





# “Integration services for foreign scientific and academic staff in the Czech Republic”

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# INTEGRATION SERVICES FOR FOREIGN SCIENTIFIC AND ACADEMIC STAFF IN THE CZECH REPUBLIC

## Abstract

This study analyzes the status of integration services for foreign highly skilled staff at higher education and scientific institutions in the Czech Republic. This paper is relevant as it is essential to obtain data and information about services and possible barriers affecting the quality of life and professional experience with work migration to another country. The study conducted a survey and obtained feedback from 221 respondents. Quantitative data were analyzed in SASD 1.4.10. and SPSS. Moreover, the paper employed qualitative research in the form of open-ended questions processed by open coding in Atlas.ti 7.

The analysis described the quality of the employer's services, their offer, and frequency, as well as satisfaction with the work and social environment in the Czech Republic. Barriers to integration were identified; they include complicated administration, the need to learn the Czech language, and cultural and mental differences. Deficiencies in services for common life necessities were highlighted, e.g., provision of suitable accommodation, adequate school facilities for children, dual-career jobs, or medical treatment.

The study resulted in the idea of the introduction of a service system, based on coordinated social services, for the reception of experts from abroad and better conditions for their integration. This system will increase the attractiveness of Czech institutions to the influx of brains from abroad.

## Keywords

foreign staff, integration, higher education and scientific institution, internationalization, services, Czech Republic

## JEL Classification

F22, I23, J24, J49

## INTRODUCTION

It is vital to report on the status of integration services provided to foreign scientific and academic staff (FSAS), i.e., visiting professors, experts, and members of international projects at scientific and higher education institutions in the Czech Republic (SHEI). FSAS are migrating foreigners who may have different employment statuses and may have different academic/scientific ranks and types of main activity: research, teaching, management or project participation, and non-bound to a single state (Teichler, 2015; European Education and Culture Executive Agency et al., 2019). Barriers to integration into the work process can harm their professional performance and disrupt their psychological and physical health.

Migration is a demanding social change. An immigrant, especially from a non-European country, has to adapt to different values, culture, religion, mentality, work, and social conditions that he/she was not used to before, which can cause someone a sense of stress or crisis, and even health problems. In addition, the new environment presents

new dilemmas. In extreme cases, discriminatory situations may arise from racial, cultural, and religious differences, such as xenophobia, mobbing, bossing, stalking, or harassment. Unbalanced or declining work performance in a new environment is also a complication for employers, as competitiveness in a particular field or specialization may be threatened.

Currently, services for FSAS differ from employer to employer. The rules of coexistence at workplaces are enshrined in institutional regulations; however, their use in practice often needs to be improved and supported. Furthermore, the area of FSAS in SHEI is so far only marginally studied. Therefore, there is not enough domestic theoretical basis for setting up the system of services and solving barriers to integration, removing possible underestimated working conditions and adverse effects of the new social environment. Moreover, there is a lack of specific data on the state of services. Therefore, getting feedback from FSAS, who already have experience with the integration, is valuable.

This paper details the integration processes that FSAS experience when entering CR, e.g., obtaining a visa, meeting the law conditions, and first steps in CR. In addition, it shows the pertinent issues relating to FSAS and their integration into their work and local environment. These include aspects of quality, offer, and frequency of the services provided by SHEI and satisfaction with the social climate in CR, i.e., factors that have been influencing their living standards in CR. The data were collected before the Covid-19 pandemic; hence, the international travel restrictions nor the restrictions caused by the war threat to Ukraine did not affect it.

The results revealed important information about the state of integration services for FSAS, satisfaction with work and social environment, and identified barriers that need to be removed. On their base, the idea of a concept for setting up a comprehensive system of integration services was born and proposed. Therefore, the study should be the impetus for improving the state of integration services and the change of work conditions and internal rules at SHEI in CR, taking into account the socio-cultural specifics of FSAS.

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## 1. LITERATURE REVIEW AND HYPOTHESES

SHEI HR management aims to care for FSAS, their work environment, and other factors affecting their performance. Favorable conditions positively influence their abilities, results, satisfaction, and well-being. There is currently no standardized system of services for FSAS in CR. However, in today's globalized world, the migration of FSAS is common and has been increasing in recent decades (Lowell & Findlay, 2001). Their arrival is supported as part of the internationalization strategy of SHEI (MEYS, 2020), as their knowledge and skills increase their competitiveness in science, research, and education (Behle, 2014; Sperduti, 2019; MEYS, 2021).

The motivation to migrate can be different, caused by the attractiveness of a famous university, the location, the need to deepen qualifications, gain experience, and involvement in international pro-

jects, but also various personal and economic reasons (Ackers, 2008; Marcu, 2014; Ravenstein, 1885; Shachar, 2006). The migration of a highly skilled workforce is beneficial – it supports employment in the new country, and the acquired skills are invaluable for further professional growth (Wiers-Jenssen, 2008). Europe is attractive for FSAS from third countries (Sbalchiero & Tuzzi, 2017). Especially for Europe, the so-called “Matthew’s effect” applies, which says that resources will be distributed so that those who have a lot will have even more (Merton, 1968). Reputable institutions attract FSAS who bring new knowledge and skills and thus become rich, compared to those that do not offer professional appeal or provide services to encourage immigration.

