



# New Approaches to the Co-ordination of Diaspora Policy

## Executive Summary

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**Further information about the project:**

Further outputs:

Project report 1: Overview of possibilities for the coordination of Czech diaspora policy

Project report 2: The needs of compatriot communities in individual countries, and their ties to the Czech Republic

Project report 3: The needs of compatriot communities in selected countries, and their ties to the Czech Republic: United Kingdom, Australia, New Zealand, USA, and Germany

Project report 4: Communication portal



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**Who are the members of Czech diaspora (in Czech often termed “compatriots”) today? What are their ties to the Czech Republic? What do they need from the Czech state? How can they contribute to the Czech Republic (CR), and do they want to? “New Approaches to the Co-ordination of Diaspora Issues”, a research project funded by the Technology Agency of the Czech Republic, sought to answer these questions. The strengthening of ties with Czech citizens living abroad can bring not just economic, but also wider benefits to the CR, facilitate the return of a qualified workforce, promote the reputation of the CR abroad, and forge stronger links with countries where Czech citizens live. Compatriots often express great desire to contribute to the CR, to return what the Czech state invested in them, e.g. in the form of education. They want to enrich Czech society with the experience, knowledge and values that they themselves had the opportunity to acquire. The mutual benefits are indisputable but creating conditions more conducive to strengthening ties with the Czech diaspora is needed.**

Czech government bodies and policy makers, especially the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Ministry of education, youth and sports (including consular services, and the Special Envoy for Expatriate Affairs, and wider support for education in Czech) have put a lot of work into creating an effective policy and practice. However, consulates do not have sufficient tools or number of staff to fully support the needs of compatriots and to deal with all requests within a satisfactory timescale and with understanding and insight into compatriots’ needs.

Based on our empirical findings, we conclude that despite notable progress, the Czech Republic currently does not have a coherent, clearly focused diaspora policy. Despite the efforts of a number of institutional actors to establish contact with the new generation of compatriots, support of diaspora communities focuses primarily on cultural heritage of traditional Czech/Czechoslovak compatriot communities and on the education (i.e. teaching Czech language and national curricula) of children born to Czech living abroad. In contrast, there is a lack of support for return migration (e.g. of young scientists) and of more systematic contact with the new diaspora (lack of networking and of information provision). Rather than being pro-active, the policy is responsive to diaspora initiatives from below, with compatriot civil society often replacing or supplementing the state and state initiatives: for example, Czech schools abroad often act as cultural, social and business drivers and centers.

We identified the main problems of Czech diaspora policy as follows: a lack of political and societal interest in compatriots; a lack of initiative in diaspora policy making; the fragmentation of diaspora policy into individual ministries and institutions, and insufficient coordination of communication towards compatriots. These conclusions are based on the below findings about the target populations of our research, namely: the diaspora in general, diasporas in selected countries, and representatives of scientists, expats.

All three target populations have both common and distinct needs, but in general, compatriots cited macrostructural factors - i.e. the political, social and economic situation in the Czech Republic – as the main reasons impacting decisions about potential return.

Common issues that our respondents commented on included: 1) an overall large bureaucratic burden and little to no digitisation (e-government), slow services or low flexibility of the Czech public administration in general, including embassies; 2) problematic access to electoral participation by Czech citizens abroad due to the absence of postal or electronic voting; 3) the need for wider access to Czech language learning and education about Czech culture for Czech compatriots abroad, reflecting the increased demand; 4) a negative, often dismissive, discourse about compatriots within the Czech public discourse; 5) minimal awareness and promotion of the achievements of Czechs abroad, as well as little appreciation and use of their potential.

Specific needs of the expatriate communities from selected (see Project report 3) include: in the UK, the improvement of communication with the Czech Republic at the embassy level and thus the need for strengthened consular services. We also noted an interest in creating mutual cultural and professional platforms. In the USA, there is interest in greater state support for activities of compatriots, including the new Czech diaspora. Australia and New Zealand are atypical destinations in terms of their considerable geographical distance and therefore problematic accessibility of basic administrative tasks, like recognition of Czech driving licenses, etc.

Increased provision of electronic communication is therefore essential, not only at the level of public administration, but also in civil society activities. In Germany, more favourable financial, organisational and social conditions should be set up to facilitate return migration of experts.



Czech scientists and academics abroad are critical of the lack of transparency in selection procedures for scientific and academic positions, insufficient internationalisation of the Czech scientific environment, inadequate salaries in Czech research institutions, and sexism in the workplace. Scientists in the USA, for example, are calling for improved opportunities and conditions for mutual academic cooperation and exchange, to take advantage of the considerable potential of scientists eager to cooperate. There is a potential opportunity here to pro-actively influence the potential departure/arrival of 'brains' and encourage them to return or towards increased collaboration.

### Recommendations:

To create a more efficient and effective diaspora policy and practice, we recommend:

- 1. To intentionally and systematically increase the visibility of Czech compatriots and to promote a good image of the diaspora** (through media, at political events, etc.).
- 2. To create a website for compatriots, „Compatriot portal“** (see Project report 4), or to link „Compatriot portal“ with the existing „Citizen’s portal“, or to incorporate it into a unified portal, which would be overseen and regularly updated (in terms of both content and usability) by a single public administration body. „Compatriot portal“ should contain all information necessary for compatriots. This includes information needed for moving abroad, living abroad, and for returning to the Czech Republic. The information on the portal must be easy to find, comprehensible, concise, complete and up-to-date. At the same time, **it is necessary to speed up the digitalisation of public administration and services is necessary** so that documents processed through consular services can be processed electronically directly by the relevant authorities or services, as much as possible.
- 3. To ensure that all Czechs have equal access to full political participation.** The availability of **postal (and ideally electronic) voting** is seen as crucial for many compatriots, potentially also the question of representation of compatriots in the Senate or the Parliament.
- 4. To continue supporting the education of children, youth and adults.** In places with the biggest concentration of new diaspora members, having a diaspora teacher who would provide regular and consistent language learning would improve language acquisition, especially among compatriots who want to return to the Czech Republic.
- 5. To improve communication between the state and compatriots through sending news/information to registered compatriots and via social media.** Increased communication between Czech institutions and (especially new) diaspora members in specific regions, voluntarily registered with their nearest embassy or a consulate, would improve compatriots’ connection to the CR. It is important to explain why compatriots should be interested in registering – how it benefits both them and the state (e.g. in situation of threats to international security, evacuation plans, etc.).
- 6. To improve the support for co-operation, visiting opportunities or the return of Czech scientists** by setting easier conditions for networking and creating grant applications, better financial and pay conditions, better material facilities, or possibly offering start-up apartments.
- 7. To provide easier access to consular services for compatriots in New Zealand** through digitalisation of public services, or through regular visits of consulate staff to New Zealand during which compatriots would be able to fully access consulate services.

Our multi-method study is characterised by a unique approach that combined several types of data, collected from June 2021 to October 2022: a quantitative survey of 940 Czechs living abroad; qualitative in-depth interviews with 100 diaspora members from a selection of five countries (UK, Australia, New Zealand, USA and Germany); 14 semi-structured interviews with key Czech diaspora policymakers, implementers and with civil society organisations; and a focus group with Czech scientists working abroad. We notably created a hierarchy of the terminology used (diaspora, "compatriots", "Czechs living abroad") and systematically classified all relevant institutional actors into a unified scheme. We also present diaspora policies of other countries as sources of comparison and inspiration for Czech policy and propose the creation of a unified communication Portal of the Compatriot (Portál krajana).

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