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Description of the reception policy in the Czech Republic

**Bianca van der Velde
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Introduction

From October the 15th until October the 28th I visited the Czech Republic to see how this country deals with the reception of asylum seekers. It was a very interesting experience!

The Refugee Facilities Administration (RFA) executes the reception policy. The organisation had 12 centres, of which I visited 5. There are 3 types of centres: reception centres (comparable with our AC's), residential centres (comparable with our Repatriation locations) and Integration centres (partly comparable with our O&I locations).

In this report I will give a description of the reception system. First, I will describe the asylum- and reception policy. Then I give an overview of the most recent developments. A large part of the report is about the organisation of the reception (tasks, facilities, personnel etc.). At the end of the report I will make a comparison between the Czech and the Dutch system. The appendixes contain a list of abbreviations, a map of the locations of the RFA and a daily report.

I hope that this report gives the reader an interesting and clear image of the Czech reception system.



1. Asylum policy

1.1 Asylum procedure

The asylum procedure is taken care of by the Department for Asylum and Migration Policy (OAMP), part of the Ministry of Interior. Asylum seekers get a visa from the Foreigners Police, which they have to prolong every 60 days. The OAMP makes a decision on the application. This could be either a positive or a negative decision. When it's negative, the asylum seeker can make an appeal. Therefore he goes to court.

1.2 Relation between procedure and reception

The Reception Facilities Organisation (RFA) takes care of the reception of asylum seekers. It is a semi-independent organisation but it works for the Ministry of Interior. Since 1996 the reception and the procedure are taken care of by two different bodies. After the first negative, people have 5 days to make an appeal against this decision. Reception is provided until the court gives a negative decision. The time between the court and the decision can vary from 3 months till 2 years. Therefore, the average stay can vary from a couple of months to 2 years.

In case of a negative decision, an asylum seeker has to leave the centre within 24 hours. There are no big problems with this; the asylum seekers just leave the centre without problems! The police are not necessary and people don't come with excuses like in the Netherlands. Only if, for example, a woman is pregnant and almost has to give birth, she can stay a bit longer.

The asylum seeker gets a visa from the police for 10 days. Within this period, he has to leave the country.

1.3 Reasons for recognizing a refugee

The different kinds of permits are: political residence permit (asylum), humanitarian permit (incl. medical) and categorical permit. There isn't such a thing as a permit given because it took too long to make a decision ("vergunning o.b.v. tijdsverloop"). The people who get temporary protection (categorical permit) don't need to apply for asylum. At this moment there is no nationality, which gets temporary protection.

1.4 Relation to regular applications

Most of the people in the reception centre Zastávka have a permit on humanitarian grounds. This is a problem because they have more difficulties to find housing (because of health problems). I don't know yet if this is the same in the other integration centres.

1.5 Rights to work

Asylum seekers can get a working permit after 1 year in the Czech Republic. There are no restrictions. Most people work in the construction field or in fast food restaurants etc.

1.6 Repatriation policy (incl. detention)

Repatriation only happens when it's safe, voluntary and dignified. It only happens when an asylum seeker himself asks for it. After his procedure had ended, he immediately has to leave the camp. He has 24 hours to apply for repatriation with help of the Czech government (RFA and IOM). When somebody wants to return after the first negative, he must apply for that within 7 days. But most of the people make appeal against the first decision.



When somebody applies for repatriation, he can stay in the camp until his repatriation is realized. He can use the same facilities as an asylum seeker, but he doesn't get the pocket money. This is a part of the new asylum act, which became valid on the 13th of October. Before this act these people could stay in the centre but couldn't use the facilities like the meals. The RFA pays the costs for the repatriation.

If they don't leave the country within 10 days, they run the risk of being caught by the Foreigners Police. Then they are placed in a detention centre. People can stay there for a maximum of 6 months. Within those 6 months, the police deport them to their country of origin. When the FP fails to arrange a travel document, they get a visa for the Czech Republic.

People from EU countries like Slovakia are not allowed to stay in a centre after the first negative, but they can stay in the country. This is also a consequence of the new asylum act.

1.7 Integration policy

If someone gets a residence permit, he goes to an Integration Centre. There are 5 of these centres in the Czech Republic. In this centre, people can start with the state integration program. This program consists of 150 hours of Czech language lessons and housing in an integration apartment, offered by the OAMP. Since the first of October, the RFA started with an additional integration program to stimulate the refugees to find housing and a job, and to speed up the process of integration. The problem is namely that the integration centres are too crowded, and that the people are too passive. The residents expect too much of the RFA and they are not independent. The new program from the RFA is a pilot; it runs from 1-10 until 31-1-2005. After this date it is evaluated.

The contents of the complementary program are:

- Computer lessons
- Czech geography
- Czech law
- Societal orientation
- Extra Czech lessons (4 hours per week), organized by an NGO (SOZE)
- Diploma-evaluation

The permit holder can choose which parts of the program he wants to follow, according to his needs and wishes. He can choose whether he starts with the additional program or not, but if he doesn't, he has to pay (more) for the facilities in the integration centre. The state program, however, is obligatory during the period that permit holders are living in the integration centre. In the municipality, they can choose if they want to continue or not with the language lessons. The lessons are given by NGO's and are free.

If people have a basic knowledge of the Czech language, they can do an exam. If they pass it, they don't have to start/continue the state integration program. After 10 years someone can get the Czech nationality. Everybody with a residence permit gets a passport.



