



# **Mutual Learning Programme**

DG Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion

**Peer Country Comments Paper – Czechia**

## **How important is the support of legal forms of labour migration?**

**Peer Review on “Control and prevention of undeclared  
work in complex chains of economic activity”**

**Slovakia, 4-5 May 2021**

*Written by Soňa Veverková.*

*April 2021*



**EUROPEAN COMMISSION**

Directorate-General for Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion

Unit A1

Contact: Shui-Beam Lam

E-mail: [EMPL-A1-UNIT@ec.europa.eu](mailto:EMPL-A1-UNIT@ec.europa.eu)

Web site: <http://ec.europa.eu/social/mlp>

European Commission

B-1049 Brussels

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## 1 Introduction

This paper has been prepared for the Peer Review on "Control and prevention of undeclared work in complex chains of economic activity" within the framework of the Mutual Learning Programme. It provides a comparative assessment of the policy example of the host country and the situation in Czechia. For information on the host country policy example, please refer to the Host Country Discussion Paper.

## 2 Situation in the peer country

As in the host country Slovakia, there is also no legal definition of undeclared work in Czechia, with the concept of illegal work being used. In Czechia as well as in Slovakia, illegal work is mainly associated with the employment of foreigners from third countries (see Table 1).

Table 1. Development of the number of detected illegal workers in relation to the number of inspections

Year	Number of inspections	Number of persons detected conducting illegal work			
		Czech nationals	EU nationals	Third-country nationals	Total
2013	36,101	1,394	295	1,481	3,170
2014	15,911	1,238	184	650	2,072
2015	9,583	1,913	294	858	3,065
2016	9,308	760	193	1,337	2,290
2017	9,707	767	234	1,917	2,918
2018	8,339	763	225	3,595	4,583
2019	8,160	622	207	3,513	4,342
2020	5,557	556	141	2,413	3,110

Source: SÚIP, 2021

Economic growth and labour shortages have been accompanied by the increased demand for labour from abroad. Czechia has struggled with labour shortages for the past five years. The unemployment rate has been falling steadily since 2014, reaching just 2% in 2019, and only 3% in the fourth quarter of 2020 despite the introduction of anti-epidemic measures that have hit some sectors hard. Since around 2015, employers' organisations have pointed out that labour shortages may become an obstacle to further economic growth and that the problem should be addressed urgently (Beneš, 2018, Dlouhý, 2019). According to employers, the only solution involves the import of labour, at least in the short term<sup>1</sup>.

After consulting with employers, in November 2015 the Czech government approved a pilot project, the aim of which was to simplify the administrative process relating to the immigration of Ukrainian specialists. However, this project was not sufficient to cover the needs of employers (Prask, 2018).

In parallel with the support of labour migration through legislation, there has been an increase in the incidence of illegal labour migration. No statistics on the extent of illegal labour migration are available; however, State Labour Inspection Office (Státní úřad inspekce práce, SÚIP) statistics on inspections conducted reveal an increasing trend

<sup>1</sup> In the long term, they emphasise the reform of the education system so that it better and more flexibly responds to the requirements of employers.

(see Table in Annex 3). Despite the declining number of inspections performed by the SÚIP, the number of detected illegal workers continues to increase, with third country nationals accounting for around 80% of detected illegal workers in recent years. Lack of labour force on the Czech labour market has caused the decreasing number of detected Czech nationals working illegal and – on the contrary – the increasing number of illegal workers from third countries since employers have been forced to search for workers abroad.

According to the SÚIP, the highest number of detected illegally employed foreigners by country of origin in 2019 concerned Ukraine (3 015) and Moldova (246). Of illegally employed EU citizens, most migrated from Slovakia (97) followed by Romania (36) and Hungary (34).

### 3 National policies and measures<sup>2</sup>

In Czechia, the issue of undeclared work in complex chains of economic activity is associated mainly with so-called undisclosed employment intermediation. It relates primarily to the illegal employment of foreigners, especially from the Ukraine. The tools employed to combat undisclosed employment in complex chains of economic activity focus on two areas: the promotion of legal labour migration and the punishment of those involved in this form of employment, be they employers or employment intermediaries.