The quality of life is linked to the rights and freedoms of people worldwide, enshrined in the UN Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UN, 2015). The Charter of Basic Rights and Freedoms of CR states that all people are equal in digni-

ty and rights (Legislation Czech Republic, 1993). The European Commission issued two necessary codes – the European Charter for Researchers and the Code of Conduct for the Recruitment of Researchers, to regulate the rights and rules for migration and receiving FSAS (EC, 2006). In its strategic framework, the concept of quality of life (OG CR, 2017) sets binding indicators supporting the integration into a healthy life and the use of opportunities for immigrants in a new country (Maussen, 2018).

The starting point for the analysis was the theory of the social-ecological perspective according to Bronfenbrenner (1979) or Gitterman and Germain (2008) and Germain (1981). It emphasizes the need to deal with people and the environment in which they live. FSAS are immigrants, i.e., disadvantaged individuals who moved from their country of origin (Amnesty International, 2020). Therefore, it is necessary to support the adaptive capacity of FSAS, remove socio-cultural barriers, and modify the environment to better suit all needs (Skotakova, 2020). Moreover, it is essential to prevent cultural crises arising from changes, differences, and misunderstandings in a foreign language, culture, or environment (Putova, 2017). Satisfaction in the work process is an essential factor affecting mental and physical health (Kondrat, 2013; Skotakova, 2020). The acculturation process is perceived individually; FSAS are integrated into a new environment when they are oriented and accept the new culture (Putova, 2017; Vackova, 2016).

SHEI are working with the strategy of internationalization of the tertiary sector (Knight & De Witt, 2018) and introducing strategic tools to ensure the quality and development of human resources in science and research (Horizont 2020, 2018). SHEI should provide their FSAS with support services that maintain their social, psychological, and physical well-being (Dragomirecka & Bartonova, 2006; Solcova & Kebza, 2004; Jankovsky, 2018) and should create a work environment where FSAS can perform effectively. One of the factors is satisfaction in the work environment, esp. job security in professional life along with financial remuneration (Cervenka, 2015). Thus, a satisfied foreigner has a better chance of success in his career and achieves better performance, which causes a better working atmosphere (Dohnalova, 2008).

An employer sets the workplace culture and principles that employees should respect. However, the problem with ethical codes can be that some documents are only formal, and their fulfillment can be difficult to enforce (Bohata & Zak, 2018). As a result, employees with unsatisfactory performance are often advised to turn to an internal coach or HR specialist, who will identify the problem and help set specific steps to proceed further (CC CR, 2019). For example, the University of Ostrava has established a coaching center for solving the problems of students and graduates, but not employees (UO, n.d.). The mission of universities is to care for students, but unfortunately, FSAS are often neglected.

The offer and range of services provided by the employer contribute to the satisfaction of FSAS at the workplace. Some SHEI provide buddy services, which include, for example, pick-up at the point of arrival in the country and transfer to the destination, accommodation, translation, and other necessary services (Buddy, n.d.). They are often available only to international students, as they operate under the banner of the international student organization Erasmus Student Network (ESN, n.d.).

However, there needs to be a standard system for the range, interconnectedness, and availability of integration services. It is primarily about practical help – such as employee handbooks in English, e.g., published by Charles University in Prague (2022) with practical information for incoming FSAS. SHEI use projects to provide services – e.g., PILZ (MUNI, 2018) or Euraxess (n.d.) project with its contact centers in most public universities. FSAS entering CR need help with a visa and residence permit, forms based on the Act on the Residence of Foreigners in CR (Legislation Czech Republic, 2021), accommodation (IRS Czech, 2019), banking, health insurance, medical care, family and children (Euraxess, n.d.), and Czech language as the only official language of communication (MFA, 2022). Incoming citizens of third countries must go through more complicated administrative procedures than EU citizens, who have the same legal status as citizens of CR (MI, 2020). SHEI personnel often help with setting up working conditions and advice on taxes, social security, career development, recognition of qualifications, and intellectual property rights.

Therefore, the purpose of this study was to report on the status of integration services for FSAS. Accordingly, the following hypotheses were forwarded for testing:

- H1: Quality of employer's services influences the evaluation of employer's support, barriers when entering CR, amount of income, social status ranking in CR, satisfaction with the working environment, the offer of services, culture shock, feeling "at home" in CR, knowledge of the Czech language, interaction with people around, respect for cultural traditions, frequency of using services, the quality of living standards in CR.*
- H2: Offer of services influences the evaluation of employer's support, satisfaction with the working environment, feeling "at home" in CR, nationality, length of stay, country of residence, marital status, amount of income, social status ranking in CR, respect for cultural traditions, the experience of discrimination, frequency of using services, the quality of living standards.*
- H3: Frequency of using services influences the evaluation of social status ranking and quality of living standards in CR, employer's support, and interaction with people around.*
- H4: Satisfaction with the work environment influences the evaluation of employer's support, frequency of using services, job security, quality of living standards in CR, satisfaction with housing, country of residence, marital status, feeling "at home" in CR, knowledge of the Czech language, possibilities for further professional development, social status ranking in CR.*
- H5: Satisfaction with housing influences the evaluation of social status ranking, satisfaction with the working environment, feeling "at home" in CR, nationality, country of residence, length of stay, marital status, amount of income, knowledge of the Czech language, the quality of living standards.*

These analyses aimed to demonstrate and confirm the statistically significant findings concerning the

services provided. Results should be a stimulus for improvement in setting up quality employer integration services at SHEI CR and new rules supporting the intercultural working environment.