2. Actual situation in the Czech Republic

2.1 Political-societal context

Now the Czech Republic has become a part of the EU, the number of asylum seekers is diminishing. A number of centres maybe have to be closed because they are half empty. One of the residential centres, Cerveny Ujezd, has already been closed.

Societal problems are the influx of Roman gypsies, alcohol problems from the Ukrainian people and drug abuse. The Gypsies come to the Czech Republic because of poverty.

2.2 New Asylum Act

At October 13th 2005, a new Asylum act was established. The main changes are:

- EU members can't stay in a centre after the negative decision from the OAMP.
- Long-term permit: when people want to leave the camp for more than 10 days, they have to ask permission to the OAMP.

2.3 Number of applications and voluntary return

There were 5459 applications in 2004. The number of applicants is still diminishing. At this moment (October 2005) there are only 822 people living actually in a centre. There are much more asylum seekers, but the rest is living in private housing. It is a big question how they can afford this, but probably they will have (illegal?) jobs.

The number of applicants is going down. The RFA probably will have to close some centres, but the Ministry of Interior hasn't decided yet about this matter.

In 2004 550 persons returned, from which 37% by airplane. The top five of countries of origin: Slovakia, Chechnya, Ukraine, Russian Federation and Belarus.

2.4 Countries of origin and trends

The top ten of countries of origin is: Ukraine, Chechnya, Vietnam, Russian Federation, Belarus, Georgia, China, Slovakia, (90% are Roman), Kyrgyzstan and Mongolia. But lately, more and more people are coming from India. There are also a bigger number of African people coming. Most of these people are coming by airplane. That's why next year a new reception centre is going to be opened at the airport of Prague, for 60 people.

The Czech Republic attracts a lot of single men and families from the former Soviet Union countries.

2.5 Future changes in the organisation – Detention centres

While I was visiting the CR, there was announced a big change in the RFA. From the first of January 2006 the RFA will also run all the detention centres in the country. At this moment, these centres are run by the FP. There are about 10 of these centres in the CR, of which one is being closed. This change was a proposal from the RFA, and the Ministry of Interior had to approve this plan.

A detention centre is a closed centre for foreign illegal people who have to be deported or who can apply for asylum if they haven't done that yet. These people can apply for asylum within 7 days, but they have to stay in the detention centre for 6 months. After these 6 months they



will get a transfer to a residential centre. The medical check is already executed in the detention centre, that's why they don't have to go to a reception centre first. The period of 6 months in the detention centre is necessary to prevent abuse of the possibility to apply for asylum. When a person can't apply for asylum, the FP will try to deport him within 6 months. If this is not possible, in the end he will get a visa for the Czech Republic...

The detention centres don't have the same facilities as a centre from the RFA, like social facilities. Besides, they are in a very bad condition. Therefore, a lot of improvement is necessary on the buildings. In the future, the RFA and the police will work together in these centres, but the RFA is going to run them. The police are responsible for the safety and guarding the fences etc.

Consequences for the RFA

- Two of the RFA residential centres are going to be transformed into a detention centre: Zastávka u Brna and Bela.
- The integration centre in Zastávka u Brna is transformed into a residential centre.
- All the residents from these centres will get a transfer to another centre before February 2006.

Personnel consequences and attitude towards the changes

The reaction from the personnel on all the changes is quite positive. We spoke with the manager of the residential centre in Zastávka u Brna, mr. Sekerka. He said that he likes to have a dynamic job and that he sees it as a challenge. The only disadvantage is the big amount of work they will have in the coming months.

His workers were not very shocked when they heard the news, because they already knew about the plans. It only became definitive on the 27th of October, because the Ministry of Interior approved the plans. But still it is bad news for some people, because not everybody will keep his job.

The FP is happy that the RFA is going to take over the detention centres, because they had tasks that don't really belong to the police. But on the other hand the police will lose jobs too.

Communication

The personnel were informed at the 27th of October. The external parties were going to be informed the next week, from the 31st of October.



3. Refugee Facilities Administration (RFA)

3.1 Characteristics of the organisation

The RFA is a semi-independent, which works for the Ministry of Interior. It's a national organization. The head quarter is in Prague.

There are three types of centres: reception centres, residential centres and integration centres. Residential centres are divided into first instance camps and second instance camps. The people in de 1st instance camps wait for the first decision and the people from the 2nd instance camps wait for are decision from the court. In the second instance camps there are no offices of the OAMP, because all the admission interviews are done and the first decision is already taken.

Characteristics of the 3 types:

Reception centre

- Identification and visa granting (FP)
- Initiation of asylum grant proceedings (AMPD)
- Medical examinations and other admission procedures (RFA)
-
- Quarantine closed centre

Residential centre

- Arrival in from a reception centre after conclusions of admission procedures
- Provision of services during asylum grant proceedings
- Open centre

Integration centre

- Temporary accommodation for persons who have been granted asylum status
- State integration program: Czech language lessons and an offer of integration apartments from Regional Offices

3.2. Size of the organisation

The RFA has 12 centres: 10 residential centres and 2 reception centres. These centres can either be a “normal” residential centre or an integration centre.

At the 31st December 2004, 447 employees of various professions worked in the RFA: directors, financial managers, lawyers, programmers, secretaries, social workers, non-stop service workers, accommodation service workers, operational workers, educators, doctors, nurses, etc.

The total capacity of the asylum facilities is 2560 beds, and the number can be increased to 3515 if necessary. The costs per asylum seeker are € 10,30 per person per day,

3.3 Basic tasks

- Operation of asylum facilities
- Voluntary repatriation program
- Provision of services



- Goods like bedclothes, cleaning products, etc.
- Meals, 3 times a day
- Social assistance, activities etc.
- Facilities like a TV room, creativity workshop etc.

