

Education Programmes for Refugees

Research report for the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees

Branch Office for the Czech Republic

Institute of Ethnology of the Academy of Sciences of the Czech Republic
Department of Ethnic Studies
Prague, April 2002

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¹ This work was reviewed in co-operation with the teachers of the Refugees Counselling Centre of the Czech Helsinki Committee, whom we would like to thank warmly for their help.

This report was produced on the basis of a commission from the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees – Branch Office for the Czech Republic.

The report is based on a survey conducted in Czech refugee facilities in October and November 2001 and was supplemented by further surveys in March 2002. The main element of the survey was approximately 50 interviews with asylum seekers, employees of the refugee facilities, and officials of the Ministry of the Interior, employees of NGOs, the Ministry of Education, Youth and Physical Education, schools and diagnostic institutions. The field research was complemented by study of the relevant materials. We should like to thank all the participants in this project for their assistance.

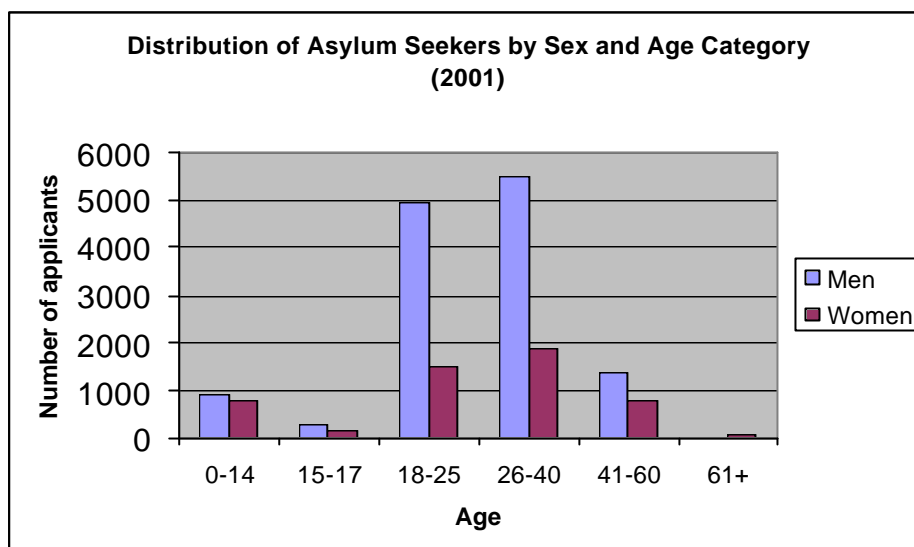
Introduction

Access to education is a basic human right and a significant factor for the integration of refugees in the destination country. Article 22 of the *1951 United Nations Convention on the Status of Refugees* states that: “refugees should receive the same treatment as is accorded to nationals with respect to elementary education” (United Nations 1951). At the same time, Article 28 of the *United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child* stipulates that each child has the right to education. The children of recognized refugees under 18 years of age, the children of asylum-seekers and children - asylum seekers unaccompanied by their statutory representative have all the rights mentioned in the Convention without discrimination of any kind (Convention on the Rights of the Child 1989). In 2001 a total of 2,088 asylum seekers under the age of 18 applied for asylum in the Czech Republic, 1,167 of them boys and 921 girls.

In the Czech Republic compulsory education takes the form of attendance at basic schools, usually from the age of 6 to 15. In the year 2001 out of the total of 2,088 asylum seekers under the age of 18, the number of children up to the age of 15 was 1,686 – 912 of them boys and 774 girls (see *tab. 1*). In the years 1900 – 2001 asylum was granted to 599 children in this age category (see *tab. 2*).

Age category	Men	Women	Total
0-14	912	774	1686
15-17	255	147	402
18-25	4944	1467	6411
26-40	5487	1870	7357
41-60	1373	767	2140
61+	41	50	91
Total	13012	5075	18087

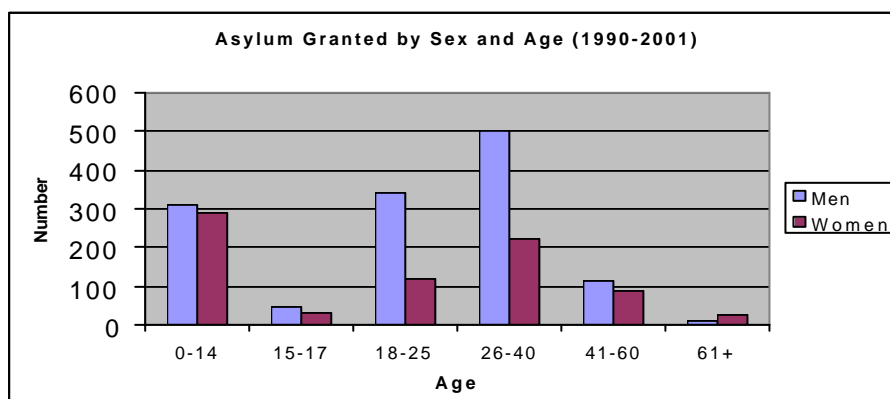
Tab. 1 Distribution of Asylum Seekers by Sex and Age (2001) (Source of data: Ministry of Interior of Czech Republic; Organization for Aid to Refugees)



Graph 1 Distribution of Asylum Seekers by Sex and Age (2001) (Source of data: Ministry of Interior of Czech Republic; Organization for Aid to Refugees)

Age category	Men	Women	Total
0-14	310	289	599
15-17	50	33	83
18-25	341	119	460
26-40	502	226	728
41-60	115	88	203
61+	13	28	41
Total	1331	783	2114

Tab. 2 Asylum Granted by Sex and Age (1990 – 2001) (Source of data: Ministry of Interior of Czech Republic; Organization for Aid to Refugees)



Graph 2 Asylum Granted by Sex and Age (1990 – 2001) (Source of data: Ministry of Interior of Czech Republic; Organization for Aid to Refugees)

School education of accompanied children up to 15 years of age

In the Czech Republic, school education for children of asylum seekers is provided on the basis of the *Instruction on ensuring obligatory school attendance of children of asylum seekers from asylum facilities* issued by the Ministry of Education, Youth and Physical Culture of 11 April 2000, Ref. No.: 35 471/99-22. The objective of this instruction is to secure the conditions of school education for children from accommodation centres for asylum seekers. In the year 2001, children of asylum seekers were being taught in nine basic schools in the vicinity of accommodation and integration centres. They were the following basic schools:

1. Basic school in Belá pod Bezdezem, Máchova 1110
2. Basic school in Zastávka u Brna 102
3. Basic school in Zbýšov u Brna, Komenského 473
4. Basic school in Bílina, Lidická 18
5. Basic school in Kostelec nad Orlicí, Palackého 45
6. Basic school in Kostelec nad Orlicí, Komenského 522
7. Basic school in Sec, Pionýru 298
8. Basic school in Kašava 190
9. Basic school in Stráž pod Ralskem, Pionýru 141

Education in the schools listed takes place in standard classes attended by pupils of the majority society alongside the children of asylum seekers. Since the children of asylum seekers almost invariably have no knowledge of Czech, they need to be given basic language courses that will enable them to follow teaching in the standard classes before they join these classes. Basic language teaching for the children is currently ² is provided by four of the ten schools:

1. Basic school in Belá pod Bezdezem, Máchova 1110
2. Basic school in Zastávka u Brna 102
3. Basic school in Bílina, Lidická 18
4. Basic school in Kostelec nad Orlicí, Palackého 45

The elementary language training is given immediately after children join the school. Children are asked to join a school s immediately after the asylum seeker has been transferred from a reception centre to an accommodation centre.³ The elementary language training is conducted in what are known as

² In h 1994 – 2000 basic language training was organised directly in the refugee camps of the Ministry of the Interior. Teaching here was organised by the Refugees Counselling Centre of the Czech Helsinki Committee.

