

# Chapter 8

## “Young and Small” Thai Immigration into Czechia: Wives of Czechs Versus Migrant Workers

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**Abstract** This article tries to thoroughly map Thai immigration into Czechia with an emphasis on the nature of the integration process. It analyzes what has not been studied yet, it uses an important comparative perspective, and, in practical terms, it sheds light on whether there is a spatial and social isolation/exclusion which Czechia should tackle. Four models representing different types of migration and integration of Thais in the Euro-Atlantic area are used as a frame of reference for specifying the main outcomes of the authors’ own questionnaire survey (159 Thai respondents, snowball sampling, conducted mainly in Prague, in 2012).

**Keywords** Czechia • Integration • Questionnaire survey • Thai migrants • Migrants’ wives

### 8.1 Introduction and Goals

The migration of Thai people abroad is a relatively new topic in migration studies. Thais are not a nation of wanderers, and thus it is no surprise that emigration from Thailand was almost unknown some 60 years ago. It began to form only after the WWII. Until then, only a few Thais outside of the diplomatic corps left the country, and when they did, it was for academic reasons or family reasons (Chantavanich 2003). More extensive migration began in the 1960s, but the number of emigrants from Thailand is not significant in comparison to the number of all migrants living outside their countries. New waves of migration, particularly in the 1990s, stirred up the interest of researchers in this topic (Goldstein and Goldstein 1986; Richter et al. 1997). In the European context, many studies of accompanying phenomena of

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the Thai migration have been carried out – prostitution, cross-cultural marriages that are often linked to the “mail-order brides” phenomenon, and remittances (see Piper and Roces 2003; Ratana 2006; Plambech 2007; Suksomboon 2007; Lapanun 2010; Pataya 2011).

Since the Velvet Revolution in 1989, when communism collapsed and a new democracy based on a free market system was established, Czechia has been changing and opening to the world in the last two decades (Drbohlav et al. 2010; 2011). It has quickly become a transit and more and more an immigration rather than an emigration country. The current number of 441,536 legally registered immigrants<sup>1</sup> (4.2 % of the total population) is unrivaled in any other post-communist countries in the region of Central and Eastern Europe (Drbohlav et al. 2010; Okólski 2012).

This article tries to thoroughly map Thai immigration into Czechia with an emphasis on the nature of their integration process. It has the following basic goals:

- Regarding the basic research, the article describes and explains migration and integration processes of a small immigrant group, which has not been analyzed yet. As of December 31, 2013, there were only 790 Thai people with long-term or permanent residence in Czechia (the largest immigrant groups included 105,232 Ukrainians, 90,948 Slovaks, and 57,406 Vietnamese – Ministry 2013). We tried to analyze the issue in an integral way by taking into account both the modalities of movements and the modalities of establishment (Martiniello 2013) in a new Czech society and the ties that the Thai migrants may keep to their mother country.
- More specifically, we chose the way of analysis through which it is also possible to ascertain whether or not there are commonalities or parallels between the case of Thai migrants in Czechia and Thai migrants in other important selected destination countries. Thus, the comparative approach, which is often called for, is applied (see Martiniello 2013 or Vargas-Silva 2012). We also adhere to a “firm belief that comparative work will promote the theoretical development of migration research” (Saharso and Scholten 2013, p. 1). Thus, the article is also partly relevant to the issue of making typologies of migratory movements. As for countries of Central/Eastern Europe (CEE), typologies have so far concerned their own migrants in other destination countries (see, e.g., Engbersen et al. 2014) rather than new immigrants in CEE destination countries.
- What is also worth pointing out is that we analyze the Thai migration and integration to/in Czechia, which is still in a relatively immature stage of development. Hence, our paper makes it possible to follow up in the future with other research activities mapping in detail the character of the integration of Thais in Czechia over time. This is an opportunity that was missed when mapping some other immigrant groups in Czechia.
- As far as the applied research is concerned, the analysis aims to broaden the knowledge while possibly assisting practical tasks of the Czech state as to how to

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<sup>1</sup> Ministry of the Interior of Czechia – data as of December 31, 2013.

prevent the creation of closed immigrant communities, social isolation, and social exclusion of foreigners, how to design integration measures in order to reflect actual needs of foreigners, and also mutual coexistence of immigrants with majority population, as is, indeed, stipulated in the official concept of foreigners’ integration of the Czech Republic (see, e.g., Ministry 2011).