3.4 Relation between reception organisation and deciding organisation

The OAMP (the deciding organisation) has offices on the reception centres and the first-instance camps. So the applicants don't need to go to another place to apply for asylum and to have their interviews.

3.5 Relation between and developing and carrying out the reception policy

The head office in Prague makes the policy in cooperation with the Ministry of Interior. The centres have to execute this policy.

3.6 Partners in the chain and division of the tasks

- Foreign Police: issues visa, checks the documents, carries out identification
- OAMP (Department for Asylum and Migration Policy): takes decision on application, verifies given data needed for a decision on asylum granting and provides administration procedures.
- RFA: operates asylum facilities, provides accommodation, social services, medical services, catering and other services.

3.7 Organisation of influx, outflow and transfers

Every day the head office gets a list from the reception centres with the names of the residents. These are the names of the persons who completed the first stage of reception (medical checks). They might already have a first decision from the OAMP (first instance), but some people didn't have a decision yet.

One person at the head office is responsible for deciding to which residential centre they will go and for the transport of the people. People cannot choose to which residential centre they will go. Only if they have very strong reasons, they can apply for it, but there is no guarantee that they will get what they want. The head office is trying to spread people from one nationality over the country as much as possible. This is to prevent that there will be a big concentration of one nationality in a centre because this can cause troubles.

Two times a week a bus is taking groups of residents from Vysní Lhoty to the different residential centres. Only if there are only a few people with a transfer on a certain day, they might get a ticket to go by themselves with the public transport. There are 4 buses in total used by the RFA. In the first week of my stay, 56 people were transported from VL to other centres.

If people are crossing the border, they have to go to Vysní Lhoty. They have to find this place themselves. This must be quite difficult as it is located in such a small village! Only if people are coming to the Czech Republic by airplane, they stay in the reception centre at Ruzyne Airport.

For information about outflow after a permit or second negative: see paragraph 1.6 and 1.7.



4. Housing

4.1. Housing of asylum seekers

The reception centre is a closed centre, which means that the people are obliged to stay in. When they get a transfer to a residential centre, they can choose whether they want to stay in a camp or in private housing. If they want to stay in private housing, the RFA is no longer responsible for them. They are deleted from the computer system and they only have contact with the Foreign Police and the OAMP.

A resident may leave the centre for a maximum of 10 days per calendar month. If a resident wants to leave for a period of more than 24 hours and less than 10 days, he has to fill in a form for the RFA. He has to declare when he will come back and where he will stay.

He may also leave the centre for more than 10 days, but then he has to ask permission from the OAMP. Therefore, he has to give his address and a proof that he is officially living in this address. He will get a visa from the Foreign Police, which is valid for 2 months. If he doesn't ask for official permission, he gets a visa for only 30 days. After this long-term stay, he can come back in a residential centre. If a person is out for more than 3 days, he has to take all his belongings with him so that his room is available for somebody else.

If a person doesn't return within 24 hours after the agreed date, he can be placed in another centre. Besides, he has to pay a fine to a maximum of € 67, -. This happens often, but is not known if people really pay the fines. The RFA can check very easily if somebody is out or in, because everybody who goes out has to leave his ID-card with the guards of the centre.

4.2 Housing of permit holders

There are two ways to get housing: the OAMP can offer an integration apartment or the permit holder can try to find an apartment himself. In that case, he can get subsidy for renting this apartment. But if he hasn't found an apartment himself within 3 months, he has to accept any offer from the OAMP. But I also heard in Havirov, that one could refuse the offered house one time. Most of the people want to live in Prague or Brno, but this is very difficult.

It can take years before somebody gets housing, because there are not a lot of apartments available (neither for Czech people). Still, permit holders always get an apartment for themselves. So they never have to share it with other people, like in Holland.

When people are still living in the integration centre, they have to pay for their apartment (€ 30 - € 60 per month). They don't have to share the apartment with persons from another family. In case only one person in the family has a permit, the family can stay together either in a residential centre or in an integration centre.

4.3 Management of the locations

There are 3 departments in every centre: the Social, Organisational and Economical Department. The Social Department is the biggest, and the personnel (social workers, accommodation workers, non-stop service workers, nurses) are working with the asylum seekers. The Organisational Department is taking care of the organisation of the centre.

The Economical department is taking care of the technical services and maintenance of the buildings. Professional cleaners clean the buildings, but the residents can also contribute to



this. They get extra pocket money for this, with a maximum of twice the pocket money. Residents can work in the centre for a maximum of 12 hours per month.

4.4 Physical characteristics of the housing

All the centres I have seen have more or less the same characteristics. The lodging houses have 2 or 3 floors. The toilets and showers are common (in the hall), as well as the laundry facilities. In every lodging house there are several offices and facilities. This is done to stay in contact with the residents.

There are no real cooking facilities because the meals are served in the dining room. But in every hall there is a small kitchen. In every centre there is a clothing shop, TV room and a children's centre. In some centres there is a library, sewing workshop, school, art workshop and gym. In 2 centres there is a possibility to cook, because the apartments have their own kitchen.



5. Facilities and allowances

5.1 Organisation of facilities for asylum seekers

The facilities are spread over the buildings. In every centre there are a number of services. The social service carries out the admission interview and provides information on staying in a centre. The accommodation service assigns a room for accommodation and provides complete accommodation services. It lends bedclothes, catering accessories and room keys and distributes hygienic materials.