³ In the reception centre children and adults are taught by a suitably qualified teacher – employee of the Refugees Counselling Centre of the Czech Helsinki Committee (the current teacher has eight years of experience). The costs of teaching in the reception centre are covered from the budget of the Refugees Counselling Centre.

“compensation classes”, which are organised whenever a minimum of three children require language training. When the number of children who require elementary language training exceeds 12, it is possible to create another compensation class. The maximum number of students in a compensation class is 25. Limits on staff and wage resources for the compensation classes at the schools concerned have been raised, as has the limit on non-investment funds, and staff are paid bonuses that are supposed to be 10% higher than the average for the district. Schools organise compensation classes either in the school building (for instance Zastávka u Brna, Bílina, Belá pod Bezdezem) or in the accommodation centre (Kostelec nad Orlicí).

In the compensation class all the teaching is usually carried out by one teacher. Children attend the class until they are capable of making themselves understood and following teaching in Czech. If at least partial proficiency in the teaching language is achieved, children are transferred to a standard class where they receive education with pupils of the majority population. The transfer of a child from a compensation to a standard class is subject to the decision of the director of the school following a consultation with the teacher of the compensation class and the teachers who will be teaching the child in future. The period required before transfer from a compensation to a standard class differs from one child to another. During our inquiry, we noted an attempt to reduce this period rather shorter so that the children could take their place in a larger collective as soon as possible. In some schools, for example in Bílina, children of up to first grade age are put in standard classes immediately, if possible, while entry into higher grades naturally requires a degree of linguistic competence only to be acquired in the compensation class.⁴ Usually, children are put into a grade one year below the one they would attend in the country of their origin.

The very varied collective of children of asylum seekers also, however, requires non-standard solutions. During our fieldwork we encountered a situation in which, for example, a child was attending a compensation class but for some subjects where language proficiency was secondary, such as mathematics, he was attending a standard class. We also noticed that teachers took into account the fact that the mathematics proficiency of a pupil corresponded to the seventh grade of a Czech basic school whereas his proficiency in other subjects was at fourth grade, and accordingly made it possible to him to change grades for different subjects.

Asylum seekers stay here for from 14 days to 1 month, and in some cases longer, and learn basic Czech phrases (such as greetings, introductions etc.)

⁴ E.g. in Belá pod Bezdezem their experience is that the most successful pupils can be transferred from compensation classes to standard classes after three months.

Teachers also recognise that siblings from accommodation centres usually wish to attend the same class, and their parents often want this arrangement, even if the children are of different ages. Staff also respect the fact that a child should not have to face a completely unknown environment and so whenever possible they transfer at least two children from a compensation class to a standard at the same time, so that right from the beginning the children are with someone they know. This means there are children of different ages in the same class, but it does not appear to disturb the educational process in a significant way.

The education in compensation classes is for the most part based on improvisation by the teacher. Teachers in some schools also try to teach standard subjects – mathematics, arts and crafts, music lessons, civics etc. in compensation classes (for instance in Belá pod Bezdezem), while teachers in other schools focus only on Czech language training.

Most of the teachers are new to teaching foreigners Czech, and ordinary textbooks for teaching Czech as a foreign language to children at elementary schools do not exist. In Zastávka u Brna, for example, teaching staff mentioned a textbook supplied by the Director of Refugee Facilities of the Czech Ministry of the Interior, but it is unlikely that they make much use of it in practice.⁵ In Bílina the teachers had not been informed about the textbook, and in Belá pod Bezdezem the teaching staff had heard of it but did not have it. In Bílina they had decided to teach using Czech textbooks (for native speakers) for the first grade of elementary schools, and in Zastávka u Brna they use teaching materials compiled by the Czech Helsinki Committee's Refugees Counselling Centre. Some teachers expressed doubts about the feasibility of putting together a suitable textbook of Czech at all, given that the children in the compensation classes are so diverse in age and proficiency in school subjects. Older children from the territories of the former Soviet Union have experience in learning foreign languages; they often have the basics of English or another world language and some knowledge of the Latin alphabet. In the case of a number of children from other countries, however, language teaching must go hand in hand with the teaching of basic reading and writing. First grade copybooks and other aids used by the first graders had proved to be relatively useful in teaching the basics of the language. There are so many different foreign communities involved that as yet no school has taken the experimental step of hiring a foreign teacher. In Belá pod Bezdezem, for example, in 1999 – 2001 the staff were teaching pupils with roughly 20 different maternal languages.⁶

⁵ According to the co-ordinator for Czech teaching at the Counselling Centre for Refugees of the Czech Helsinki Committee only the text part is useful for teaching, and only for adult students. .

⁶ The Refugees Counselling Centre of the Czech Helsinki Committee states that in 1994 – 2000 it taught pupils with a total of 25 mother tongues.

It is characteristic of the compensation classes that individual pupils have varying levels of knowledge of the language and also do not start the school year at the same time but arrive immediately after their parents have been allocated to accommodation centres. Children from different countries have different cultural backgrounds and different conceptions of school attendance and curricula. This means that a whole range of activities cannot be performed with all pupils at the same time. A new pupil acquires the absolutely essential vocabulary assisted by a teacher so that he/she can name the surrounding objects and understand the phrases “open your book”, “shut your book” and so on, while the others write, paint, try to read etc. The whole class then reads fairytales together, for example, with each pupil understanding as much as he/she can.

Compensation classes have two functions: training and integration. Some teachers expressed the view that given the rapid turnover of pupils, the primary function of the classes is integration. Since the teaching is of rather provisional nature and the community of pupils is not homogenous as far as school proficiency and age are concerned, the children themselves usually look forward to transfer to a standard class.

The teachers expressed the opinion that pupils did not experience transfer from compensation into standard classes as in any way traumatising, since the teachers of the standard classes took their limited language proficiency into account and other pupils in the classes are already accustomed to the situation. Teaching was disturbed, however, when a larger number of pupils (estimated at more than 4) were transferred from compensation classes to standard classes. In the annual report of the Basic School in Belá pod Bezdezem the school authorities noted in 1999 that “In many cases work in classes with a larger number of immigrants is comparable to work in special classes. In the current situation it is impossible to have classes with the maximum number of pupils stipulated by school legislation, and the need is more to create collectives with a smaller number of pupils (Výroční zpráva 1999: 17).”

Pupils transferred from compensation classes to standard ones are not initially graded. End-of-the-year reports are based on a combination of verbal assessment and grades. Czech children are classified using grades from 1 to 5 (in descending order of proficiency). In the case of the children of asylum seekers, verbal assessment is the primary form of evaluation of performance and proficiency in Czech language and subjects strongly dependent on language. Here the teacher gives a verbal report on the child's efforts and results so as to avoid the possibility of traumatising the child with poor marks. For foreign languages, mathematics, physics and other subjects where Czech language proficiency plays a less important role, teachers begin to use classificatory

grades from the point at which a child of asylum seekers has caught up with the others in terms of knowledge.

The education of the children of asylum seekers involves many specific questions and considerations. One is the fact that the school often has practically no input information about the pupil and has to rely on what the child says about himself or herself. Only gradually are unanswered questions about the child's previous education clarified. In the Czech Republic, a file is established for each pupil. The file begins with a brief paragraph containing the most important information, and after a few weeks - if the refugee child remains at the school - it is augmented by standard records of the kind kept on all basic-school pupils in the Czech education system. If the pupil is transferred to another accommodation centre or moves away for some other reason this documentation is passed on to his or her next school.