## 2. METHODOLOGY

The Czech Statistical Office does not register the category of FSAS working in SHEI. Records exist only according to demographic characteristics, work, and trade license without subdivision into scientific, professional, or mental workers (CZSO, 2014). The analysis was focused on FSAS who are employed in the SHEI CR with long-term or permanent residence (living in the Czech Republic for more than 1 year, possibly for a shorter period, but with the prospect of a long-term stay), as they have already undergone the initial adaptation and could express their practical experience.

The target group was ascertained by asking about the physical numbers of people in the international departments of all 26 public universities – a total sample (MEYS, 2021) and in the Euraxess project CR (Euraxess, n.d.). Moreover, questionnaires were also posted on Facebook. Based on the analysis of the annual reports, a qualified estimate of FSAS in CR was established at a max. of 3,000 people. Questionnaires were returned from 221 respondents.

Quantitative data analysis was performed using SASD 1.4.10 (Statistical Data Analysis) and SPSS v. 24, 25 (Statistical Package for Social Sciences). In the second sorting stage, contingency tables with absolute and relative frequencies (column, row, total, and expected) and a sign scheme were constructed. As part of the correlation analysis, the Chi-square goodness-of-fit test –  $\chi^2$  (Pearson Chi-Square) and the Independence Test were applied according to the nature of the characters and the number of observations. Furthermore, the calculations of Pearson's contingency coefficient, Normed Person's contingency coefficient, Cuprov's coefficient, Cramer's coefficient, Walis' coefficient, Spearman's coefficient, and Correlation coefficient were performed. The strength of the relationship was measured at three levels of significance –  $\alpha = 0.05, 0.01, \text{ and } 0.001$ .

As part of the description of the analyzed statistically significant links, the values of the Chi-square goodness-of-fit test and the Test of Independence were given as standard. To determine the direction of a statistically significant relationship between two traits, the level of possible deviation was calculated for each box of the contingency table. In case of an insufficient number of observations, Yates correction was applied.

For higher validity, the analyses were supplemented with qualitative research – coding of open-ended questions from the questionnaire in the Atlas.ti 7. The data are from 2019, in which migration was not restricted by pandemic measures, as COVID-19 significantly suspended the international exchange of experts between institutions.

The risk point was determining the total number of FSAS at SHEI in CR. Unfortunately, their numbers are not recorded anywhere – only in the annual activity reports of public universities (point 6.5 Academic and scientific workers with foreign citizenship, average recalculated numbers). However, they include guarantors of disciplines, members of international teams, councils, and commissions who have a short-time employment contract and do not have problems with immigration because they work externally from their home university.

### 3. RESULTS

FSAS entering a job in SHEI encountered various barriers. The process of obtaining a visa at the embassy and the administration of forms in Czech were identified as primary complications. In addition, FSAS often did not understand compulsory levies (tax, social, and health insurance). Respondents described their experiences with the work environment and services provided to them, e.g., workplace equipment, income, food, housing, conditions for family arrival (a job for partner, foreign-language school facilities for children), Czech language courses, translation services; barriers perceived in the health care and other services. If the employer's support or a Czech citizen's help is missing, it may happen that a foreigner who could benefit Czech science and research does not even come.

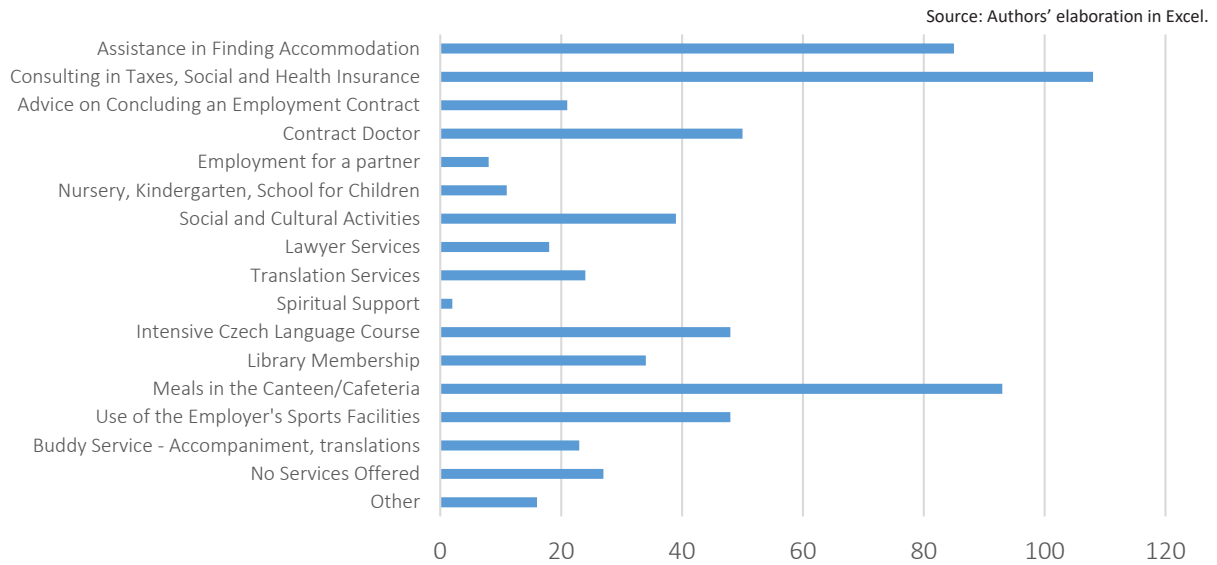
When evaluating the quality of services provided by SHEI, 54% of respondents stated good quality, and 46% bad to average. When evaluating the quality of services provided by the projects, 60% of respondents indicated good quality, and 40% poor to average.