#### 3.1 Illegal employment of foreigners

As in the host country Slovakia, there is also no legal definition of undeclared work in Czechia. The Czech legislation only acknowledges a concept of illegal work. According to Act No. 435/2004 Coll., on employment, as amended, Section 5e, **illegal work refers to:**

1. the employment of a natural person outside a labour-law relationship,
2. work carried out by a foreign national in breach of a work permit issued or without such a permit, if required by this Act, or contrary to the employee card, intra-corporate transferee card or blue card issued pursuant to the Act No. 326/1999 Coll., on the residence of foreign nationals in the territory of the Czech Republic or without any of these cards,
3. work performed by a foreign national for a legal or natural person without a valid residence permit in the territory of the Czech Republic, if required by the Act No. 326/1999 Coll., on the residence of foreign nationals in the territory of the Czech Republic on the Residence of Foreign Nationals in the territory of the Czech Republic.

However, illegal employment is not limited to the performance of work by foreigners without the required authorisation, it also includes the performance of work that is not in line with the work permits issued. Foreigners issued with work permits are allowed to work only for the employer to which the permit refers and at the place of work doing the type of work listed on the permit. This type of illegal employment was recorded by SÚIP inspectors to a greater extent than any other type of violation in 2019. Moreover, the number of cases of foreigners performing work in such violations of the terms of their work permit increased year-on-year. This phenomenon is not necessarily linked to undisclosed employment intermediation (see below).

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<sup>2</sup> The scope of the text does not allow for the more detailed analysis of legislation on undeclared work and, in particular, the employment of foreigners from third countries with whom undeclared work is chiefly associated. The Ministry of the Interior of the Czech Republic (Ministerstvo vnitra České republiky, MV ČR) clearly describes this issue, see e.g. the [following link](#).

### 3.2 Undisclosed employment intermediation

Undisclosed employment intermediation (zastřené zprostředkování zaměstnání) is defined by the Act No. 435/2004 Coll., on employment, as amended, Section 5, as **the activity of a legal person or a natural person consisting in the hiring of workforce to another legal person or natural person without meeting the conditions for employment intermediation**. This definition has been valid since 14 July 2017<sup>3</sup>, so it is relatively new concept in the Czech legislation which should combat against bogus self-employment and illegal employment. In practice, this concerns situations in which employers do not have enough workers and need to solve such problem in the short term. The legal approach is to hire labour through an employment agency based on the agreement (a contract) concluded between an employment agency and a user on temporary assignment of an employee.

However, according to the SÚIP, more and more cases are occurring of the replacement and obscuring of the employment of natural persons via other commercial relationships for the purpose of the temporary assignment of such persons to the "employer". In practice, disguised agency employment is used by both employment agencies that have a valid permit for employment mediation and other entities that do not.

The most common type of disguised agency employment comprises contracts for work under Act No. 89/2012 Coll., the Civil Code, concluded between the client and the contractor (which may be an employment agency with a valid permit or any other legal or natural person without a valid permit to mediate employment). The main reason for this approach concerns the costs of securing workers which, in such cases, are significantly lower than the costs of engaging legal employment agencies. Work contracts - in contrast to agreements (contracts) concluded between employment agencies and users of the temporary assignment of employees - do not have to address the issue of the comparable working and wage conditions of workers hired in this way, thus reducing the costs for the "contractor". The "contractor" enters into so-called agreements to complete a job with its workers. While such agreements are regulated by Act No. 262/2006 Coll., the Labour Code, under certain conditions they do not include the obligation to pay social and health insurance contributions. A further option open to the "contractor" that bypasses the conditions of Act No. 262/2006 Coll., the Labour Code and Act No. 435/2004 Coll., on employment (in addition to agreements to complete a job) comprises bogus self-employment.

The SÚIP encounters undisclosed employment intermediation usually in connection with employment agencies and companies with foreign statutory representation. The main aim in such cases is to disguise the performance of the dependent work of foreigners from outside the EU and thus to reduce labour costs (SUIP, 2019).

Inspections in this respect have been conducted by the SÚIP since 2016, when they were conducted in the form of special inspection events. Since 2017, following the introduction of the concept of disguised employment mediation into legislation, such inspections make up one of the priorities of the SÚIP concerning the field of employment.