Another issue specific to the education of school-age children of asylum seekers arises from the fact that their parents have often chosen the Czech Republic as a transit country and soon after filing an asylum application try to cross the borders to the EU countries illegally. During one school year, 60 – 70 go through a compensation class of 18 pupils. One concrete example is that of the basic school at Belá pod Bezdezem where there have been two compensation classes operating since the year 2000, each with a maximum of 12 pupils. The first class is for children up to ten years of age and the second for children older than ten. A total of 85 pupils attended the two classes in the last school year (2000/2001) (see *tab. 3*) and the number will probably be comparable at the end of this school year (see *tab. 4*). The overall period for which children of asylum seekers attend basic school varies from child to child. (see *tab. 5*). Many of them cease to attend a school either because they illegally cross the state frontiers with their parents or because they are transferred to another refugee centre. Up to the beginning of 2002 children were also leaving accommodation centres for several weeks or months with their parents on special leave of absence. Since the 1st of February 2002, an amendment to the law on asylum has meant that asylum seekers may only leave their centres for up to one month and parents are warned that they must register their child at the basic school nearest to the place in which they are staying. Despite this measure, however, school staff claimed that the education of children of asylum seekers was relatively fragmentary and unsystematic. Teachers are rarely in a position to assess its effects since very few of the children remain at one school for several years, and very few indeed finish their basic schooling in the place of their former compensation class.⁷ The re-allocation of families from one accommodation centre to another is often a hurried affair, and so children have no idea how long

⁷ On the other hand we were several times ensured that the children of asylum seekers are quite good at school.

they will be attending a school in a particular locality. We have even recorded cases where pupils have gone to school in the morning and accommodation centre staff had come for them during lessons because of a sudden decision on reallocation.

Duration of school attendance / months	Number of pupils
1	25
2	20
3	11
4	19
5	4
6	4
7	1
8	1

Tab. 3 Duration of the school attendance of children at levelling classes at the Belá pod Bezdezem Elementary School in the school year 2000/2001. The table shows the high level of fluctuation in compensation classes during a full school year. (Source of data: Belá pod Bezdezem Basic School)

Duration of school attendance / months	Number of pupils
1	11
2	20
3	4
4	6
5	3
6	5
7	1

Tab. 4 Duration of school attendance of children in compensation classes at the Basic School Belá pod Bezdezem in the school year 2001 / 2002, Sept. 2001- March 2002. The table shows the number of months that individual pupils attended compensation classes before being transferred to standard classes or leaving the school, and so gives an idea of the level of fluctuation in compensation classes. (Source of Data: Belá pod Bezdezem Basic School)

Duration of school attendance / months	Number of pupils
1	23
2	19
3	9
4	14
5	6
6	2
7	1
8	1
9	0
10	4
11	0
12	1
13	2
14	1
15	0
16	0
17	0
18	1
19	1

Tab. 5 Overall length of school attendance of children of asylum seekers at the Belá pod Bezdezem Basic School, who entered compensation classes at the BS in the school year 2000/2001. The column “duration of school attendance” shows how many months (incl. incomplete months) the child attended the BS, including period in a compensation class. . The column “number of children” shows how many children ceased attendance after the given number of months (Source of data: Belá pod Bezdezem Basic School)

A significant specific feature of the education of children of asylum seekers is a considerable fluctuation of their numbers that cannot easily be estimated in advance. In response to the problem the schools in the vicinity of refugee centres either keep two classes in operation with a small number of children so that more children can be added, or have a „backup“ teacher who is temporarily entrusted with other work but can be immediately redeployed to teach foreign children. When the numbers of pupils increase, the school must request the Ministry of Education, Youth and Physical Culture for additional resources for teaching and materials through the school authorities. Although there are resources reserved for these purposes, it takes time for them to be transferred and often they are not immediately available at the time they are most needed. Furthermore, since children so often change schools, the costs of textbooks and aids increase; the families of asylum seekers do not return the textbooks on leaving the accommodation centres and these have to be purchased again and again.

Far from all the refugees are interested in the education of their children. According to respondents, the important factors here are the approach to education in the refugee family's country of origin (the prestige of the school system there) and whether or not the Czech Republic is a transit or a destination country for the refugee family. Some teachers say that simply from a pupil's attitude to education they find out whether a family intends to remain in the Czech Republic or leave more quickly than the accommodation centre staff.⁸ Several times we heard the opinion that Afghans, Armenians and Georgians, for example, had an interest in education while the biggest problems were with Romanians, who were not interested in their children's school attendance. In Bílina, the school director gave the following example of this phenomenon: the management of the centre at Cervený Újezd had notified her of the arrival of a large group of Romanian refugees, estimating that about 40 children would start to attend school. The school hired a teacher and opened a new compensation class, but only two children started to attend, since the Romanian families did not send their children to school. On the other hand respondents also said that it was very hard to generalise about which groups of asylum seekers had a positive or negative attitude to education, and there was a great deal of variation between individual families.

The school attendance of children from other groups also is not entirely regular. Teaching staff believe that apart from the poor motivation of asylum seekers, one reason is the different daily regime of refugee families. Children from some refugee groups are not used to getting up early in the morning, since they go to bed late with their parents or suffer from the noise in the accommodation centres at night. If the staff of the accommodation centre wake the children up and tell them to go to school they often comply, but if school attendance is left up to the parents, there is a relatively large risk of irregular or no attendance. While the schools notify the social welfare department of the District Office of a child's failure to attend school, most parents take no notice of official complaints and neither the management of the accommodation centres nor the schools themselves have any means of motivating parents or imposing sanctions. The result is that irregular school attendance often continues throughout the whole period a child's stay in the in an accommodation centre. At the basic school in Zastávka u Brna we were told that some families from the Arab world, for example, take care to ensure that their sons attend school but are indifferent in the case of their daughters. Attitudes to education are also affected by the abnormal psychological pressures to which asylum seekers are exposed in the accommodation centres.

⁸ Obviously such guesses cannot be allowed to affect interaction with asylum seekers.

Children of Asylum Seekers by Nationality *tab. 6.*

Country of Citizenship	Number of children
Armenia	80
Afghanistan	36
Ukraine	25
Slovakia	22
Russia	18
Bulgaria	14
Romania	12
Albania	10
Russia (Chechnia)	9
Bosnia and Hercegovina	8
Moldova	7
Serbia	6
Iraq	5
Georgia	4
Macedonia	4
Belarus	3
Ukraine (Jews)	3
Vietnam	3
Azerbadjan	2
Kazakhstan	2
Hungary	2
Somalia	2
Bosnia and Hercegovina (Croats)	1
Congo	1
Kyrgyzstan	1
without citizenship	1

Tab. 6 The country of citizenship of children who attended basic school at Belá pod Bezdezem from 1991 up to 3.11.2000. (Source of data: Belá pod Bezdezem Basic School)

In schools where teachers have experience both with asylum seekers from accommodation centres and those living in private homes, the staff expressed the view that that children of asylum seekers staying in private homes attended schools more regularly than those of asylum seekers, at accommodation centres, and that their parents more often inquired about their progress and co-operated with the school. We are unable, however, to provide more exact evidence for this statement.

Some teaching staff also voiced the opinion that the interest of families of asylum seekers in the education of their children has decreased in recent years.

This is mainly attributed to change in the social profile of asylum seekers. The teachers considered that especially before the year 2000 there were more political refugees from intellectual or educated circles among asylum seekers. These immigrants had more interest in their children's education. Asylum seekers today are often motivated by the search for economic betterment. They do not represent a social elite and their interest in their children's education is correspondingly lower. This was not, however, the only view expressed.

One important issue related to the school attendance of refugee children is that of meals and opportunity to participate in various activities organized by the school in addition to normal lessons. The key questions here are the costs of the activities and the limits imposed by their religious affiliations or that of their parents.