The characterization of the main terms, definitions, and concepts used follows the introduction and main goals, together with an account of the present state of Thai migration to the chosen countries. Four models representing different types of migration and integration of Thai people are used as a frame of reference for specifying the main outcomes of a survey. This section is preceded by an introduction to the methods used during the research, and the outcomes themselves are divided into logical blocks providing information about the state of Thai migration to Czechia – the total number of migrants and their distribution by age, gender, education and family status, language knowledge, interaction with the majority population, remittances, inclusion in key institutions of the society, acculturation, and, above all, the destinations and source areas of Thai migration to Czechia. The conclusion summarizes the main outcomes of the research.

## 8.2 Terms, Definitions, and Concepts Used

We define international migration as the movement of individuals and groups of people between different countries, in our case the movement of people from the Kingdom of Thailand to Czechia. When defining residence status, we use internal statistics of the Alien Police of the Czech Republic, which differentiate between temporary and long-term residence. We consider the residence to be temporary if the visa is for more than 90 days, i.e., the foreigner intends to stay for 90–180 days and long term if the foreigner intends to stay for more than 6 months. The period of stay is considered to be permanent if a person holds a permanent residence permit, which is granted when all the legal conditions are met and the foreigner has been living in Czechia continuously (migrants can usually get this after 5 years of temporary residence).

In the paper, we use the term irregular migrants in harmony with principles recognized by the Council of Europe. As irregular migrants, we consider people who fulfill at least one of the following conditions: (1) migrants who cross borders illegally, (2) migrants who overstay the allowed period of entry or resident permit in the area, (3) migrants who work even though they do not hold a permit or they work in a manner that is inconsistent with their immigration status (see more in Bogusz et al. 2004).

The integration of migrants into the new societies of the target countries is an ambiguous term that is hard to grasp (Bauböck 1994; Heckmann 2006). Various levels of the integration of migrants into the new, target society are conceptualized differently (see, e.g., Bauböck (1994), Barša (1999), Heckmann (2006), and Bolaffi

et al. (2003)). In this article, we use integration as a synonym for a term of social integration. It means a conscious interaction and cooperation of actors (migrants and members of a majority society) (see, e.g., more in Zincone et al. 2006). More specifically, we make use of Heckmann and Schnapper's (2003) concept (which is based on Lockwood's and Esser's concepts – see in Heckmann 2006). Within this social integration framework, integration of migrants into a receiving society should be understood through the aspects of placement, cultururation, interaction, and identification.<sup>2</sup> Heckmann and Schnapper (2003) suggested conceptualizing these as structural integration, cultural integration (or acculturation), interactive integration, and identificational integration. They are basic dimensions of integration and have proven to be well apt for operationalization in empirical research and for the development of indicators (Heckmann 2006, p. 10).

- “Structural integration means the acquisition of rights and the access to positions and membership statuses in the core institutions of the immigration society: economy and labor market, education and qualification systems, housing system, welfare state institutions including the health system, and citizenship as membership in the political community” (Heckmann 2006, p. 15).
- Cultural identification has to do with cognitive, behavioral, and attitudinal change of individuals. “Acculturation primarily concerns the immigrants and their descendants, but is an interactive, mutual process that changes the receiving society as well. . .” (Heckmann 2006, p. 16).
- Acceptance and inclusion of immigrants in the sphere of primary relations and networks of the receiving society – interactive integration – is indicated by peoples' private relations and primary group memberships. Indicators which represent the integrative integration are: social intercourse, friendships, partnerships, marriages, and membership in voluntary organizations (Heckmann 2006).
- Finally, there is inclusion in a new society based on the subjective level, and we can call this identificational integration. It “shows in feelings of belonging to and identification with groups, particularly in forms of ethnic, regional, local and/or national identification, or in sophisticated combinations of these” (Heckmann 2006, p. 17, see also Bosswick and Heckmann 2006). All in all, integration is a process requiring reciprocal effort and having impact upon both migrants and the host society (Heckmann and Schnapper 2003). The integration concept is symptomatic chiefly of migratory experience occurring in Europe (Favell 2010); therefore, it makes sense to apply it in this article.

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<sup>2</sup>For example, Bolaffi et al. (2003) mention four “kinds of integration” – economic, political, cultural, and associative.