Every centre also has psychological and legal service. The legal service is provided by employees from various NGO's. Furthermore there is a TV room and a children centre. Children above the age of 6 go to a primary school outside the centre. Education for adults is organised by different NGO's.

Medical service is provided by doctors and nurses from the RFA. In the reception centre Vysní Lhoty there was no consultation hour for the medical services; people could just come in and ask their questions. The health service has almost the same tasks as in Holland: they are the first place to go for an asylum seeker. The nurses decide if somebody needs help from a specialist. The basic medical care is free, extra services need to be paid by the asylum seeker. The MS also gives information about hygiene and prevention. In general they don't use translators, only the psychologist sometimes uses one.

There is also a non-stop service. People can come in 24 hours a day with their questions. This is also the first place where new residents have to report. Main tasks of this service:

- Register the presence of the residents (long term stay etc.)
- Update the files
- Send a list with information about all the residents to the head office every day. Every worker also has to make a daily report, which they have to send to the non-stop service. All the reports are collected and sent to the head office.

The workers have a shift of 12 hours. Only the manager of the non-stop service has a shift of 8 hours. There are always 2 persons working at the same time.

5.2 Non-Governmental Organisations (NGO's)

Non-Governmental Organisations play an important role in the centres of the RFA. They take care of a lot of facilities and assistance in many areas. Everything is done by paid workers.

Facilities organised by the Catholic Charity Organisation:

- Second hand clothing shop
- Sewing room
- Social and legal advice
- Activities for children and adults

5.3 Provision of allowances/goods for asylum seekers

- Pocket money
They get E 0,54 per day. The social money per month in CZ is 144,60 euro. People only get pocket money at the days they are in the camp.
- 3 Meals a day (5 for children).
There are only 2 centres where people can cook themselves. Every day they have to order their meals for the next day. If they don't do that, there might be nothing left for them.



- Clothing shop.
The residents can buy clothes for 5-20 Ck (less than a euro).
- Bedclothes
The residents have to give it back when they leave. Every two weeks they can get clean bed cloths.
- Insurance

When an asylum seeker decides to live outside the camp for a long stay, he doesn't get anything from the RFA. They have to apply for a long stay outside the camp.

In a residential centre, they have to sign a paper in which they declare how much money they have ("verklaring van onvermogen"). This can have consequences for the allowances and facilities they will get.



6. Guidance

6.1 Daily life

The non-stop service is available 24 hours a day for all kinds of questions. Sometimes it is used a lot and sometimes it's very quiet at night. The workers think that it is a necessary service.

Social workers give personal advice to people who need it. They also talk about the consequences of a negative decision in the procedure and confront the residents with their situation. The Gypsies, for example, will never get a residence permit, so the workers tell them that it's a waste of time to stay in the Czech Republic.

The accommodation service takes care of the rooms, provision of goods etc. The NGO's: organise activities, run a second hand clothing shop (Diocesan society) and a sewing workshop.

6.2 Asylum procedure

Legal advice is only provided by NGO's: SOZE (Society of Citizens Helping Immigrants), Diocesan Society. The asylum seekers have to ask for advice themselves. The people who provide the advice are lawyers. These lawyers can act as a "gemachtigde" for the asylum seekers.

6.3 Work/education

In a residential centre and in an integration centre the residents get help when they want to find a job. This help is provided by social workers, but also by NGO's like SOZE. A problem is, however, to find work. Most employees don't want asylum seekers because they don't speak the language. Besides, there is also a lot of unemployment among the Czech citizens.

All the education for adults is provided by NGO's. They give language lessons, PC lessons etc. If somebody speaks Czech very well, he can do a study. Education on a university is free in the CR.

Every resident can get Czech lessons. The lessons are for free and subsidized by all kinds of organisations and foundations.

6.4 Integration

When an asylum seeker is granted asylum, he will get a transfer to an integration centre after 4 days. Within those 4 days the police have to be informed, the permit holder gets information about the changes and there has to be found a room in an integration centre.

When somebody starts with integration he has to do a lot of things. A social worker helps him with it. Actions a permit holder has to take:

- Register in agency, which provides the social money (€ 80 after paying the rent of the room in the integration centre).
- Register in the labor office
- Apply for extra social money for children if applicable (kinderbijslag)
- Arrange health insurance within 8 days
- Get a family doctor



Furthermore he has to start with the integration program. Therefore, he must fill in a questionnaire about his level of education, work experience, language skills, expectations, plans for the future, etc. He also has to make an integration plan and a monthly report. Every month he has a conversation about the progress of the plan with a social worker. When this person didn't complete the program as agreed in the monthly plan, he has to pay extra for the facilities in the centre.

The teachers come to the centre, so the permit holders don't have to go to a school. Each student makes an agreement with the teacher about his or her schedule. This is easy because some people have other duties like taking care of their children or work. The teacher checks the number of followed hours.

6.5 Voluntary repatriation

If an asylum seeker wants to return to his home country, he can apply for repatriation. This is also possible if the procedure hasn't ended yet, but in this case the UNHCR has to give a guarantee that repatriation is safe.

It happens quite often that people want to return after their procedure has ended. They can go to their social worker to apply for repatriation. When he does this within 24 hours after the negative from the court, he can stay in the residential centre until his repatriation is arranged. The head office of RFA books a flight or arranges a ticket for the train. People don't get extra money. They have to arrange their travel documents at the embassy when they don't have a passport. IOM gives assistance.