Costs of meals as well as transport to schools are covered by the accommodation centres, which are also responsible for paying any medical expenses for the children (children do not have health insurance). Not all school canteens have the resources to prepare more than one menu and so there are problems with providing meals for example for Muslim pupils. On the other hand most of the Muslims encountered by teaching staff have not been consistent in this area of their faith and the children have eaten everything served in the canteen. Questions of how to respond on religious matters have also arisen over swimming lessons, with teachers having to speak to parents on the issue of the participation of Muslim girls. Specifically, we heard the story of a Muslim girl at Bílina who wanted to join swimming lessons and whose parents had to be asked for permission. In general it can be said that teachers do not force pupils into activities that are contrary to their beliefs. It is less certain whether they are always aware of cultural sensitivities among the pupils from the accommodation centres in the standard classes. The discussions on whether Muslim girls could cover their heads during lessons that took place in one of the schools with compensation classes were needlessly traumatising for pupils from a different culture.

Payment for school activities not financed by the accommodation centres may present problems. Such items include cinema and theatre tickets, or entrance to exhibitions. It is however generally known that asylum-seekers and people granted asylum have insufficient funds, and so the institutions waive such charges if they are part of a school teaching programme.

Where there is an after-school centre or the school has established children's clubs, the refugee children are invited to attend. Such school facilities offer the children the opportunity for spare-time activities for which the accommodation centres rarely provide suitable conditions.

The children of the asylum seekers may also go on “nature school” camps. If there is interest from asylum-seeker families, the accommodation centres will cover “nature school” costs for those children who are expected to remain in the Czech Republic. Since children do not have health insurance, the accommodation centre issues a certificate for them confirming that any necessary medical expenses will be paid by the state.

When assigning pupils to standard classes, teachers often face the problem of children whose age does not match with years of school attendance according to Czech standards. In the case of pupils with a genuine interest in education (e.g. girls from Afghanistan), this situation can be remedied by special lessons, catch-up training and then additional examinations for entry into higher classes. In the case of older children who have never attended school in their countries of origin (e.g. children of asylum seekers from Slovakia and Romania), most respondents had never had to address the situation in practice, because the families of such pupils had left the accommodation centre before the children had completed compensation classes or the parents had never sent their children to school at all.

One specific and not entirely isolated phenomenon is false statement of the age of pupils in the accommodation centres. Some asylum seeker families without documents claim that their children are younger than they really are, and so young people over the age of 15 are admitted to basic school. Establishing this fact by appropriate medical examination, ie. anthropomorphic testing is expensive and creates an unpleasant situation both for school managements and for parents.

School establishments teaching refugees of up to 15 years of age often encounter a whole range of situations that make it impossible for them to fully abide by existing regulations and legal standards. There are problems of this kind in the classification (grading) of pupils, and also with textbooks in compensation classes, for example. The directors of schools educating the children of asylum seekers have the greatest interest in resolving the disputes in these areas, and in the Autumn of 2001 they initiated discussions at the Ministry of Education, Youth and Physical Culture. It is now to be anticipated that the Ministry of Education will devote more attention to the whole question of the education of refugee children.

Teaching the children of asylum seekers has brought not only negative changes but also benefits to the schools involved. At the basic school in Belá pod Bezdez the influx of children from the Belá-Jezová accommodation centre compelled the state to provide thirty million crowns worth of investment for the building of

a new storey and the expansion of the school. Co-operation with the Czech branch of the High Commissioner for Refugees brought the school three computers sponsored by UNHCR. In the summer of 2001 there was a meeting of children of asylum seekers with representatives of the Czech government, UNCHR and the Ministry of Education at the cabinet office, and so on.

The Education of children from 15 to 18 years of age

There are no specialised establishments for the education of asylum seekers' children over the age of 15 years of age. In the year 2001 the total number of asylum seekers children in this age category was 402, of which 255 were boys and 774 girls (see *tab. 1*). In the years 1990 - 2001 asylum was granted to 83 children in the age range 15 – 18 years (see *tab. 2*). Children of asylum seekers over 15 years of age may take part in language courses designed for adults at refugee centres (see educational courses for adults). Pupils over 15 who have taken language courses for adults are helped to find further education by staff at the Refugees Counselling Centre of the Czech Helsinki Committee. If a child has sufficient language proficiency, they will find him or her a suitable high school. If a child has already attended several years of basic school, the teachers at the school try to find him or her a place in high school or vocational training centers.

At the basic schools with compensation classes they told us that some children of asylum seekers had actually completed their basic school education there, although this was not a very common phenomenon, and that in these cases the school staff had found them places in further education at other schools. So far they have been reasonably successful in placing the children of asylum seekers in apprentice centres, academic high schools or other secondary schools. Whether a pupil is accepted at a higher school mainly depends on his/her proficiency and skills but also on the management of the school in question. Basic school teachers mentioned examples of both positive co-operation on the one hand and unwillingness of school managements to accept children on the other. We heard several times that staff of middle (higher) schools more often encounter children of asylum-seekers who are living in private accommodation or in "a regime of tolerance". Middle school education is not compulsory in the Czech Republic and application is up to pupils and parents themselves, but without the help of an informed third party it is often hard for asylum-seekers to get their children accepted into middle schools. Often asylum seekers do not even know that the option exists. If children have already been attending basic school then the teachers, of course, draw their attention to the possibility of study at middle school. We have encountered cases, however,

where the parents had arrived in the Czech Republic with a child who had just finished basic school, the child had not gone on to any further education, and currently, after granting of asylum, only has the minimum qualifications.⁹

The middle-school education is provided free of charge for the children of asylum-seekers as for the rest of the population, but we have met a case where the child of asylum seekers is studying at private middle school and the parents are paying the school fees.

Foreigners who are starting to rebuild their lives in the Czech Republic face not only organisational but also financial problems in securing education for their children. Therefore, some institutions offer funding for the education of people seeking or granted asylum in the Czech Republic. The most important sponsor is the office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees, which sponsors studies through the non-governmental organisation the Advisory Centre for Integration. Another important sponsor is the Open Society Fund, which provides grants towards middle-school and university studies. In 2001 Open Society Fund provided 38 grants for students to attend university, 28 grants for middle-school students, 10 grants for Czech courses, and 1 for a re-qualification course.

Education of children unaccompanied by their statutory representative

In line with the United Nations' Convention on the Rights of the Child of 1989 we include persons younger than 18 years of age in this category. It is an extremely vulnerable group of children, who under Czech law are not legally competent and who must be dealt with using special procedures. .

As of the 31st of December 2001 there were 239 claimants for asylum under legal age. They were mainly from the Ukraine, Moldavia and other countries of the Commonwealth of Independent States; others come from India, China and other Asian countries. They were mostly minors of 15 to 18 years of age, but also included children of less than 15 years of age. In the year 2001 the total number of unaccompanied minors of age of 0 – 14 years was 36 and the number of minors older than 15 years was 203 (see *tab. 7*).

⁹ Staff of the Counselling Centre for Refugees of the Czech Helsinki Committee told us that if a child does not have a complete basic education from the country of origin and is in the age-group 15-16 years, they try to ensure that he or she is accepted into a basic school for at least one or two years to obtain the foundation for study at middle school. . Older children cannot be placed in a basic school.

Country of Citizenship	Age category		Number of Person
	0-14	15-17	
Afghanistan	6	16	22
Algeria	-	1	1
Armenia	1	14	15
Bangladesh	-	1	1
Belarus	-	2	2
Bulgaria	-	2	2
Côte d'Ivoire	-	1	1
Georgia	6	13	19
China	2	13	15
India	-	26	26
Iraq	-	5	5
Kazakhstan	1	-	1
Kyrgyzstan	-	1	1
Moldova	1	16	17
Mongolia	4	3	7
Morocco	-	2	2
Nepal	-	1	1
Nigeria	-	4	4
Pakistan	-	2	2
Romania	9	36	45
Russia	2	8	10
Sierra Leone	-	1	1
Slovakia	1	4	5
Turkey	1	1	2
Ukraine	1	14	15
Uzbekistan	1	-	1
Vietnam	-	15	15
Zimbabwe	-	1	1
Total	36	203	239

Tab. 7 Minor refugees unaccompanied by adults as of 31. 12. 2001. (Source: Ministry of the Interior of the Czech Republic)

In compliance with Article 92 of LawNo. 325/1999 Coll. (Czech Asylum Law), a guardian is appointed for an asylum seeker younger than 18 years to perform legal acts, such as submission of remonstrance, petition etc. on his behalf. A relative of the asylum-seeker may for example act as guardian for the period of stay on Czech territory. If a minor has no such relative here, the state finds a suitable person for the role. Guardians for asylum procedure are usually employees of the Czech Helsinki Committee. Guardianship for period of stay is then determined by judicial decision.