Choosing from several options, the respondents needed advice on taxes, social and health insurance. SHEI can help with accommodation options within the institution (dormitories, apartments for doctoral students) or finding flats. Some employers offer medical treatment by a contracted doctor, intensive Czech language courses, meals, and the use of sports facilities. Socio-cultural activities with Czech citizens were offered fewer. Usual services for FSAS include library memberships; there are also offers of help in negotiating an employment contract and income, or translation and legal services.

The respondents used the provision of school facilities for their children or employment for their partners. The fewest services FSAS used in the area of spiritual support. 27 respondents stated that none of the services was ever offered to them or stated that they neither required nor lacked any services. One respondent secured the services himself as private (paid) (Figure 1).

*H1* did not confirm the statistical significance/relationship of the quality of employer's services to the amount of income, social status ranking in CR, knowledge of the Czech language, and assessment of the quality of living standards in CR. In contrast, *H1* confirmed that the quality of the employer's services was significant for variables (Table 1). FSAS who rated their employer's support as good were satisfied with the quality of the employer's services and did not encounter any significant barriers when entering CR. Respondents who evaluated the quality of services as average to poor evaluated their employer's support as neutral or poor and identified complicated administration as the most significant barrier when entering CR.

FSAS pointed to socio-cultural differences. A substantial barrier for them was the Czech language in official meetings – already at the embassies of CR abroad. SHEI services should start already with help in the country from which FSAS want



**Figure 1.** Types of services used

to travel. In some countries, communication and translation of forms into Czech were very complicated (and expensive). Respondents who experienced culture shock rated the employer's service quality as poor to average, in contrast to respondents who did not experience it and rated it as good.

Adequate income is one of the factors of satisfaction with the work environment (compared to SHEI in West European countries, respondents stated low incomes in CR, especially for post-doctoral students). Appropriate workplace equipment, the availability of support services, and inter-cultural coexistence at the workplace, facilitated by the employer's rules and values, were positively appreciated. The analysis showed that respondents who rated the quality of services provided by the employer as good significantly more often were

satisfied with the work environment. Those who rated it as poor to average were more likely dissatisfied with the work environment or evaluated it neutrally.

FSAS encountered common life issues after arriving in CR. FSAS often helped themselves, e.g., with housing, or they used the help of willing Czech or foreign co-workers. It took work for them to find school facilities for children (preferably teaching in English) and doctors willing to accept foreigners and communicate in English. Respondents who evaluated the quality of services as good significantly more often used the services offered. In poor to the average evaluation of services, they were not offered any services or only used ordinary benefits (canteen or sports facilities).

**Table 1.** Quality of employer's services

Source: Authors' elaboration in SASD, SPSS.

No.	Quality of employer's services	Value X <sup>2</sup>	df	p	SS
1	Employer's Support	17.874	2	< 0.001	***
2	Barriers when entering CR	30.605	9	< 0.001	***
3	Culture Shock	6.712	1	< 0.05	*
4	Satisfaction with the Work Environment	27.048	2	< 0.001	***
5	Service Offer	36.103	4	< 0.001	***
6	Frequency of Using Services	14.219	1	< 0.001	***
7	Interaction with People Around	17.52	2	< 0.001	***
8	Respect for Cultural Traditions	7.439	2	< 0.05	*
9	Feeling "At Home"	7.968	1	< 0.01	**

Note: X<sup>2</sup> – chi-square; p – test of independence; df – degrees of freedom; SS – Statistically significant; \* – Statistically significant difference for significance level  $\alpha = 0.05$ ; \*\* – Statistically significant difference for significance level  $\alpha = 0.01$ ; \*\*\* – Statistically significant difference for significance level  $\alpha = 0.001$ .

The frequency of services used is closely related to the employer's service offer (the employer must provide the services). FSAS, who rated the quality of their employer's services as good, said they used them. With an average or poor rating, they did not use any services or used them only a little.

The quality of the employer's services consists in removing barriers to coexistence with the majority – SHEI organized socio-cultural events enabling informal meetings between foreigners and Czech citizens. Such events were organized in the form of project support. However, 59.3% of respondents stated they were unfamiliar with the project services. 40.7% of FSAS were familiar with them.