7. Special groups/categorical reception

7.1 People from EU countries, UMA's, Dublin claims, illegal persons

Every applicant has the right to stay in a centre of the RFA until his procedure has ended. The only exception is that people from a EU country have to leave the centre after the first negative. People can start a new procedure and will get reception again, but this is only possible 2 years after the end of the former procedure.

There are no UMAs anymore in the centres of the RFA, because they are now placed in a centre for minor foreigners in Prague. The Ministry of Education runs this centre. There are no invited refugees either.

7.2 Psychiatric patients

Psychiatric patients can get help from psychologists and the medical services. If it is really necessary, they can be placed in an institution for mentally ill people.

7.3 Single men

In some centres like in Vysnı́ Lhoty, single men live in the so-called white zone. They don't have the permission to enter the green zone, which is meant for the vulnerable groups mentioned in paragraph 7d.

7.4 Safety measures for vulnerable groups

- Vulnerable groups are families, single women, single mothers, elderly people
- Technical measures like separate buildings for these groups, cameras in every building, separate zones (green zone for single women and families).
- Organisational measures like separate hours for the meals, pocket money etc.
- Personnel measures like trained workers, guards at the entrance.

Sometimes there are a lot of problems when there is a large group of residents with the same nationality, like the Chechens and Georgians. They bully and blackmail each other. In serious situations, the police come to assist. The social workers show very clearly that they keep a close eye on these problems, and that everybody who is being threatened can come to them.



8. Relationship between RFA and Czech population

8.1 Relationship in general

It depends on the centre, but in general there are no big problems. In Zastávka, for example, the neighbors are not really interested in the centre. When there is an open door day, it's hard to attract visitors.

8.2 Activities/measures to improve the relationship

- Vysní Lhoty: children activities. These activities are organised for children from asylum seekers and Czech children, so that they can meet each other.
- Open door-days
- Sport tournaments
- Student working stays and visits
- Participation in multicultural events
- Exhibition of asylum seekers' graphics and paintings
- A contribution from the RFA to the municipality: € 0,30 per day per resident.

9. Communication

9.1 Information for asylum seekers

- Fact sheets in different languages (only the most important information) about rights and duties, legal standards, services, NGO's, information about the Czech Republic and repatriation
- Leaflets about human smuggling
- Information on the wall in public rooms and on the doors
- Accommodation rules in the lodging houses
- Pictograms with images of the different services. They are the same in every centre
- Personal communication (social workers, non-stop service etc.) Translators aren't used often

9.2 Internal communication

Every morning, there is a meeting with all the people from the Social Department. Every afternoon, the Social Department has a meeting with the Medical Services. The managers from the three departments have a weekly meeting with the manager of the centre.



10. Personnel

10.1 Number of staff

At the end of 2004, 447 employees worked in the RFA. 50 Of them are working at the head office. The head office is divided into an Organisational department, a Social department and an Economics department. Also here a lot of people have to leave the organisation because the number of asylum seekers is diminishing.

In comparison with Holland there is much more staff working in a centre. This is because the RFA also needs cooks, medical people, non-stop service, cleaners and psychologists. The number of workers varies per centre.

The RFA doesn't use volunteers. But a lot of services for the residents are provided by different NGO's. These NGO's sometimes use volunteers.

10.2 Education and training

There are a lot of trainings available for the staff. Some are obligatory and some aren't. The staff can follow courses like intercultural communication, dealing with aggressive clients, working with women and about the countries of origin. The workers have about 3 courses a year.

There is also a social worker available for the employees. He or she comes twice a month to every centre to talk with the workers about all kinds of problems they may have in their work, but also in their private life. Sometimes there is a meeting with the whole staff.



11. Administration and registration

11.1 Registration system

Every person has an identity card with the most important information on it, and a barcode. It is white, but the single women have a green one because they can live in the green zone.

The administration system is called Evidence. All asylum seekers are registered here, but if somebody wants to live outside the centre, he's written out of the system. The files of the persons who are deleted from the system are sent to the central archive in Cerveny Ujezd.

Evidence contains the following information: personal data, family members, orders for the meals, where he is staying at the moment and information about the procedure. Within some months, an updated version of Evidence is going to be used. At the moment the old and new version both are used. In the new version, all the centres are connected with each other while the old version only contained information about one centre. Furthermore, the new version contains more information about the residents. According to Lukas, a programmer from Vysní Lhoty, they have been working on this system for 6 years. The problem was that the Ministry of Interior didn't really cooperate.

At the head office there are 2 or 3 ICT workers, and in the bigger centres there is only one. It isn't really a separate department like in Holland.

11.2 Reports

The non-stop service sends a list with information about all the residents to the head office every day. Besides, all the workers also have to make a daily report, which they have to send to the non-stop service. All the reports are collected and sent to the head office.

12. Analysis

12.1 Comparison with the Dutch reception system

Asylum policy and reception

The relation between reception and asylum procedure is almost the same in the Czech Republic. But in the Czech Republic the rules are simpler and clearer. The time spent in a centre is much shorter because the procedure is finished within a maximum of 2 years. Another difference is that asylum seekers don't have their own lawyer, but they can go to a counselor from an NGO.

The way the reception is finished, is much clearer in the CR. People have to leave the camp within 24 hours after their procedure is ended, and there are no excuses. People can only start a new procedure after two years. When people want to repatriate there is less help than in the Netherlands, and they have only 24 hours to decide whether they want this help or not. The RFA arranges the repatriation.