Such inspections are very time consuming. According to the SÚIP, three or more entities are often involved in such business relationships (the so-called chaining). The deciphering of these relationships, especially when foreign entities are involved, is extremely difficult. In many cases even the imposition of a fine for non-cooperation to the inspected entity does not help. However, in the case of inspections of entities with foreign involvement, the SÚIP enjoys close cooperation with the Czech Social Security Administration (Česká správa sociálního zabezpečení, ČSSZ) and the [Internal Market Information System](#), which simplifies the exchange of information between Member

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<sup>3</sup> Based on amendment No. 206/2017 Coll. to Act No. 435/2004 Coll., on employment, as amended and other related acts.

States of the European Union. Moreover, such SÚIP inspections are also often conducted in cooperation with the police and the foreign police services.

The number of inspections and total amount of fines imposed in connection with disguised employment mediation has been increased in the last years (see Table 2).

*Table 2. Total amount of fines imposed in connection with disguised employment mediation*

Year	Number of inspections	Total amount of fines (CZK)	Total amount of fines (EUR)
2018	29	7,123,000	274,890
2019	69	34,768,000	1,341,766
2020	80	36,277,000	1,400,001

### 3.3 The concept of an unreliable employer

Unreliable employer is another relatively new concept in the Czech legislation, based on the Act No. 222/2017 Coll., which amended the Act No. 326/1999 Coll., on the residence of foreign nationals in the territory of the Czech Republic. According to Section 178f of the Act, an employer is an unreliable employer in the following cases:

1. The employer is not free of debt.
2. A fine for allowing performance of an illegal work was imposed on the employer, with a final effect during a period of four months preceding the filing of an application for an employee card.
3. The employer does not carry out any economic activity.
4. The employer failed to comply with the obligation to register a foreign national for insurance.
5. The employer is in liquidation.
6. The employer's registered office is not real.

If some of the conditions above is fulfilled, unreliable employer can also be legal person or natural person to which foreign national is temporarily allocated by employment agency on the basis of agreement between employment agency and user (it means employer to whom foreign national is allocated by employment agency).

The fact that an employer is unreliable is a reason not to issue an employee card to a foreign national or a reason not to grant consent for a change of an employer. The unreliability of employer is an obstacle in case of the application for an extension the validity of the employee card as well.

Unreliable employer concept is equivalent to the Slovakian violator and registry of violators. However, this quite controversial concept has been criticized by employers (HK, 2017) because of limited discussion before the acceptance of the amendment and vague definitions which are not in accordance with other acts. This concept is awaiting a new amendment currently.

### 3.4 The situation of posted workers

With respect to the performance of work by foreigners in Czechia, the SÚIP is increasingly encountering the abuse of the posting of foreign workers to Czechia by employers from neighbouring EU countries according to Directive 96/71/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 16 December 1996 concerning the posting of workers in the framework of the provision of services. According to the SÚIP, in many cases over the past two years it has been determined that the posting of workers is intended to disguise the hiring of foreign labour. With respect to Czechia, this involves

mainly Polish entities that post employees of Ukrainian nationality to Czechia who have residence permits that were granted in Poland.<sup>4</sup> This entitles them to stay in the Schengen area (including Czechia) for a maximum of 90 days during any 180-day period.

Although one of the main conditions for the posting of workers comprises the conclusion of an employment relationship with the sending party, it has been verified via cooperation with the ČSSZ and the Internal Market Information System that in many cases the posted persons do not have such an employment relationship. Moreover, the inspections revealed cases where the receiving company identified the foreign partner that posted the workers which, when contacted, denied the existence of any relationship with the posted persons (SÚIP, 2020a).

### **3.5 Support for legal forms of labour migration**

With respect to the control and prevention of undeclared work in complex chains of economic activity, it is necessary to mention the support of legal forms of labour migration aimed at simplifying the administrative procedures associated with the employment of third country nationals. In 2015, when the Czech labour market began to show signs of labour shortages, following consultations with employers, the government launched the "Special Procedures for Highly-Qualified Employees from Ukraine" project. Its aim was to simplify the administrative process relating to the immigration of Ukrainian specialists. However, this project was not sufficient to cover the needs of employers (Pask, 2018). That is why the project was extended to include lower skilled workers not only from the Ukraine but also Serbia and non-European countries such as India, Mongolia and the Philippines. Moreover, the quotas governing foreign workers were increased. In September 2019, the project outlined above for the support of the import of workers from abroad was reformed into three programmes: the Qualified Employee, the Highly-Qualified Employee Programme and the Key and Scientific Personnel Programme, all of which are geared towards skilled and qualified workers.