Services are also a prerequisite for better interaction with the environment and, thus, integration. When evaluating the quality of services positively, respondents' interaction with other people in the neighborhood was excellent. In a negative evaluation, their interaction was poor to average.

FSAS need to maintain the values of their home country and need services in the cultural and spiritual areas. FSAS, who rated the quality of services as good, had no barriers to observing their cultural traditions. FSAS who reported poor services felt more significant barriers.

The quality of services is a crucial factor that affects the attractiveness of SHEI, the satisfaction of FSAS, and their integration into CR. The analysis showed that FSAS, who evaluated the quality of the employer's services as good, significantly more often stated that they felt "at home" in CR. Conversely, with a poor to average rating, they did not feel "at home" in CR.

*H2* did not confirm the statistical significance/relationship of the offer of services to respondents' nationality, length of stay, country of residence, marital status, amount of income, social status ranking in CR, the experience of discrimination, and the quality of living standards in CR. In contrast, *H2* confirmed that the service offer impacted the variables' evaluation (Table 2). The offer and range of services are directly related to the satisfaction of FSAS at the workplace. Respondents who used the services for common life issues significantly more often were satisfied with the work environment. Conversely, respondents who were not offered any services expressed dissatisfaction with the work environment.

Employer's support is related to the offer of services; therefore, respondents who were not offered any employer's services negatively evaluated the employer's support. Contrarily, satisfied respondents positively evaluated the employer's support.

The frequency of using services in common life issues is logically (and analytically) significantly related to the range of services. Respondents who were not offered any services reported no or little use of services.

The connection also emerged from the analysis of cultural barriers – respondents who were not provided with any services more often reported that they felt greater barriers preventing them from observing cultural traditions.

The range of services (scope, availability, interconnectedness, complexity) influences the willingness of FSAS to integrate into CR. FSAS who used services for common life issues and advice on labor and legal issues significantly more often said that they felt "at home" in CR.

**Table 2.** Offer of services

Source: Authors' elaboration in SASD, SPSS.

No.	Offer of services	VALUE X <sup>2</sup>	df	p	SS
1	Satisfaction with the Work Environment	23.901	8	< 0.01	**
2	Employer's Support	22.005	8	< 0.01	**
3	Frequency of Using Services	19.335	4	< 0.001	***
4	Respect for Cultural Traditions	16.779	8	< 0.05	*
5	Feeling "At Home"	30.272	16	< 0.05	*

Note: X<sup>2</sup> – chi-square; p – test of independence; df – degrees of freedom; SS – Statistically significant; \* – Statistically significant difference for significance level  $\alpha = 0.05$ ; \*\* – Statistically significant difference for significance level  $\alpha = 0.01$ ; \*\*\* – Statistically significant difference for significance level  $\alpha = 0.001$ .



**Table 3.** Frequency of using services

Source: Authors' elaboration in SASD, SPSS.

No.	Frequency of using services	VALUE X <sup>2</sup>	df	p	SS
1	Employer's Support	7.085	2	< 0.05	*
2	Interaction with People Around	6.286	2	< 0.05	*

Note: X<sup>2</sup> – chi-square; p – test of independence; df – degrees of freedom; SS – Statistically significant; \* – Statistically significant difference for significance level  $\alpha = 0.05$ .

*H3* did not confirm the statistical significance/relationship of the frequency of using services to evaluate social status ranking and the quality of living standards in CR. However, *H3* confirmed that the frequency of using services had an impact on the evaluation of variables (Table 3). The frequency of using services was related to their offer. If SHEI have a sufficient range of services, they are often used. In that case, those who used the services rated the employer's support as good.

Higher utilization of services promotes better integration; respondents who used services more often rated their interaction with the people around them as excellent.

*H4* did not confirm the statistical significance/relationship of the satisfaction with the work environment to country of residence, marital status, knowledge of the Czech language, and frequency of using services. On the other side, *H4* confirmed that satisfaction with the work environment influenced the evaluation of variables (Table 4). FSAS, satisfied with their work environment, rated their employer's support as good. FSAS, who reported having a secure job, reported satisfaction with their work environment. Those with a feeling of uncertainty or neutrality more often reported dissatisfaction with the work environment.

Respondents, whose opportunities for professional development were higher, significantly more often were satisfied with the work environment. Respondents expressed dissatisfaction when having little or no opportunities for professional development. Satisfaction at work also includes satisfaction with accommodation or housing. Those who were satisfied with their housing were also satisfied with their work environment. Dissatisfaction with housing, on the other hand, is significantly related to dissatisfaction with the work environment.

Satisfaction with the work environment is related to a feeling of good integration. Respondents who were satisfied with the work environment significantly more often felt "at home" in CR. Respondents who did not feel "at home" in CR more often expressed dissatisfaction with the work environment or rated it as average.

The same connection applies to the standard of living in CR. FSAS expressing satisfaction with the work environment or rating it as average significantly more often expressed satisfaction with their living standards. Similarly, respondents who rated their position compared to Czech citizens as good were significantly more often satisfied with their work environment than those who rated their position as bad and were dissatisfied with the work environment.