Integration policy

The integration policy in the Czech Republic has a lot of similarities with the Dutch policy. There is also an integration pilot running in the integration centres with the same intentions. Big differences are, nevertheless, that there are too little language lessons. There are also



fewer rules and obligations, and even no obligations when a permit holder is going to live in a municipality! The state integration program only contains language lessons and no societal orientation. Another difference is that residents of an Integration centre pay rent and get social money.

Actual situation

In the Czech Republic the number of asylum seekers is going down, like in the Netherlands. This means that some centres will have to be closed. A big difference is that the residents have other nationalities than in the Netherlands. They mostly come from the former Soviet Union and, lately, from India.

Reception organisation

The 3 types of centres are almost the same as in Holland, but the Reception centres are part of the reception organization (RFA) and not of the deciding organization (OAMP), like in the Netherlands. Other differences are that there are more personnel per asylum seeker, and the centres have a smaller capacity. Similarities are that the tasks of the reception organization are about the same, as well as the tasks of the partners in the chain.

Management of the centre: in Holland there is no Organisational department. Tasks of the social and economical department are divided differently in Holland. Furthermore, there are more personnel in the Czech centres, because the RFA has more tasks. The training possibilities are the same. A difference is that there are no volunteers working in the RFA.

Housing

In the Czech Republic more people live outside the camp in private housing. Maybe this is because they have the possibility to work the whole year. The only restriction is that asylum seekers are allowed to work after a stay of one year. Furthermore, there is more control on where the residents stay. Every day the workers check who is staying in the camp and who is not. The housing of permit holders is almost the same as in Holland.

Facilities

In the Czech Republic there are services like the non-stop service and a dining room, which we don't have (anymore) in the Netherlands. Another big difference is that everybody can follow language lessons, even if they have a negative decision. The RFA also pays a lot of attention to creative activities. Every centre has an art creativity workshop. The other services like medical care and social assistance are almost the same.

Special groups

There is a special treatment for some categories of asylum seekers. For example, people from EU countries can't stay in a centre when they want to wait for a decision from the court. Another thing that is special about the Czech system is the separate zones for vulnerable groups and single men. Both groups have to respect each others zones.

Administration

The "residents registration system" is comparable with the Dutch system. Unlike in our system (IBIS), the personal data of every asylum seeker is completed by a digital picture.

The workers complain about the increasing amount of administration. They also have to report everything they do. Every day, all the reports are collected by the non-stop service and sent to the head office.



12.2 Learning points

In this paragraph I will mention a couple of positive points in the Czech reception system, which could be interesting for Holland to integrate in our system. In the first place, I saw that every centre used the same system of pictograms. In Holland there are pictograms available as well, but they aren't used as consequently as in the Czech Republic.

Secondly, I want to stress the importance of special zones for different groups. This can increase the feeling of safety in a centre, especially for vulnerable groups. The safety measures that are taken in the Czech centres are a good example for Holland (see paragraph 7.4).

In the third place, I was surprised by the positive attitude from the personnel towards changes. While in Holland you often hear a lot of complaints when a big change is announced, I heard a lot of optimistic sounds.

12.3 Investigation subjects

Apart from the learning points, I also would like to mention some subjects that are worth it to be investigated.

A thing that struck me was the digital picture in the administration system. It would be a big improvement if it was possible to take a digital picture of every asylum seeker. This picture can be used for a paper file, but also for IBIS. It wouldn't be necessary anymore to take a picture in every new centre, and all the workers could see the face belonging to the name.

In Holland, a lot of asylum seekers don't live in the centre, but only come once a week to stamp. This means that we have a lot of empty rooms which can't be used for other persons. Maybe it's a good idea to adapt the Czech method: in the Czech centre people lose their room when they are out for more than 3 days. They have to take all their stuff with them and they can get another room when they come back. This could be a good system, although you need a lot of control and registration. Our registration system (IBIS) is not suitable for this yet.

In the area of integration it might be a good idea to adapt the system of monthly plans and use sanctions to stimulate the permit holder to achieve the goals mentioned in the plan. Having to pay more for a facility can be a good sanction.

The final investigation subject is about repatriation. In the Czech Republic, people who are working on their repatriation can stay in the camp until it is realized. They don't get pocket money, only food and a room. In Holland there isn't such an agreement, as far as I know. This could be a good idea if we agree on how an asylum seeker has to prove that he is arranging his repatriation.



Appendix A: Daily report

October 15th

After a long journey I arrived at 14.00 in Hotel Barbora (1/2 hour from the centre of Prague with public transport).

October 16th

Sightseeing Prague. I also met my 'colleague' from Norway who arrived today. She's a manager of one of their centres and in her early fifties.

October 17th

At 8.45 a driver took us to the head office of the RFA in the Police Academy of Prague. There we met Ales, our contact person. He gave a short introduction on their organisation. Later we talked with Moges, an employee who is responsible for the transfers to and from the different centres. He explained us what his tasks are.

Unfortunately, there were not a lot of people who had time for us. But we had a nice conversation with a lawyer called Hilmi (he was from Jemen). He told us that his most important task was to get money from asylum seekers who caused damage which isn't covered by the insurance! A lot of residents have an alcohol problem, and this is what caused many troubles. There are a lot of fights or people get involved in a traffic accident for example. It is very difficult to get the money back, because they don't have it! And the RFA isn't authorized to cut their social money. We also talked a lot about Norway and Holland, Hilmi was very interested!