To be included in such programmes, companies operating in Czechia must meet the conditions relevant to the specific programme. However, in all cases, the company must prove that it has no outstanding obligations to the state (the concept of the unreliable employer is not used in this context). Inclusion in such programmes entitles the company to receive certain benefits such as reduced administration and/or the preferential processing of residence and work permits for its future employees. All the programmes are administered by the Ministry of Industry and Trade of the Czech Republic (Ministerstvo průmyslu a obchodu České republiky, MPO ČR) and no legal right exists to be included in such programmes. The programmes were suspended as part of the anti-epidemic measures introduced following the declaration of the state of emergency in Czechia on 16 March 2020; however, the suspension was lifted in June 2020.

However, the measures introduced to support legal forms of migration have met with a mixed response. According to Drbohlav et al. (2021), many employers consider the legal migration support programmes to be unnecessarily inflexible. The administrative-bureaucratic processes involved are viewed to be over-complicated compared to the approaches of other countries (e.g. Poland) to which Ukrainian workers are attracted. Moreover, the trade unions do not consider the importing of labour from abroad to be a viable solution to the labour shortage issue. They point out that foreign workers are arriving from countries in which wage levels are lower than in Czechia and are, therefore, willing to work for lower wages than Czech employees. In their opinion, employers are abusing the situation and that instead of motivating potential employees with higher wages, they are simplifying workplace processes so as to make it possible

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<sup>4</sup> Polish legislation related to the employment of migrant workers from third countries is not so strict as in Czechia; hence, undeclared work in complex chains is often linked to Polish businesses.

to recruit employees from poorer EU and non-EU countries and thus avoid increasing wage levels<sup>5</sup>.

#### **4 Considerations for future policies and initiatives**

Over the last five years or so, the issue of undeclared work in Czechia has been associated primarily with the employment of foreigners from third countries.

In Czechia as well as in Slovakia, undeclared work is mainly associated with the employment of foreigners from third countries. Economic growth and labour shortages have been accompanied by the increased demand for labour from abroad. The government has responded to employers' demands by introducing economic migration programmes aimed at accelerating the administrative procedures involved in the granting of work permits. According to the HK (2019), these programmes have proved to be functional and have acted to reduce the administrative burden on both the employer and the employee and, in particular, the time required to obtain a work permit. Active support for legal forms of labour migration is, thus, proving to be one of the ways in which to reduce illegal labour migration and thus potentially the associated undeclared work. However, this solution is not available to all workers and special conditions apply.

Indeed, illegal labour migration with the foreign labour force is attractive to those employers, who are not eligible for the programmes of legal work migration. Employers using the illegal employment reduce labour costs in response to the increase in wages that reflected recent economic growth in Czechia. The increase in the number of legal migrant workers was accompanied by a corresponding increase in the number of illegal migrant workers. In response, legislative changes have been introduced aimed at preventing undeclared work in complex chains of economic activity. The most significant change in this respect concerns the legislative definition of undisclosed employment intermediation. While this change applies to all workers regardless of nationality, in practice SÚIP inspectors encounter undisclosed employment intermediation particularly in connection with migrant workers from third countries.

However, the issue of undeclared work in complex chains of economic activity is extremely complex. Although SÚIP inspections focus on this issue, it is extremely difficult for inspectors to decipher the relationships between the natural and legal persons. Despite cooperation with other state authorities, especially with the foreign police and the IMA, the punishment of undeclared work in complex chains of economic activity is challenging, especially when foreign-based entities are involved.

#### **5 Questions**

- Are there any programmes or special projects which support legal forms of foreign work migration in Slovakia?
- As in Czechia, also in Slovakia is undeclared work in complex chains of economic activity closely connected to employment of foreigners, and hence the cooperation with foreign authorities outside the EU (for example, the Ukraine) is inevitable. Has there been any progress on cooperation with foreign authorities, namely from third countries?

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<sup>5</sup> 'I'm really looking forward to going to Germany, Austria or Belgium to attend recruitment events, and they will all be very happy to work for Czech wages!' stated Josef Středula, president of ČMKOS. Source: Martínek, Vejvodová (2019), page 19.