**Table 4.** Satisfaction with the work environment

Source: Authors' elaboration in SASD, SPSS.

No.	Satisfaction with the work environment	Value X <sup>2</sup>	df	p	SS
1	Employer's Support	98.204	4	< 0.001	***
2	Job Security	32.742	2	< 0.001	***
3	Possibilities for Further Professional Development	21.329	4	< 0.001	***
4	Satisfaction with Housing	13.763	4	< 0.01	**
5	Feeling "At Home"	22.833	2	< 0.001	***
6	Quality of Living Standards in CR	19.06	4	< 0.001	***
7	Social Status Ranking in CR	24.514	4	< 0.001	***

Note: X<sup>2</sup> – chi-square; p – test of independence; df – degrees of freedom; SS – Statistically significant; \*\* – Statistically significant difference for significance level  $\alpha = 0.01$ ; \*\*\* – Statistically significant difference for significance level  $\alpha = 0.001$ .

**Table 5.** Satisfaction with housing

Source: Authors' elaboration in SASD, SPSS.

No.	Satisfaction with housing	Value X <sup>2</sup>	df	p	SS
1	Feeling "At Home"	15.528	2	< 0.001	***
2	Quality of Living Standards in CR	22.56	4	< 0.001	***

Note: X<sup>2</sup> – chi-square; p – test of independence; df – degrees of freedom; SS – Statistically significant; \*\*\* – Statistically significant difference for significance level  $\alpha = 0.001$ .

H5 did not confirm the statistical significance/relationship of the satisfaction with housing to nationality, country of residence, length of stay, marital status, amount of income, social status ranking, satisfaction with the working environment, and knowledge of the Czech language. In contrast, H5 showed that housing satisfaction influenced the variables' evaluation (Table 5). Housing is a basic life need. A frequent problem was finding accommodation upon arrival to CR (if the employer did not provide it). Property owners are afraid to sign an accommodation contract with a foreigner (the reason is often the lack of language knowledge); they must be owners of the apartment or real estate, request the owner's consent to rent, and have other obligations related to the accommodation of foreigners. Respondents who were satisfied with their housing more often stated that they felt "at home" in CR. Those who were unsatisfied or only half satisfied with housing significantly more often stated that they did not feel "at home" in CR. Satisfaction with housing is related to the quality of living standards. Respondents satisfied with their housing were also very satisfied with the quality of their living standards during their stay in CR.

After arriving in CR, FSAS needed help – from an employer, the Euraxess project, or found a willing Czech or foreign colleague who accompanied them to the Foreign Police and helped with registration, filling in forms, and translation from/to Czech, recognition of qualifications, verification of documents, finding suitable accommodation, banking services, etc. Respondents stated that in CR (especially in smaller towns), there was a very limited choice of placement options for children in school facilities (with teaching in a world language) and employment opportunities for the partner. The need for support was also felt when starting a new job. Advice in the field of taxes, health insurance, and social security was usually provided by the personnel department of the SHEI.

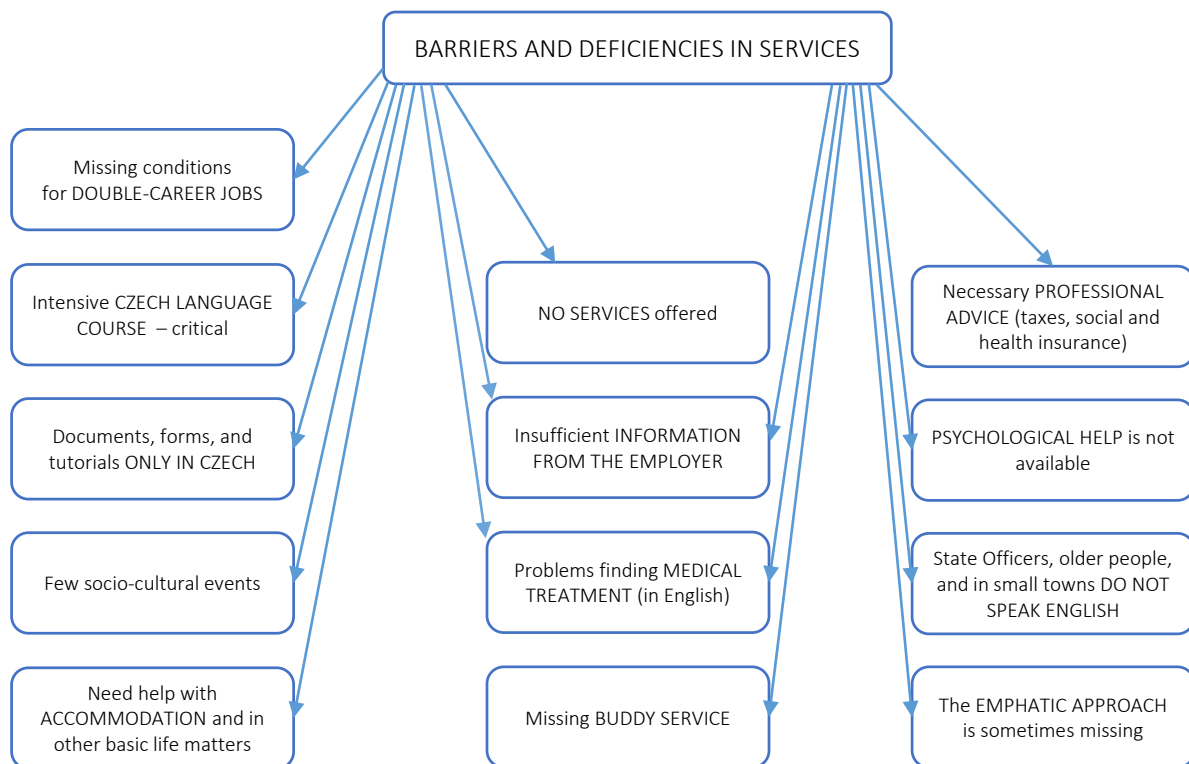
This is a very complex issue; HR professionals often had to contact the Financial Authorities, the Czech Social Security Administration, and health insurance companies or cooperate with specialist companies – e.g., PROXY (HLB Proxy, n.d.).