After this talk we had lunch, and then we went off to the airport to visit the reception centre Ruzyně. There were strict safety checks and we had to show our passport and our bags. When we entered the reception centre I got quite a shock: it was so small! It is built for 16 people, but at that moment there were 22 people. There is only one corridor which gives entrance to all the rooms, the offices, the bathrooms, kitchen etc.

We talked with Alexandra, the manager of the centre. She told there were no big problems and the residents were quite satisfied. A couple of notes on the wall showed this: they showed the gratitude of the residents and a lot of positive words for the staff! It was a very busy day because some people got a transfer to the other reception centre (Vysní Lhoty) and there were also new people coming in. That's why our visit was very short.

October 18th

At 9 o'clock we went to the Police Academy again. We expected to be able to talk with some employees in the morning, but unfortunately everybody was busy. We were offered to talk with a lawyer again, but we didn't do that. There was also a new employee, she just started that week. We talked with her about our reception policy.

At 10.15 we already left for Vysní Lhoty. It took us 6 hours to get there, including 2 stops. At 16.15 we arrived at VL. We dropped our bags and went with Ales to a town at the border with Poland (Cieszyn) which is half Czech and half Polish. He showed us the town and we had dinner. Back in VL we went to sleep in our over-heated apartment. But it was perfect that we both had our own apartment at the reception centre!



October 19th

This morning we have visited Havirov. This is a residential centre, but at the moment a part of the centre is used as an integration centre. The reason is that there are too much permit holders. We had a talk with the manager of the centre and a manager of one of the departments. They also showed us the centre and some rooms of residents. It looked very clean and proper. Havirov is one of the two centres where people have their own kitchen. This was also a very short visit because we had to be back in time for lunch in Vysní Lhoty.

After lunch we got a tour around the camp from Marcela, the manager of the Organisational Department. Vysní Lhoty is a reception centre. This means that this is the first centre where people have to go to apply for asylum. People stay here about 3 or 4 weeks before they go to a residential centre.

The atmosphere at the camp was quite peaceful and everything looked much organised. A part of the white zone (with the single men) was closed, because a couple of Indian men were in quarantine. They had some disease and were not allowed to go out of this area.

We saw the lodging houses, the art creativity workshop, the medical services and some offices. Especially the art creativity workshop was beautiful; it was full of masterpieces from the residents! At 15.30 the working day was over, and we were “dismissed”. For me it’s very strange that the working day already starts at 7, lunch is at 11.30 and the working day is over at 15.30!

October 20th

We spent the whole day in Vysní Lhoty. In the morning, the Norwegian colleague and me both spoke with another social worker. I spoke with Igor. I had to wait for him in the art creativity workshop where I spoke a little bit about Holland with the woman who worked there. After a while a Ukrainian father and son came in, and they started to talk about their country and the problems between east and west Ukraine. It was very interesting, but they couldn’t stop talking! After more than an hour I finally went with Igor to his office.

He told me about his work and showed me the computer system. He also showed the files of the people and how they give information to their colleagues when a resident gets a transfer to a residential centre. He also told that sometimes he got tired of the increasing amount of administration. I recognise this problem!!

After the talk with Igor we had lunch and at 12 o’clock we joined a meeting between workers of the Social Department and the nurses. It was about a new plan to improve the social work, and about an information meeting for a group of Chinese people. They needed a translator for this.

At 13.00 we had the possibility to join a children activity outside the camp. It was organised for both children from a residential centre (probably Havirov) and children from primary schools in the surroundings. The RFA thinks it’s important that Czech children and foreign children meet each other, and this activity is a way to realise that. But it wasn’t clear to me why the meeting point was at the entrance of Vysní Lhoty, because the children of that -closed- centre weren’t allowed to join...

The activity (a series of games and puzzles) was a success and there were no troubles at all between the two groups. The children even spoke a little bit English, more than the adults who guided the activity!



October 21st

At 9.00 a driver brought us back to Prague. This time it took us 3.15 hours, because we drove at an average speed of 150 km/h! There was no activity for the afternoon, so we were free the rest of the day.

October 22nd and 23rd

Sightseeing Prague

October 24th

At 12.00 we arrived at Zastávka u Brna, a residential/integration centre in the small village Zastávka (near Brno). There we met Jana Capalová, the manager of the Social Department. We started with a lunch and then Jana showed us a very professional PowerPoint presentation about the RFA and Zastávka residential centre. We also discussed the program for the coming days. And we met the manager of the centre, Josef Sekerka.

After this, the working day was over. We had to share a room in the main building. It was very nice.

October 25th

Today we started with a tour around the camp. Zastávka residential centre has two lodging houses and a lot of facilities for the residents. In the back of the camp there is a third lodging house. This is the integration centre; it is separated from the residential centre by a fence. But first we were taken to the art creativity workshop by Pavlina, a very nice and enthusiastic girl. Compared to the workshop in Vysní Lhoty this one was quite a mess, but she did a lot of good things for the children and the adults.

We also talked with accommodation workers. Later, we went to the non-stop service and talked with Eva, one of the workers. In the afternoon we visited the integration centre.

October 26th

We started with a meeting with a nurse. I found out that the organisation of the medical services is almost the same as in Holland. At 9.30 we had the opportunity to talk with Pavel Filo, a worker from an NGO called Diocesan Caritas. He told us what kind of facilities and activities they offer the residents. This varies from a second hand clothing shop to a sewing workshop and social/legal advice.

At 10.15 we went to Zbysov, a residential centre. We were lucky, because they had an open doors day. They organise this every year for the people from the neighbourhood and the municipality. At this day visitors can get information about the centre and taste national dishes made by the residents. We also could taste, it was delicious! The residents were very happy to have visitors and the children were singing and dancing for us.