Up to 2000, minor asylum seekers were placed in accommodation centres in the same way as adults and their education was organised in much the same way as that of children of adult asylum seekers. In 2000, procedures were modified with a search for new solutions.

Currently a child under the age of 15 unaccompanied by an adult is placed first, on the basis of an emergency order, in a facility of the Ministry of Education, Youth and Physical Training. Usually this is a Children's Diagnostic Institution, and specifically one of the following:

The Bohumín Children's Diagnostic Institution
Brno Children's Diagnostic Institution
Brno-Hlinky Children's Diagnostic Institution
Dobrichovice Children's Diagnostic Institution
Hradec Králové Children's Diagnostic Institution
Liberec Children's Diagnostic Institution
Plzen Children's Diagnostic Institution
Praha 2. Children's Diagnostic Institution
Praha 4 (U Michelského lesa) Children's Diagnostic Institution
Praha 4 (Na dlouhé mezi) Children's Diagnostic Institution
Ostrava – Kuncicky Children's Diagnostic Institution

These facilities come under the methodical direction of the Ministry of Education, Department of Special Education and Institutional Education, but the department does not keep statistics on foreigners of child asylum-seekers and so has no precise information on how many children in this category have been placed in the facilities, their countries of origin and the length of their stays. We obtained the following information directly from senior staff of the children's diagnostic institutions in March 2002:

The Bohumín Children's Diagnostic Institution

Since 1998 approximately 10 children in the category have been placed here. In 2001 there were 4 unaccompanied child asylum seekers here from Bangladesh, Iraq, Sri Lanka, Afghanistan. They were placed in the diagnostic institution on the basis of an emergency order. Only two of these children (aged 13 and 16, from Iraq and Afghanistan) remained in the Czech Republic and were placed in a children's home. The others had probably crossed the Western borders of the state illegally.

In 2002 (22nd March) no child in the category concerned had been placed in the institution.

The Brno Children's Diagnostic Institution

In 2000 one Algerian of roughly 18 years of age had been transferred to the institution. After 48 days he had been transferred to an educational institute. There had also been a 16-year-old Afghan boy, who after twenty days had been placed in a children's home. One under-age Moldavian girl had been sent back to her country of origin, and one under-age Chinese girl had escaped almost immediately after arrival at the institution and was still on the run.

In 2001 no foreign minor had been placed in the institution. At the beginning of 2002 one Ukrainian had stayed there. He had been shown to be older than 18 and had therefore been sent to a Ministry of the Interior reception centre for asylum seekers in Vyšní Lhoty.

The Brno-Hlinky Children's Diagnostic Institution

In 2001 four Ukrainians had been placed in the diagnostic institute on the basis of an emergency order and in the period Jan-March 2002 one Vietnamese and one Romanian. All had undergone an anthropomorphic test and all had been found to be older than 16. They had therefore been handed over to the immigration police.

The České Budejovice Children's Diagnostic Institution

In 1999 a Mongolian was placed here on the basis of an emergency order; a test showed him to be over the age of 15 and he was therefore handed over to the immigration police. In 2001 8 Chinese (3 girls and 3 boys), were placed in the institution on the basis of an emergency order; anthropomorphic testing showed them to be in the 17 – 20 age range and they were therefore transferred to a Ministry of the Interior refugee facility. In the period Jan.-March 2002 no child in the relevant category had stayed in the institution.

The Dobrichovice Children's Diagnostic Institution

In 2001 and early 2002 no under-age asylum seekers had been sent to the institution on the basis of emergency order. In 2000 Iraqi minors from the Belá-Jezová accommodation centre had been sent there for 14 days because their mother had suffered a nervous breakdown and been hospitalised. When the mother had recovered the children were sent back to the accommodation centre.

The Hradec Králové Children's Diagnostic Institution

In 2000 three Bulgarian citizens had been sent to the institute on the basis of an emergency order: two girls aged 14 – 15 years, who were suspected of prostitution, and one boy of 10. They spent just under a week in the institution and were subsequently handed over to the Bulgarian Embassy and taken back to

Bulgaria. In the years 2001 – 2002 no child in the relevant category had been placed in the institution.

The Liberec Children's Diagnostic Institution

In the period 2001 – March 2002 no unaccompanied foreign minor had been placed in the institution.

The Ostrava-Kuncicky Children's Diagnostic Institution

In the period 2000 – March 2002 no unaccompanied foreign minor had been placed in the institution.

The Plzen Children's Diagnostic Institution

In 2001 two Albanians had stayed in the institute on the basis of an emergency order. They remained for approximately one month. Examination showed them to be older than 15 and so they were handed over to the immigration police and subsequently placed in a camp in Balková. In the period January – March 2002 no child in the relevant category had been placed in the institution.

The Prague 2 Children's Diagnostic Institution

In 2001 one young man older than 15 from Sri Lanka had been placed in the institution on the basis of an emergency order. After approximately a month he had been transferred to a Ministry of Interior accommodation centre for asylum seekers, where he joined his uncle.

In the period January – March 2002 no person in the relevant category had been placed there.

The Prague 4, Na dlouhé mezi Children's Diagnostic Institution

In 2001 one Romanian aged 16 had been placed in the institute. She stayed there for approximately 3 months, but was then transferred to an educational institute for a few days after being assigned to a Ministry of Interior accommodation centre, since in the meantime her mother had also arrived in the Czech Republic and applied for asylum.

The Prague 4 – U Michelského lesa Children's Diagnostic Institute

In 2001 Romanians whose parents had been arrested and remanded in the Prague Praha – Ruzyne prison were placed here.

In the period January – March 2002 three young men from Senegal and one Indian stayed here on the basis of an emergency order. On the basis of tests they

were all shown to be older than 18 and were therefore transferred to the Ministry of the Interior reception centre for asylum seekers at Vyšní Lhoty . In March 2002 there were four Palestinians staying at the institution on the basis of an emergency order: two boys of 15 and 17 and two girls under 15.

Not only staff of the Ministry of Education, Youth and Physical Training, the Czech Helsinki Committee, and the Ministry of the Interior, but also staff at the children's diagnostic institutions who gave us their views believe that procedures for dealing with unaccompanied minors before and during the process of application for asylum are unsatisfactory. The diagnostic institutions exist primarily to deal with problem children of Czech provenance and the staff if these institutions themselves say that they have difficulty communicating with foreigners and cannot provide them with optimal care in the conditions of communities of young people with serious problems. From the information outlined above it is clear that for unaccompanied children a diagnostic institutions tends to be a short-term transit station from which they are moved on to children's homes, Ministry of the Interior centres for asylum seekers and other facilities, if indeed they do not escape before transfer. Communication between the children of the majority society in the children's diagnostic institutions and the under-age asylum seekers is evidently not without conflict. The teaching and training in diagnostic institutions cannot therefore be systematic. Nor does placement in children's homes emerge as a suitable solution, although of course these take only a minority of the asylum-seekers concerned, since many have lied about their age and after anthropological tests are classified as minors above the age of 15 or as adult asylum seekers.¹⁰

In the existing situation basic or other educational programmes for the children in this category up to the age of 15 cannot usually be developed and solutions are being sought to the problems of where to place these minor asylum seekers and how to stabilise their conditions. The Czech Ministry of Education, Youth, and Physical Training in collaboration with the Ministry of the Interior and other state and non-governmental institutions are therefore preparing to open a specialised facility for under-age unaccompanied asylum seekers. The locations under preliminary consideration are in Prague, Sec or Postoloprty. An accommodation and teaching facility of this kind would have the advantage that the foreigners would not be confronted with young Czech delinquents who have already been in conflict with the law.