### 8.3 The Background and the Present of Thai Migration in the World

In the long history of Thailand, dating back to the first Thai independent state of Sukhothai, we can observe a new feature in the field of population mobility from the mid-twentieth century – international migration of Thais. This relatively new phenomena was not common before. Only few people traveled outside Thailand, and the main reasons for migration were education, diplomatic, and family matters (Chantavanich 2003). Until the mid-twentieth century, we could see the dominant flow as rural-rural migration (Pejaranonda et al. 1984, in Chantavanich 2003). After that, it was the rural-urban and urban-rural migration that started to evolve (National Statistics Office 1993, in Chantavanich 2003). The international migration of large numbers of people started only in the mid-1960s (see Table 8.1).

When we look at emigration from Thailand, we can recognize four main migration streams during the last 60 years (see more in Auerbach 1994, cited in Yahirun 2011; Bao 2010; Ratner 2000; Sciortino and Punpuing 2009; Velázquez 2000; Chantavanich 2003; Piper and Roces 2003; Pataya 2011). Not having a room for deeper specification, we concentrate on the latest era.

The last, fourth emigration flow is focused on the movement of Thais to Europe. This migration stream evolved simultaneously with the migration of the workers to the Middle East in the 1970s. The migration involves a large number of women moving to Europe, especially to Germany, Denmark, Switzerland, and the Netherlands (Suksomboon 2007). However, this migration stream of Thai women does not follow usual patterns of international migration. Usually, it is the men who move

**Table 8.1** The number of Thai emigrants abroad in 2010

Country	Number of people
USA	282,000
Germany	140,581
Taiwan	67,600
Japan	49,609
Singapore	45,000
South Korea	43,865
Great Britain	40,000
Sweden	32,000
Australia	30,000
Malaysia	28,286
Israel	26,000
Libya	23,000
New Zealand	22,353
Switzerland	22,000
Other countries	153,757
<b>Total</b>	<b>1,006,051</b>

Source: Numbers were published by the Thai Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Hugué JW, Chamrathirong A (2011) Thailand Migration Report 2011

first within economically driven migration, and only then are they gradually followed by women and other family members. The reverse approach represented by the large number of Thai women in Europe is probably due also to the historical fact that Thailand has never been under colonial rule (Suksomboon 2007), which would probably make “classical labor migration” easier.

Another reason, besides that related to migration policy aspects (see below), is the type and kind of work that Thais often specialize in when staying and working abroad. Women vis-à-vis men might profit from this situation too (see especially massage parlors). Emigration to Europe is linked with the end of the Vietnam War and the development of tourism. Thai women who had previously been providing sexual services primarily to US soldiers and European tourists started to move to cities such as Amsterdam, Frankfurt, and Zurich (ILO 2012). So, the first wave of this migration was associated with prostitution. However, later, a new model of “cross-cultural marriages” was developed. Marriage with a man from the “West” is the main and also the easiest way to get to Europe while avoiding the strict immigration rules today (Chantavanich 2003; Suksomboon 2007; Lapanun 2010). For example, in 2007, 15 % of all the marriages in the northeast part of Thailand were mixed. “Thai women’s marriages to European men are not a response to crisis but a strategy to solve the problem” (Plambech 2007, p. 23).

Thai migrants are usually older than 25, most of them being 30–39 years old. The majority of immigrants are from the northeast part of Thailand, with most of the migrants coming from the Udon Thani, Nakhon Ratchasima, Khon Kaen, Chaiyaphum, and Buriram provinces (ILO 2012). A significant proportion of the migrants also come from the center, which can suggest that Bangkok does not offer adequate labor opportunities for its citizens, who opt for migration within their country to improve their living conditions. Most of the migrants are males, but their number has been decreasing lately while the number of women is increasing. Migration to Europe and Australia is an exception as it has been led by women from the beginning.

The publication *Internal Migration in Thailand* (2009) points out that the educational structure of Thais who migrate abroad because of work is low – “half of them having only partial primary school education (below Grade 4), more than 70 per cent having less than lower high school (Grade 9 and below), and only roughly 11 per cent having a diploma or a bachelor degree” (Sciortino and Punpuing 2009, p. 27). In accordance with the low level of education, Thais are usually employed in fields with low qualification requirements. In 2007, only 8 % of them had a qualified job. Even though the majority of them are migrating to Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) countries, the ratio of more highly educated migrants is still very low in comparison to other countries in the region.<sup>3</sup> Education influences both migration strategies and the

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<sup>3</sup>The percentage of university-educated migrants out of all university-educated Thais was only 1.5 % in 2008. By comparison, there were 13.2 % in Singapore, 11.6 % in Malaysia, or 7.3 % in the Philippines (Sciortino and Punpuing 2009).