A quarter of respondents stated that they did not use any services for FSAS, and 27 were not offered any services. Those who have lived in CR for a long time said that the situation has improved. The Czech language was identified as a complication that could be overcome with translation services and accompanying people to the authorities, the doctor, and the police. There was a lack of sufficient information (in English) from the employer at the start of the work process and some services ensuring the basic social conditions for life in CR.

The evaluation of the services for FSAS was very different – from the complete absence of services to a very positive evaluation of the services of SHEI or the Euraxess project. In the overall evaluation of the standard of living in CR, the respondents stated that they were satisfied on average (80.6%), very satisfied (12.2%), and dissatisfied (7.2%).

Based on the statistical analyses of quantitative research, the quality, the offer, and the possibility of frequent use of the employer's services were appreciated as a strengthening element of the integration of FSAS. Furthermore, the respondents who evaluated the quality and offer of services, employer's support, their job, work environment, and housing positively, had no problems integrating into the majority and interacting with people around.

Regarding coded responses to open-ended questions, entry administration to CR revealed first-step barriers that FSAS had to overcome – complicated administration, the need to learn the Czech language, and feelings of cultural and mental differences. For issuing the work visa, the embassy



**Figure 2.** Barriers to integration related to deficiencies in services

required completed forms in the Czech language and certified translations of documents but did not provide translators; communication took place in the Czech language. Some FSAS had to travel far to the embassy because it was not located in their country, and they belonged to the catchment area of another country. Both official fees and commuting were time-consuming and expensive. FSAS also lacked information on living conditions in CR (including geographical ones).

After entering CR, respondents often described barriers with accommodation – Czech citizens are unwilling to accommodate foreigners, or the affordable accommodation was technically outdated or poorly equipped. Czech cuisine was evaluated as unhealthy, not very tasty, with little representation of vegetables and fish, and with much pork. Respondents also did not like working hours from 7 in the morning and closed shops and services late in the evening. Different conditions and processes at the workplace were perceived as another barrier. There was a lack of familiarization with work procedures, forms, and tutorials in English. FSAS felt differences in educational and scientific systems

compared to their country of origin. The barrier occurred with registration at a doctor accepting a new patient and communicating in English. FSAS also experienced difficulties in banks when opening a bank account, registering with a mobile operator, and searching for legal services. Dissatisfaction with the quality of medical care in the CR was also mentioned – low capacity of doctors, long waiting times for treatment, unfriendly behavior, and the language barrier – neither doctors nor nurses spoke English and required the participation of a translator. The frequent prescription of antibiotics for common colds was also mentioned.

An appropriately set up system of services is, therefore, an important factor for breaking down barriers to integration (both physical and psychological). FSAS satisfied with the quality of services and did not feel any restrictions in observing their cultural traditions. The varied range of services and the possibility to use them often means that the FSAS are generally satisfied in the new environment and have no problem interacting with colleagues and people around them. They integrate well and quickly and soon feel “at home” in CR.

The desirable practical impact from information found during this analysis should be the extension or improvement of integration services for FSAS in CR and their quality. This requires complexity, coordination, and availability, i.e., provision of external services outside SHEI CR. For example, there could be suitable accommodation, school facilities for children, support of female scientists, and medical treatment, as well as securing so-called “dual-career jobs” (employment for a partner) and streamlining the processes of the adaptation and subsequent integration in the SHEI sphere incl. removing the obstacles that must FSAS overcome (Figure 2).

## 4. DISCUSSION

Despite insufficient information on the total number of FSAS in CR and no previous research data, theories or articles focused on FSAS in CR to form a sampling frame, it was possible to contact FSAS through SHEI. The issue was mainly addressed by foreign scientific articles related to brain drain, gain, and brain circulation (Boeri et al., 2012; Teney, 2021). These studies did not deal with conditions of adaptation or subsequent integration or services for a highly skilled workforce. The international migration of academics was addressed, for example, by Bauder (2015). There was no basis to compare the integration services for FSAS. This is the first concrete critical feedback that should lead to further research and the implementation of evidence-based practice within integration strategies. Integration services need their standards, supplemented with aspects that consider users' socio-cultural specifics.