After lunch we spoke with Klara, she is a lawyer from another NGO called SOZE. We talked about the services they provide. At 14.30 we were taken to Brno by Zdena, a very nice woman who works in the children centre. She showed us the town, and we had a very nice afternoon.

October 27th

In the morning we wanted to go to the dining room to have breakfast, but nobody was there to open the door. It appeared that all the workers were together at a meeting. It seemed very important. Later we heard that the ministry of Interior had approved the plans for a big change



in the organisation: from next year the RFA is going to run all the detention centres in the country, and Zastávka is going to be a detention centre as well! So that was what the meeting was about. Later we talked with the manager and with Jana about these changes, and their attitude towards them was quite positive.

Later, we went to Zbysov again. On Wednesday the workers didn't have a lot of time to talk to us because of the open doors day, but today we could talk with the manager, the assistant manager, a non-stop service worker and a nurse. We spoke a bit English and a bit German but we had a very interesting conversation.

At 12.00 we left for Prague again. We had a very interesting program in Zastávka and Jana had really done her best for us, although she was very busy.

In the evening we had a 'farewell-dinner' with Ales and Moges.

October 28th

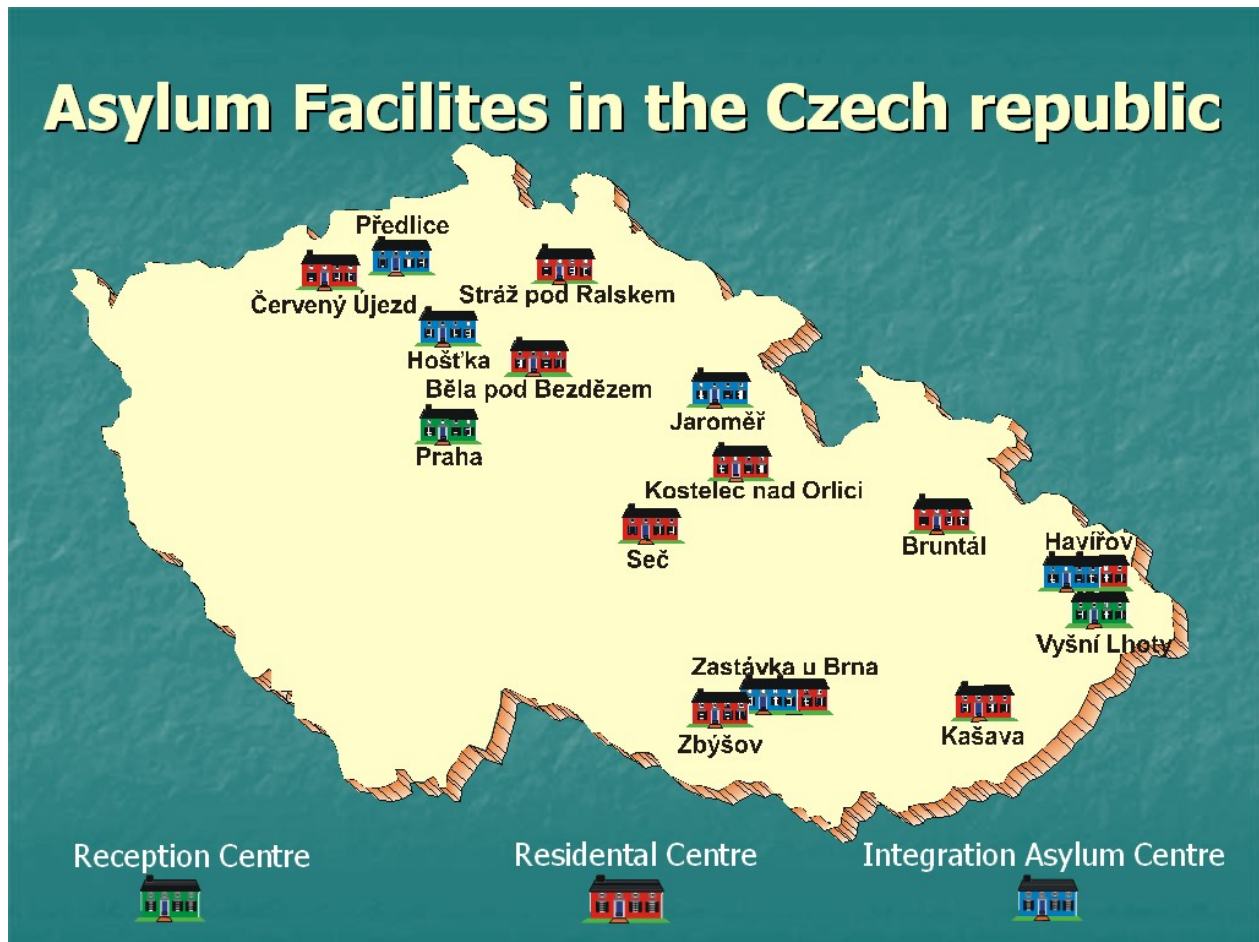
This was a day off, because it was a national holiday.

October 29th

Flight back to Amsterdam.



Appendix B: Map





Appendix C: Abbreviations

ENARO	European Network of Asylum Reception Organisations
FP	Foreign Police
IOM	International Organisation for Migration
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
OAMP	Department for Asylum and Migration Policy
RFA	Refugee Facilities Administration
UMA	Unaccompanied Minor Asylum seeker