behavior of migrants from Thailand. Opportunities for people with low qualifications are very limited. Usually, they stay in the country only for a short time and then return to Thailand. Highly qualified people, on the other hand, have easier access to a new country and more possibilities, which leads to better integration in the target country (Sciortino and Punpuing 2009). “Limited proficiency in English and local languages is a major barrier to performing their jobs and adapting to the new country and, while wanted by employers, they often feel discriminated against and looked down on by the surrounding society” (Sciortino and Punpuing 2009, p. 28). Today, most Thai workers are employed in agriculture, manufacturing, or as construction workers. Women are involved in the service sector or as domestic helpers, cleaners, or carers (Kang 2012; Sciortino and Punpuing 2009). Kang (2012) also admits that a similar work orientation is characteristic of the entire region. Moreover, a new type of female migration has begun to form with women moving abroad to work in factories. Female migration is however also connected with organized criminal groups, who are using the women for prostitution, especially in Japan (Chantavanich 2003; Huguet and Punpuing 2005; Pataya 2009).

The predominant reason for migration is the need to support a family, caused by poverty or family debt. But poverty is a relative term. It does not necessarily mean absolute poverty with a lack of basic needs, but can often mean relative poverty or a sense of poverty (Lisborg and Plambech 2009).

Remittances play a key role in Thai migration and the success of migration is also measured by their level. “Sending money back home in a common practice for more than 90 percent of Thai migrant workers” (Chantavanich 2003, p. 28). The amount of money depends on the country of employment. For example, Suksomboon (2007) has found that the amounts of money sent from Europe do not differ that much. This is due to the fact that Thais are comparing the remittances they receive with each other, and they try to ask for similar sums from their family members abroad. Usually, the remittances are sent to parents or partners (husbands or wives), but many point out that the remittances are not always used effectively. They are used to buy property, a new house, and household equipment (refrigerators, TVs, etc.). Part is used for children’s education and other domestic expenses. One study states that less than 5 % is used for direct investment (see more in Chantavanich 2003; Huguet and Punpuing 2005; Suksomboon 2007).

## 8.4 Four Models of Thai Migration and Integration

We summarized the behavioral strategies of Thai migrants into four basic models for the purposes of this article. Below, you will find our own interpretation of studies carried out by other researchers in the given destination countries.<sup>4</sup> Of

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<sup>4</sup> We chose models based on Thai migration to Europe and North America – the regions where Czechia is located while ignoring, for example, Thai migration to the Mideast or East Asia.

course, they need not work directly with the four types of integration as defined by Heckmann (see above). Moreover, studies were carried out separately, often with different sets of conceptual frameworks, research methods, and objectives. Hence, our four given models are logically burdened with some deduction and simplification. Despite this fact, we believe that for the given purpose, the models capture reality in a more or less satisfactory way. The simplified models will serve us as a framework for evaluating the types of migration and integration of Thais in Czechia.

- The American model is distinct from that of other countries, thanks to the high number of Thais in the country (see Table 8.1). There is a high ratio of highly educated people and an almost equal gender composition of the population (Patraporn 2010). The factors behind the migration are economic reasons, family reunions, starting a family, and study. Generally, Thais have no problem integrating structurally, as well as culturally and socioeconomically.<sup>5</sup> Identificational integration is also characteristic for the second generation, which is why many people gain permanent residence in the country, settle there, and become naturalized (Yahirun 2011). The representative country for this model of behavior of Thai migrants is the USA.
- The German model is, in comparison with other models, based on more people being found in irregular situations (see ILO 2012). However, migration to the country is based mainly on “Thai brides,” who get visas as wives or partners. The main reason for migration is economic deprivation in the mother country, which leads to emigration for the sake of supporting the family (in the form of remittances sent) and also to improve the living conditions of the migrating individuals (Piper and Roces 2003; Pataya 2009). The composition of the migrants is characteristic as more than 80 % of them are women. Migrants are moving to the country mainly from the northeast part of Thailand, and they have a low level of education (Duangkumnerd 2009). Individuals with residence permits are included in the structural part of integration. Cultural and socioeconomic integration can be partially recognized for the wives, who entered the country to be reunited with their family. On the other hand, it is very limited for the people who are living there based on a work permit. Identification with the “culture and society of the host country” (identificational integration) is almost nonexistent, because the main goal is to return to the country of origin. The countries that represent this model of behavior of Thai migrants are Germany and Japan.
- The British model is similar to the American model with a high percentage of well-educated people. The difference in the gender representation in the population is recognizable as women represent 70 % of all the Thai immigrants in the country. Migrants are coming to the country from all Thai regions, especially