¹⁰ In recent months we have been noticing an opposite tendency, i.e. statement of a higher age to ensure that a minor can stay with his/her group in the reception (accommodation) centre.

Children over 15 years of age are sent to accommodation centres for asylum seekers. If they have some relatives there, they live with them, but if not, they live in a separate part of the accommodation centre that has been reserved for them. They have the same educational conditions as children over 15 years of age accompanied by statutory representatives. Even in this category, however, we have recorded an increased number of cases of young people trying to leave the facility and continuing on to the European Union countries. If a minor unaccompanied by his/her statutory representative does not return to an accommodation centre within 24 hours, the management of the accommodation centre informs the police. Investigation is usually, however, unsuccessful.

Another problematic area concerns under-age asylum seekers placed in the deportation camps ((Balková by Plzeň and Poštorná by Breclav), where they are waiting for decisions in conditions of detention and no educational programmes are provided.

Adult Education

Adult asylum seekers can attend courses organized by the Czech Helsinki Committee in the reception centre at Vyšní Lhoty and subsequently in the accommodation centres to which they are assigned. These are Czech language courses. Other educational courses are also organized by non-governmental organizations in the accommodation centres, but the language courses are the most frequent and they form the basis of other educational events.

Language courses for adults are free of charge; the teaching staff are paid by the Czech Helsinki Committee using money from non-government sources. Teachers are employed on the basis of open, competitive appointment. Some live near the refugee facilities, while others commute from a distance of up to 30 km. A co-ordinator from the Czech Helsinki Committee in Prague manages their activities.

In the reception centre the asylum seekers acquire the absolutely necessary minimum of Czech: how to say hello and goodbye, introduce themselves, and other basic elements of communication. After arrival at the accommodation centres, they can attend Czech language courses for either beginners or advanced students. In large refugee centres (Belá-Jezová, Cervený Újezd, Zastávka u Brna, Kostelec nad Orlicí) lessons take place on a daily basis. In refugee centres with a small capacity, where there are not enough people interested in Czech to justify a full course (e.g. Stráž pod Ralskem), a teacher comes to provide consultation, assign homework and work with those interested

on an individual basis. Interested asylum seekers from the Zbýšov accommodation centre by Brno can commute to courses in the accommodation centre at Zastávka u Brna.

In accommodation centres where a course is held on a daily basis, the length of classes is not a fixed quantity, but depends on the composition of the students, their attention span and their special interests. In some cases, a group can be taught for several hours, and in others the participants prefer shorter lessons followed by individual consultations. The opportunity for consultations is also taken up by children, who use the language courses for adults serve as a form of additional conversation practice. The teaching is adjusted to the fact that the asylum seekers are all different, and have different language skills and proficiency. The Czech Helsinki Committee has selected the model of consistent teaching of Czech in Czech. Given that a high percentage of asylum seekers do not know Latin alphabet, the teaching starts with Latin script. Currently the majority of asylum seekers attending courses are from the former Soviet Union (especially Russians and Ukrainians), who have a high level of literacy that makes teaching easier, especially at the beginning. The teachers point out, however, that they do not perform better than the other students in conversation or dictation, and are sometimes even weaker. The reason is clearly the fact that they understand the initial parts of the course without much difficulty and so pay less attention to thorough mastery of the language. After a while, their inattention to grammatical structure can become a serious handicap. An employee of the Czech Helsinki Committee reported that two years ago, more than half the people attending a course had still been entirely illiterate (specifically asylum seekers from Afghanistan, Sri Lanka and Arab states). Illiteracy was particularly high among women, and so the teaching had been very slow and focused on the cultivation of elementary language skills. Romanian asylum seekers are also frequently illiterate. In view of the fact that not all the participants have a satisfactory mastery of the Latin alphabet, teaching makes wide use of pictures accompanied by descriptions. The Czech Helsinki Committee staff have themselves created special didactic aids in the form of schematic drawings that are very carefully thought out and which depict objects and actions referring to ordinary working vocabulary. The pictures are arranged in thematic blocks and familiarise students with the equipment of houses and households, names of parts of the human body, names and appearance of animals living in the Czech Republic, names and appearance of fruit and vegetables growing here and so forth. In addition to acquiring vocabulary, which is of course linked up in sentences with verbs and other parts of speech, asylum seekers therefore learn a whole series of facts related to life in the Czech Republic, time expressions, weights and measures and much else.

Apart from the basic vocabulary for common material objects, further thematic blocks in the Czech language courses familiarise asylum seekers with the form of government in the Czech Republic, its key institutions and other areas of the state administration and self-government that may be of use to them, important dates and holidays, human rights and so forth.

Currently the Refugee Counselling Centre of the Czech Helsinki Committee a thematic dictionary, which will be issued in several different language versions and will include basic vocabulary, a concise grammar and simply conversational phrases. This aid should improve the quality of both Czech language courses and individual study options for asylum seekers.

Instruction in the classroom is combined with teaching in the field. Here the teaching is carried out in real situations in places that asylum seekers are likely to encounter, for example at bus stations, post offices, hospitals, local authority offices and also outside, in woods and parks. . In this way asylum seekers are familiarised directly, in authentic locations, with the phenomena typical for different environments and with the vocabulary and communication situations that arise in them.

One problem that complicates these forms of teaching is the poor transport situation around accommodation centres, which are frequently located a long way from urban centres. Teachers have to commute a significant distance to their pupils, and the teaching groups then have to go the same distance to see the real life of the majority. The problem is particularly acute in the case of the Belá-Jezová accommodation centre, for example. Another difficulty is the cost of teaching in the field, since money must be found for transport and sometimes for entrance tickets fees (e.g. to the theatre).

Czech teaching is also conducted on other occasions, such as the organisation of art circles or sports teams, men's and women's clubs, and summer camps for children. Staff of non-governmental organisations devote great efforts to organising leisure-time activities for asylum seekers but they are usually hampered by lack of funds.

As a result of this broadly conceived language training the teachers win the trust of their students, become their counsellors in important life situations, try to find them employment etc.

The Czech courses for beginners and advanced students are usually attended by asylum seekers resident in accommodation centres (usually for roughly half a year). Those who have private accommodation may also use the services of

Czech teachers, but such cases are exceptional. Although such asylum-seekers come to the accommodation centres to prolong their permission to stay, they are rarely in a position to make the journey every day or couple of days. Asylum seekers living at private addresses do not usually participate in the educational activities organised by the accommodation centres.

When discussing the profile of teachers with an employee of the Czech Helsinki Committee, we were told that despite the demanding conditions of this kind of teaching process, there was relatively little fluctuation among teachers. We found no confirmation of the possibility of “burn-out”, suggested to us for the first time at the Belá-Jezová accommodation centre and then mentioned on a few other occasions during our survey.¹¹ One third of the teachers have been performing this job for more than 6 years.

Successful applicants for asylum learn Czech under different procedures. Language courses for recognised refugees are paid for and organised by the state (see the study by Uherek Z.: The Integration of Recognised Refugees).

Other Educational Programmes

In addition to Czech teaching the Czech Helsinki Committee also organises a weekly English class at the Cervený Újezd reception and accommodation centre and Belá accommodation centre. In 2001 a computer course was also held at Belá. Another educational activity organised at the same centre in 2001 was a workshop for producing recycled paper, where asylum seekers could learn recycling technique on the materials provided. A similar workshop existed at the Cervený Újezd centre, where what is known as so called Brazilian paper was produced from old paper.