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## Annex 1 Summary table

The main points covered by the paper are summarised below.

### Situation in the peer country

- Czechia has struggled with huge labour shortages for the past five years. According to the employers, the only short-term solution has been an import of labour force from third countries – legal and also illegal work migration has increased.
- As in Slovakia, there is no legal definition of undeclared work, the legislation recognises only the definition of illegal work, which deals with bogus self-employment and illegal employment of foreigners.
- Undeclared work that occurs in complex chains of economic activity occurs in Czechia mainly with the illegal employment of foreigners, especially from the Ukraine.

### National policies and measures

- Since 2017, new legal definition "undisclosed employment intermediation" has been valid. Inspections of undisclosed employment intermediation are one of the priorities of the SÚIP concerning the field of employment.
- Such inspections are very time consuming. Three or more entities are often involved in such business relationships (the so-called chaining). The deciphering of these relationships, especially when foreign entities are involved, is extremely difficult, and in many cases even the imposition of a fine for non-cooperation by the inspected entity does not help.
- In the case of inspections of entities with foreign involvement, the SÚIP enjoys close cooperation with the ČSSZ and the Internal Market Information System. Moreover, such SÚIP inspections are also often conducted in cooperation with the police and the foreign police services.
- "Unreliable employer" is another new measure to combat against illegal work of foreigners. Unreliable employer should not be able to employ foreigners, however, in practice, this measure is hardly ever used.
- Legal forms of work migration have been also introduced in Czechia. These programmes should lower the administrative burden connected with employment of foreigners from third countries.

### Considerations for future policies and initiatives

- The development of legal and also illegal work migration much depends on the economic growth and shortage or surplus of domestic labour force. Work migration has been a major issue in Czechia for five years, however, COVID-19 pandemic can easily change it and this issue became less serious.
- Legislative changes in this field have been discussed during the last two years in Czechia. First of all, a public register of violators (as in Slovakia) should be introduced, as well as co-responsibility of the user of undisclosed employment intermediation. However, these new measures are still under discussion.
- Legal forms of work migration are also a way to eliminate illegal work of foreigners. Thus, support of the legal migration projects and further lowering of administrative burden connected to work migration from third countries is also inevitable.

## Questions

- Are there any programmes or special projects which support legal forms of foreign work migration in Slovakia?
- As in Czechia, also in Slovakia is undeclared work in complex chains of economic activity closely connected to employment of foreigners, and hence the cooperation with foreign authorities outside the EU (for example, the Ukraine) is inevitable. Has there been any progress on cooperation with foreign authorities, namely from third countries?

**Annex 2 Example of relevant practice**

Name of the practice:	Undisclosed employment intermediation
Year of implementation:	2017
Coordinating authority:	SÚIP
Objectives:	Undisclosed employment intermediation ( <i>zastřené zprostředkování zaměstnání</i> ) is defined by the legislation (Act No. 435/2004 Coll., on employment, as amended, Section 5) as the activity of a legal person or a natural person consisting in the hiring of workforce to another legal person or natural person without meeting the conditions for employment intermediation. The SÚIP encounters undisclosed employment intermediation usually in connection with employment agencies and companies with foreign statutory representation.
Main activities:	Inspections in this respect have been conducted by the SÚIP since 2016, at which time they were conducted in the form of extraordinary inspection events. Since 2017, following the introduction of the concept of disguised employment mediation into legislation, such inspections make up one of the priorities of the SÚIP concerning the field of employment.
Results so far:	In 2020, a total of 167 inspections were conducted that focused directly on the area of disguised employment mediation. The inspections involved a total of 162 companies, of which 87 were found to have violated disguised employment mediation regulations.

### Annex 3 Example of relevant practice

Name of the practice:	Support for legal forms of labour migration
Year of implementation:	2012 till now
Coordinating authority:	Ministry of Industry and Trade of the Czech Republic
Objectives:	To support legal forms of labour migration from third countries, when the employers face to the lack of domestic labour force.
Main activities:	Several programmes decreased the administrative burden connected with labour migration.
Results so far:	According to the HK (2019), these programmes have proved to be functional and have acted to reduce the administrative burden on both the employer and the employee and, in particular, the time required to obtain a work permit. However, not welcomed by trade unions.