Support and integration tools for socially excluded groups of foreigners in CR, such as Vietnamese or Ukrainians, are politically supported in CR. The work is considered to be the critical element of integration. There are examined social determinants and their influence on the health of immigrants (Vackova, 2016). SHEI need an influx of foreign brains, and therefore, should be attractive to FSAS. Setting suitable conditions for the arrival, work, and life of FSAS in CR is vital. The immigration of experts, supported by the active selection of FSAS, represents the optimal solution to the problem of financing the pension system and the supply of labor where CR saves on demanding professional training (Vackova, 2017).

The environment affects a person's psychological and health status. This fact is based on the theories of Bronfenbrenner (1979), Gitterman and Germain (2008), and Germain (1981). With a positive effect on the environment, a person can optimally realize his aptitudes and talents, which is also confirmed by Duda (1991) or Spirko (1999) in their environmental philosophy. A foreigner is disadvantaged by an unfamiliar environment and needs services to maintain the quality of professional and private life. With complex services from SHEI, FSAS can have prerequisites for good work performance, social functioning, and good health. They need support because controversial, dilemmatic, and culturally stressful situations can occur, with consequences to human dignity and even health (Havelkova & Slezackova, 2017). The influence of the socio-ecological perspective was demonstrated by the evaluation of dis/satisfaction with the work environment and social environment – housing. Feelings of job security and the possibility of further professional growth also contributed significantly. Not satisfied respondents, not feeling “at home,” negatively evaluated the quality of their living standards in CR. FSAS who are satisfied with their work and social environment and have the highest possible level of social recognition and quality of life will achieve greater independence and high-quality performance.

SHEI should cultivate the environment into which FSAS come to work and, with the help of updated regulations and services, remove barriers affecting the adaptation/accluturation and integration of FSAS. For example, some SHEI are already introducing so-called “emergency” or “hot-links,” providing psychosocial assistance or other necessary contacts, following the example of western universities (Oxford University, n.d.) to solve crises. There are also associations helping scientists with their mental health (Cactus Foundation, 2020).

According to research findings, SHEI use their international and personnel departments, but sometimes also students, to provide information and other services for FSAS (e.g., registration with the Foreigners Police, the extension of residence permit, etc.). Services often depend

on willing individuals who devote themselves to FSAS in their spare time. Integration services and their coordination are not set. Integration services should help with everyday life needs. What is the solution?

Based on the findings, a standardized system of services that will break down barriers to integration was designed to remove the barriers. Improving intercultural working conditions is how SHEI in CR could increase their attractiveness internationally to foreign experts.

The service systems can be based on the system of coordinated social rehabilitation services designed by Pfeiffer (2014), the components of which help a disadvantaged individual in a foreign environment. The proposed concept will be practical if it is comprehensive in all integration aspects. It should include the following principles: timeliness, comprehensiveness, continuity, coordination, synergy, and availability, both temporal and local (Pfeiffer, 2014). The services should form a compact structure in connection with external partners in accommodation, legal, translation, banking, and other necessary services – e.g., finding school facilities for children and treatment in medical facilities (helping especially women researchers). The integration should be supported by so-called “dual-career

jobs” (employment for a partner). The expected result is good mental and physical health and high quality of life for each FSAS in CR.

SHEI also must inform about their services and select qualified employees with a sufficient overview of the needs of FSAS. They should have an appropriate professional level, i.e., language and multicultural knowledge and skills; they act as social workers in integrating immigrants into a new social environment. They also must be well-versed in the legal regulations of CR. Their ongoing training in socio-cultural differences, ethical approaches, and crisis intervention is paramount. Well-chosen and trained staff will ensure the quality of services and an empathetic approach to FSAS.

The concept of linking both factors – a suitable intercultural work environment and a coordinated system of integration services, removing unnecessary barriers, should positively influence the integration of FSAS. The practical impact of the article should be an incentive for setting up complex services for FSAS to improve the intercultural environment in SHEI. Data on the state of services should be continuously obtained and evaluated, discussed and communicated for workplace awareness, and the further development of integration services for FSAS.

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## CONCLUSION

The study aimed to show the status of integration services for foreign highly skilled staff at higher education and scientific institutions with emphasized information about barriers to their integration that affect their quality of life and health, as well as professional growth and work satisfaction in the Czech Republic.

The results from quantitative analyses demonstrated the importance of the quality of services provided by the employer, the range of their offer, frequency, satisfaction at the workplace, and housing as significant factors influencing the integration in the Czech Republic. In addition, the supplementary responses to open-ended questions pointed to barriers (Czech language, accommodation, and bureaucracy) that a comprehensive system of integration services could remove.

The discovered facts should be an impetus for deepening the efforts to improve integration services at SHEI CR and result in the proposal of a standardized integration service system based on Pfeiffer’s (2014) system of social services coordinated with necessary external resources. Furthermore, improving rules for intercultural working conditions and coexistence is how tertiary education in CR could internationally increase its attractiveness to foreign experts, i.e., support brain gain and circulation.

## AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

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