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<sup>5</sup> It concerns migrants who came to the USA in the 1960s and 1970s and their descendants. In contrast, those who migrated to the USA in the 1990s have integrated very little in this respect (see more in Yahirun 2011).



from the northeast part of Thailand, but that is the case for the whole of Europe. The migrants usually get into the country for reasons of study, family reunion, and, last but not least, employment (Sims 2008). Structural and socioeconomic integration is usually attained. For the students and wives, cultural integration is also recognizable. The identification aspect of integration is not usually present, because the goal is to return to the country of origin (Kitcharoen 2007). The countries that represent this model are Great Britain and Australia.

- The Scandinavian model is not, in comparison to other models, characterized by a large number of migrants, which corresponds to the fact that migration of Thais to Scandinavia is more recent. The migration is based mainly on marriages and is mainly due to economic deprivation in the country of origin (Ohtsuki 2010). More than 60 % of Thais are married to a person born in the target country.<sup>6</sup> That corresponds with a high ratio of women, above 70 % (Bissat 2008; Byberg 2002). Most migrants come from the northeast part of Thailand (De Jong et al. 2002, cited in Bissat 2008). Thais usually integrate well structurally and socioeconomically. Cultural adaptation is recognizable for employees and wives (Bissat 2008). Identificational integration is almost nonexistent for the migrant workers, because the main goal is to return to the country of origin. The countries that represent this model are Iceland, Denmark, and Norway.

## 8.5 Empirical Research: Methods and Methodology

This article uses both quantitative and qualitative data. The statistics obtained from the central information system of the Alien Police (CIS), which is maintained by the Alien Police of the Czech Republic, and the data from the Czech Statistical Office and National Statistical Office of Thailand, form part of the quantitative data. The main qualitative part of this article is based on selected data collected during a survey and additional interviews.

Based on the statistical data, an initial analysis of the concentration of Thais in Czechia was made. It identified Prague (the capital of Czechia) as the place with the highest concentration of Thais, and this group therefore became the primary target population for the research. The survey itself was conducted between April 2012 and July 2012. The sample of respondents was carried out based on a non-probability sampling, using the “snowball” method. For this purpose, some basic conditions were set that the participants had to meet in order to be included among the respondents.

The respondents had to meet the following two conditions: Thai citizenship and living in Czechia on a long-term visa, i.e., over 90 days, long-term residence, or permanent residence.

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<sup>6</sup> For example, in Sweden, Thai wives are now more numerous than Finns (Haandrikman 2012).

Four different methods were used for the distribution of the questionnaires: personal contact, Internet, mail, and contact thanks to an intermediary. The method that was used most often was personal contact. All the surveys in Prague and Central Bohemia were distributed in this way (about 85 % of respondents). The respondents were sought particularly in Thai massage parlors and restaurants, because, based on our experience and other findings, these were the places with the largest numbers of Thais. The distribution process for the migrant workers involved contacting the manager or the owner of a company where the migrants work. The employer was informed of the purpose of the survey, and in some cases it was necessary to send the questionnaire to the owner for approval. After this “operation” was finished, it was decided whether the survey could be conducted in the company or not. The respondents had a chance to fill in the survey directly at work or at home. The questionnaires were collected by arrangement, usually 3–7 days after they were distributed. An intermediary or a provider of postal services was used to deliver the questionnaires to those Thais who are in Czechia for a different reason than work and those Thais that do not reside in Prague or the Central Bohemian Region (only 15 % of respondents).

In total, 214 questionnaires were distributed in Czechia and 74 % were collected, i.e., 159 questionnaires were successfully returned (but not all of the participants had answered all the questions). This number represents some 24 % of Thais living in Czechia for a longer period of time. The final version of the questionnaire was prepared in Thai using a translation from the English version done in Thailand.

The questionnaire itself contained 55 research questions and was divided into two main parts. The first part was made up of 40 questions divided thematically into six groups focusing on the following topics: migration, integration, social connections, language skills, socioeconomic background, and cultural adjustment. The second part consisted of 15 questions about identification.

