravy/ostatni/vztahy-a-zivotni-postoje/6160-tolerance-k-vybranym-skupinam-obyvatel-kveten-2025

Czaika, M. (Ed.). (2018). High-skilled migration: Drivers and policies. Oxford University Press.

Docquier, F., & Rapoport, H. (2012). Globalization, brain drain, and development. Journal of Economic Literature, 50(3), 681–730.

Drbohlav, D. (1994). International Migration in the Czech Republic and Slovakia and the Outlook for East Central Europe. International Migration Review 28(4): 1104–1127.
Drbohlav, D., & Janurová, K. (2019). Migration and integration in Czechia: Policy advances and the hand brake of populism. Migration Policy Institute. https://www.migrationpolicy.org/article/migration-and-integration-czechia-policy-advances-and-hand-brake-populism
Dumetz, J., & Gáboríková, E. (2017). The Czech and Slovak republics: a cross-cultural comparison. Marketing science and inspirations, v11, (4).
Ezzedine, P. & Pažejová, L. (2006). Slovenská menšina a migranti v ČR. In Leontiyeva, Yana (ed.) Menšinová problematika v ČR: komunitní život a reprezentace kolektivních zájmů (Slováci, Ukrajinci, Vietnamci a Romové), pp. 14-31. Sociologický ústav AV ČR.
Faist, T. (2013). The mobility turn: a new paradigm for the social sciences?. Ethnic and racial studies, 36(11), 1637-1646.
Fischer, J., & Lipovská, H. (2015). Brain drain–brain gain: Slovak students at Czech universities. Journal on Efficiency and Responsibility in Education and Science, 8(3), 54-59.
Frič, P., Bútorová Z. & Rosová T. (1992). Česko-slovenské vzťahy v zrkadle empirického výskumu (Czecho-slovak Relations Reflected in Empirical Research). Sociológia 24(1-2): 43-74.
Glick Schiller, N., Basch, L., & Blanc-Szanton, C. (1992). Towards a definition of transnationalism. Annals of the New York academy of sciences, 645(1), ix-xiv.
Graf, S., Hřebíčková, M., Petrjánošová, M., & Leix, A. (2015). Češi a jejich sousedé: meziskupinové postoje a kontakt ve střední Evropě. Academia.
Jaworsky, B. N., Klvanová, R., Rétiová, A. S., Božic, I. R., & Krotký, J. K. (2023). A critical cultural sociological exploration of attitudes toward migration in Czechia: What lies beneath the fear of the thirteenth migrant. Rowman & Littlefield.
Kalmar, I. (2022). White but not Quite. Central Europe's Illiberal Revolt. Bristol: Bristol University Press.
Koser, K., & Salt, J. (1997). The geography of highly skilled international migration. International Journal of Population Geography, 3(4), 285-303.
Halás, M. (2014). The Development of Selected Mutual Relations between the Czech Republic and Slovakia. European Review 22(3): 414–431. https://doi.org/10.1017/S1062798714000258
Harris, J. R., & Todaro, M. P. (1970). Migration, unemployment and development: A two-sector analysis. American Economic Review, 60(1), 126–142.

Holý, L. (2010). Malý český člověk a skvělý český národ. Národní identita a postkomunistická transformace společnosti. Praha: SLON, 2 vydání.
Henderson, K. (2002). Slovakia. The Escape from Invisibility. London and New York: Routledge.
Kenworthy, J. B., Turner, R. N., Hewstone, M., & Voci, A. (2005). Intergroup contact: When does it work, and why. On the nature of prejudice: Fifty years after Allport, 278-292.
Minca, C. (2003). Critical peripheries. Environment & Planning D: Society & Space, 21(2), 160-168.
MŠMT (2025) Data o studentech, poprvé zapsaných a absolventech škol. Czech Ministry of Education, Youth and Sport. https://msmt.gov.cz/vzdelavani/skolstvi-v-cr/statistika-skolstvi/data-o-studentech-poprve-zapsanych-a-absolventech-vysokych?lang=1
Pickles, J. (2005). 'New cartographies' and the decolonization of European geographies. Area, 37(4), 355-364.
Pettigrew, T. F., & Tropp, L. R. (2006). A meta-analytic test of intergroup contact theory. Journal of personality and social psychology, 90(5), 751.
Pettigrew, T. F., & Tropp, L. R. (2013a). Does intergroup contact reduce prejudice? Recent meta-analytic findings. In Reducing prejudice and discrimination (pp. 93-114). Psychology Press.
Pettigrew, T. F., & Tropp, L. R. (2013b). When groups meet: The dynamics of intergroup contact. psychology press.
Pospěch, P. (2021). Neznámá společnost: pohledy na současné Česko. Host.
Šrajerová, O. (1999). Utváranie slovenskej národnostnej menšiny. In Vranovský, Pavel (ed.). Quo vadis, slovenská menšina?, pp 6-13. Obec Slovákov v Českej republike.
Šrajerová, O. (2001). K národnej identite Slovákov v ČR. In Vranovský, Pavel (ed.). Slovenskosť v multikultúrnom svete, pp. 57-68. Obec Slovákov v Českej republike.
Šrajerová, O. (2012). Etnická identita Slovákov v Českej republike. In Slušný, J. & Lipták,
P. Slováci v ČR - cesta emancipácie a integrácie: 20. rokov Obce Slovákov v ČR. Zborník materiálov z medzinárodnej konferencie konanej v Prahe 30 .11.- 1. 12. 2012. Pp. 24-29. Obec Slovákov v Českej republike.
Sue, D. W., Spanierman, L. B. (2020). Microaggressions in everyday life. Hoboken, Wiley.
Sullivan, A. (2008). Cultural capital, cultural knowledge and ability. Sociological Research Online, 12(6), 91-104.

Tajfel, H. (1970). Experiments in intergroup discrimination. Scientific American, 223(5), 96-103.
Tajfel, H. (Ed.). (2010). Social identity and intergroup relations (Vol. 7). Cambridge University Press.
Tajfel, H., & Turner, J. C. (1978). Intergroup behavior. Introducing social psychology, 401(466), 149-178.
Tudor, A. (2023). Ascriptions of migration: Racism, migratism and Brexit. European Journal of Cultural Studies, 26(2), 230-248.
Rapoš Božič, I., Synek Rétiová, A., & Klvaňová, R. (2023). 'We Have Always Been like This': The Local Embeddedness of Migration Attitudes. Sociologický časopis / Czech Sociological Review, 59(3), 339-365. 10.13060/csr.2023.030
Rychlík, J. (2015). Češi a Slováci ve 20. století: spolupráce a konflikty 1914-1992. Vyšehrad.
Uherek, Z. (2010). Antropologické pohledy na problematiku Slováků v České republice a Čechů a Moravanů na Slovensku. Česko-slovenské vztahy a krajané. Etnologický ústav AV ČR.
Varkočková, M. (2025). Decolonizing Central Asia and Central Europe: Centrality as In-Betweenness. In Sameer Kumar (Ed.), Bridging Asia-Europe Relations: Shared Challenges and Opportunities (pp. 117-132). Singapore: Springer Nature Singapore.
Vranovský, P. (1999). Špecifiky slovenskej menšiny v ČR. In Vranovský, Pavel (ed.). Quo vadis, slovenská menšina?, pp. 29-39. Obec Slovákov v Českej republike.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

This research was supported by the Czech Science Foundation Grant No. 24-11759S.