The Organisation for Help to Refugees (OPU) is organising handicraft workshops for women in the refugee accommodation centres. The materials are provided for sewing, knitting, crocheting and carpet-making. The women are trained in team work and calculation of the price of products. OPU staff then organise the sale of the products. The workshops not only give women the chance to acquire new skills and knowledge, but have a function as occupational therapy.

¹¹ „Burn-out“ is supposedly a risk for people with jobs as demanding as work with political asylum seekers. Its symptoms are indifference to clients' problems and the adoption of a defensive, negative stereotype towards them, i.e. clients become only items on a list rather than real people. If “burn-out“ becomes chronic, the employee needs to change his/her job.

The OPU is also realising a project entitled “Safe Pregnancy and Maternity” at the accommodation centres in Cervený Újezd, Belá-Jezová, Zastávka u Brna, Zbýšov and Stráž pod Ralskem. It is deigned for pregnant women and mothers of new-born babies. A nurse and social worker offer regular consultations in different languages in the form of seminars devoted to pregnancy, childcare and so forth. In specific cases mothers are also provided with material aid. The whole project is under the aegis of the Embassy of Great Britain, the Charities Aid Foundation and the wives of diplomats in Prague.

In the Belá-Jezová and Cervený Újezd centres the Department of Refugee Facilities at the Czech Ministry of the Interior has set up a library run by the asylum seekers themselves. The Czech Helsinki Committee regularly supplies the library with newspapers and magazines in languages accessible to the asylum seekers. Recreational activities for refugees include regular screenings of films in an improvised cinema in the Cervený Újezd centre. This centre also has a women’s group that meets every week with a member of staff of the Helsinki Committee to discuss matters of interest relating to cultural habits both in the Czech Republic and the refugees’ countries of origin. The women can also spend time on craftwork and cooking. There is also an active men’s group. The Protestant Church of the Czech Brethren co-operates with the Czech Helsinki Committee throughout the Czech Republic to create a network much more extensive than that of local accommodation centres and also able to assist asylum seekers living in private accommodation.

Asylum seekers and their children living in accommodation centres can also take part in activities organised by volunteers under the aegis of the OPU, for example. In 2000 a summer camp was held for children from the Cervený Újezd centre, for example. Various competitions, concerts, sports days and Christmas meetings are held over the year.

Recognised refugees (asylants) and foreigners with long-term or permanent residence rights can use the educational programmes organised by the Advisory Centre for Integration (PPI), whose sponsors for the year 2002 include UNHCR, the European Union, the Levi Strauss Group, Know How Fund, Czech Ministry of Employment and Social Affairs and the Fund for the Development of Civil Society (NROS). In 2001 the Brno PPI community centre for example organised a “Bosnian School” – meetings of children from Bosnia. Here children of school and pre-school age were given a weekly opportunity to get to know more about Bosnian culture and formal Bosnian language in order to strengthen their sense of belonging to the state of Bosnia and Herzegovina. At the same time the children were encouraged to develop an attitude of tolerance to other cultures.

The PPI community centres that have so far been set up in Prague, Brno and Ústí nad Labem organise Czech language courses, computer courses and a music club. For the children of foreigners they provide regular afternoon programmes, extra teaching and on-off events such as the pavement painting contest in 2001 in the Municipal Park in Ústí nad Labem. The Daily papers, magazines, books, videocassettes and other foreign language materials are available to clients in PPI community centres. The Advisory Centre for Integration (PPI) also organises other cultural events such as concerts, theatre performance and exhibitions, often associated with testing of traditional foods. In August 2001 two lectures were given in the community centre in Ústí nad Labem, one on “The System of Healthcare for Foreigners” and the other on “Change in the Law on the Residence of Foreigners in the Czech Republic”.

The Association of Citizens with a Concern for Emigrants (SOZE), which works closely with the UNHCR, regularly organises educational programmes both for asylum seekers and recognised refugees and for the Czech majority. In 2001 SOZE set up the Brno cultural centre for migrants and refugees with support from the Czech Ministry of Culture. Last year it was primarily used as a venue for celebrations of the cultural-religious festivals of ethnic minorities including Armenians, Afghans, Pakistanis, Romanians, Moldavians, Kurds, Albanians, Bulgarians and Macedonians. Starting in 2002 it has launched various interest clubs and a foreign-language library there. At the same time it has been organising cultural evenings for the broader public. In addition SOZE has been holding multi-ethnic cultural and sports events for asylum seekers living in the accommodation centres.

The Czech Catholic Charity is also involved in care for the needs of migrants and refugees. Its activities include organising various cultural and sports activities to fill the free time of asylum seekers. Financial support is provided by the Czech Catholic Charity of the Roman Catholic Church, the Organisation Raphaels? Werk, Renovabis and the Foundation for the Development of Civil Society.

Some educational programmes are being organised by members of the ethnic minorities themselves. One example is the Sunday school for Armenian children that has been set up by the Armenian diasporas in the CR. The school is free of charge and the teachers work on a voluntary basis. It has about 40 pupils, divided into four classes by age and level of knowledge.

Conclusion

Educational programmes as currently realised in the Czech Republic reflect the specific character of refugee issues in this country. A typical feature of the Czech refugee situation is significant number of "transit refugees" who apply for asylum, but leave the Czech Republic while asylum procedures are still underway. These "transit refugees" are not interested in learning Czech, send their children to school only because it is obligatory and do not themselves attend courses for adults. Consequently only a small percentage of adult asylum seekers in the accommodation centres wish to deepen their knowledge of Czech on a systematic basis.

The education of asylum seekers is partly paid for by the state and organised by Ministry of Education, Youth and Physical Culture and partly paid for out of non-governmental funds and organized by non-governmental organisations.

The compulsory education of children up to 15 years of age is paid for out of the state budget. It is provided by the Ministry of Education, Youth and Physical Culture and focused on teaching in compensation and standard classes. Pupils acquire elementary language proficiency in compensation classes and are then placed in standard basic-school classes. The teaching provided in compensation classes is individual in character and each school organizes it in a rather different way. Schools are seeking the best possible model, and are doing so in co-operation with the Ministry of Education, Youth and Physical Culture.

Teaching in the compensation classes is based primarily on language training and as yet we have not recorded any cases of application of broader-based teaching programmes such as Peace Education (Sommers 2001). Our findings suggest that the teaching of children of asylum seekers is not a source of psychological problems in children and has caused no serious critical situations to arise. On the other hand, the high level of fluctuation of children in these classes and irregular attendance on the part of some mean that we cannot be sure that all these children are getting school education of real quality.

Education of children over 15 years of age is not compulsory. Children of asylum seekers over 15 years of age are eligible for placement in middle schools or vocational training centres where they can study free of charge. We have recorded no cases of children failing to obtain such a placement where they and their parents made the necessary efforts. Children of this age may also attend language classes for adults. On the other hand we encountered young people, children of asylum seekers from accommodation centres, who had not continued with their education after finishing basic school.

Courses for adult asylum seekers aim to provide the elementary instrumental skills that the individual needs in order to make his own efforts to integrate into a wider community. Elementary instrumental skills are conceived primarily in terms of proficiency in the Czech language and the major stress is therefore on language teaching. Language courses are not paid for by the state, but out of non-governmental funds provided by non-governmental organizations. They are free for asylum seekers.

The idea that language is the basis of integration is very much reflected in all the statements and behaviour of teachers and other staff concerned with refugees. Almost 30% of the respondents from the ranks of government employees expressed the opinion that favourable decision on asylum should be linked to the asylum seeker's will to integration, which is expressed in the effort to learn the language. In language lessons, asylum seekers are provided with information about the conditions of life in the Czech society.

Inability to use the language as the fundamental means of communication has a marginalising effect, and this is particularly true in a mono-lingual state like the Czech Republic with a low level of proficiency in foreign languages among the ordinary population. On the other hand, command of the language is not the only aspect of integration. Asylum seekers do have the opportunity to attend clubs focused on various hobbies, and they establish art workshops and organize discotheques, music groups etc. There is still, however, a lack of integration programmes that asylum seekers could successfully continue even after leaving the accommodations centres, i.e. that would not be interrupted when asylum seekers change their place of residence.

From the point of view of educational programmes, children up to 15 years of age accompanied by their parents are in the best situation, since they are incorporated into the process of cultural integration together with children of the majority population. At the moment no special institutions are created for them after they are transferred from compensation classes since they are assumed to have the same needs and opportunities as children within the majority society. If they remain on the territory of the Czech Republic, they are given the same care as children of the majority population after having attended language lessons. The basic schools will also help with placing children in other educational institutions. Middle and vocational education is thus available and accessible to children of asylum seekers in the same way as it is to majority children. Whether it is in fact correct to assume that they have the same needs and opportunities is a question that would need to be addressed by further investigation.

The situation of children over 15 years of age is dealt with on an individual basis. In the Czech Republic the assumption is that education beyond the basic level is

something chosen and undertaken by children on their own initiative with the help of their parents. In the case of children of asylum seekers and recognized refugees who are not themselves integrated into the majority society, however, it can hardly be expected that their parents will be able to mediate their integration through education, and will be capable of selecting an appropriate school and helping to prepare their children for admissions procedure. If these children have already attended Czech basic school, the school will help. If a young person over 15 years of age emigrates to the Czech Republic, the parents may request the assistance of non-governmental organizations or the accommodation centre's management. Not all asylum seekers use this opportunity. We are unable to estimate the number of children who have dropped out of the education process as a result of migration from the source country but we recommend that more attention be paid to the phenomenon. Uprooted young people in the 15-18 age group represent a risk group.

We also need to consider the question whether provision of education is not just one of the areas in which more should be done for this group of young people, since, as Marc Sommers points out: „lack of prospects and false expectations among young people often find expression in frustration and violence, and it does not seem to matter whether or not the young people are relatively well educated.“ (Sommers 2001: 14). It might well be useful to look for special training programmes precisely for this group.

Through the activities of the Refugees Counselling Centre of the Czech Helsinki Committee, adult asylum seekers are offered high quality elementary language teaching, which also increases their knowledge of the country to which they have come. It is typical for a transit country that this opportunity for language learning is taken up by only roughly 20 – 30% of asylum seekers. Those interested can extend the elementary courses with individual consultations and the course for advanced students. Not even the latter, however, provide asylum seekers with sufficient knowledge to obtain skilled work or cope in more complex communication situations. Many asylum seekers with an interest in integration abandon the elementary courses after three months to half a year and in the remaining months before decision on their application study unsystematically by themselves or give up trying to improve their Czech. In fieldwork we even encountered cases where recognised refugees on the State Integration Programme had to start again practically from the beginning after interrupting their language courses. Another problem is that language training is not augmented by a series of further programmes that would integrate asylum seekers more closely into majority society and would continue even after they leave the accommodation centres.

In 2001, the most problematic group seems to be that of children unaccompanied by their statutory representative. Here the question of where they are to stay has yet to satisfactorily resolved, and with it the whole question of their education. This group is obviously the most vulnerable, and it is also the group most inclined to escape the confines of institutional care. Another potentially problematic group from the point of view of educational programmes is that of asylum seekers living at private addresses outside refugee centres. Their children attend elementary schools but in fact we do know little about them. On the other hand, however, it can be assumed that many of the asylum seekers staying at private addresses are actually integrating into Czech society in the most successful way.

The education programmes for asylum seekers in the Czech Republic are based on principles very similar to those of education programmes in the economically strong countries where the world language is also the language of majority society. Mastery of the majority (Czech) language is considered to be the essential step for entry into the wider society and integration. The proportion of adults attending the language courses indicates, however, that not all asylum seekers agree.

Possibilities for education in the mother tongue of major groups of asylum seekers is not are not developed in the Czech Lands. Moreover, asylum seekers are from a wide range of countries and there are not enough language professionals to make such teaching a viable proposition.

The education system for asylum seekers is well institutionalised and based on the activities of Czech professionals. Only exceptionally are teachers taken from the ranks of asylum seekers themselves.¹² The model by which refugees teach refugees (often adopted in the third world countries) appears problematic for various reasons. On the other hand it could promote self-confidence among asylum seekers. In Czech conditions we have not found examples of further education used as a means to mobilise community. (Critical Issues – Education: 2001: 17)

Recommendations

- The field research indicated that teachers at basic schools were conscious of a shortage of aids for teaching Czech as a foreign language. Another serious complaint was what they saw as a lack of information about how

¹² We were informed about courses of computer training and courses of English and French that were taught just by qualified asylum seekers.

such teaching was organised in states that had many years of experience with teaching asylum seekers the language of the destination state. In the whole time they had been working with asylum seekers the teachers from the Czech Helsinki Committee had only had one opportunity to meet teachers of foreigners from Great Britain, France and Spain, all countries with long-term experience of the problems involved. They learned from the meeting that in these countries equipment with teaching aids and funding was at a much higher level than in the Czech Republic. We therefore recommend:

1. That teachers of children of asylum seekers and teachers of adult asylum seekers be provided with support, infrastructure and teaching aids of a high standard. There is a particular need for support of preparation of teaching texts. Currently support is essential for preparation of the thematic dictionary with conversational phrases that is being compiled by the Czech Helsinki Committee, and also support for improvement of teachers' technical equipment. In addition to textbooks, computer resources must be expanded. While the schools at least have basic computer equipment, the teachers of the Czech Helsinki Committee do not even have access to personal computers.
2. That a programme be prepared to offer a basis for contact with institutions providing education in countries with long-term experience of asylum policy, so that Czech professionals could draw on their experience with asylum seekers and recognised refugees.
3. That a strategy for applying foreign experience in this field in Czech conditions should be developed.

In this field there could also be co-operation with academic centres, including the provider of this study.

Next we recommend:

- There should be continuing monitoring of how children of asylum seekers are integrated into the education in standard classes.
- There should be focus on issues related to unattended children not only in the area of education but also other activities and to the search for an optimal solution for their placement during asylum granting procedures. The survey showed that the existing system of care for this group is unsatisfactory. We recommend attention to the possibility of setting up a special residential facility for asylum seekers of up to 15 years of age, where they could receive professional care. In this area we recommend co-operation with the Ministry of Education, where we gather that this question is under intensive consideration.

- There should be assistance for the realisation of language programmes for young people above the age of 15 and for adults, and also identification of ways of making these programmes attractive to more than the current 20 – 30% of asylum seekers who attend them. Advanced teaching of Czech of a kind that provides more than elementary communication skills and makes more contribution to the integration of individuals into Czech society should be initiated and where necessary financially supported.
- Ways should be found to stimulate the creation of educational or hobby programmes that would not be strictly linked to the place of stay, so that asylum seekers could continue to attend them after leaving the refugee centre.
- More attention should be devoted to asylum seekers living outside accommodation centres, even though with the adoption of amendment to Law no. No.. 325/1999 Coll. of the 1st of February 2002 their numbers will drop substantially. Their conditions of life, interests, needs and problems should also be investigated from the point of view of educational needs.
- The possibility of introducing educational programmes and their funding in deportation camps should be investigated.
- The effects of the amendment to Law no. 325/1999 Coll. on the approach of asylum seekers to the question of education should be monitored to ensure adequate reaction to the new situation arising from the amendments (this could be carried out in co-operation with the provider of this project).

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