During the final phase of the survey, semi-structured interviews with some of the respondents were also conducted.<sup>7</sup>

## **8.6 The Main Results: Is the Czech Model of Thai Migration and Integration Distinct?**

The first citizens of the Kingdom of Thailand were registered as residing in Czechia by the end of the twentieth century. Before 1993, the Thai presence in Czechia (or Czechoslovakia) was almost exclusively a matter of state visits. We can see that since 1993, the relationship between the countries has strengthened, Thailand has

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<sup>7</sup> When using semi-structured interviews, a researcher designs main topics and their general structure in advance, so that it is clear what main questions will be asked. “The detailed structure is left to be worked out during the interview, and the person being interviewed has a fair degree of freedom in what to talk about, how much to say, and how to express it” (Drever 1995).

**Table 8.2** Changes in the number of Thais in Czechia between 1994 and 2013

Year	Temporary residence	Permanent residence	Total
1994	16	1	17
1995	18	1	19
1996	9	5	14
1997	12	6	18
1998	19	8	27
1999	30	6	36
2000	26	9	35
2001	43	12	55
2002	54	16	70
2003	72	22	94
2004	116	33	149
2005	173	42	215
2006	223	59	282
2007	328	79	407
2008	403	91	494
2009	452	99	551
2010	570	106	676
2011	611	114	725
2012	617	114	731
2013	661	129	790

Source: Based on data from ČSU (2012) and IS CIS (2013)  
 The data are always as at 31 December. As for the definitions – see the part Terms, Definitions and Concepts Used

developed economically, and bilateral migration policies have also become more open. This is also reflected in the first labor migration of Thais to Czechia. In 1994, there were only 17 citizens from this Southeast Asian kingdom living here. Table 8.2 shows the development in the following years.

It is clear that the “Czech model” will be different from the models identified above to some degree and it will not follow all the characteristics of any given model. Just by looking at the development of migration in Czechia, we can see a clear difference in the number of Thai immigrants. By contrast to other destination countries, Thais in Czechia represent really a small fragment of the population (0.008 %). This is because the migration history of Thais is much longer in the other countries. The Czech model is closest to the Scandinavian one.

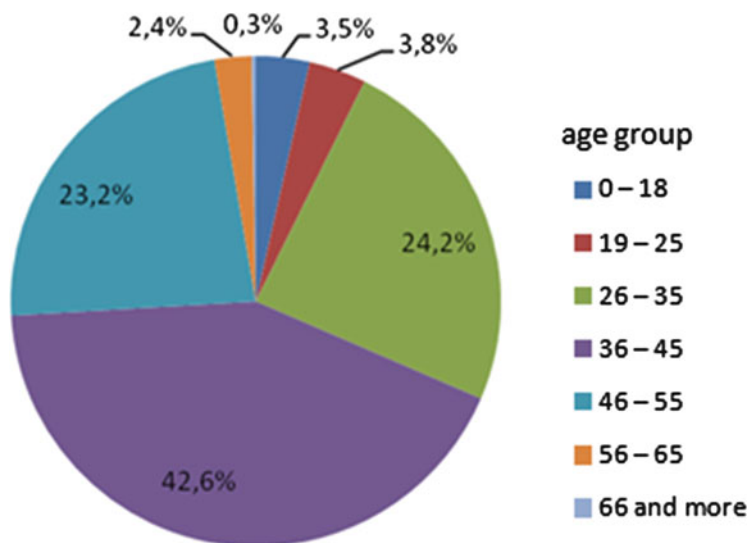
Table 8.2 clearly shows that the number of Thais in Czechia has grown. It was in parallel with the number of other foreigners (see, e.g., Drbohlav et al. 2010). It is also clear that the group of Thai migrants was in some way immune to the effects of the current global financial crisis as their population is still growing, unlike that of some other groups (e.g., Horáková 2012). However, it is important to realize that just as in the other countries, there are many migrants with irregular status in Czechia (Drbohlav 2008; Černík 2005), and this phenomenon also touches the Thai community. The Alien Police has discovered 59 Thai migrants who were in

Czechia irregularly during the last 60 years (IS CIS 2012), which does not say, however, anything about the actual number of immigrants in an irregular position in Czechia, only that they were and are there. More specifically, in 2012, according to police data, there were fewer than 0.3 % of Thai migrants with irregular status out of all irregularly residing foreigners who were detained. However, that the number of irregular migrants from Thailand is higher than the official data states was also demonstrated during our own research, as we found it to be at least twice as high.

As we can see, the growth of the Thai population in Czechia in the years 1994–2013 was relatively dynamic. For the most numerous immigrant groups in Czechia, the population during this period increased four times (Slovaks) or eight times at the most (Ukrainians). For Thais, the population multiplied 46 times, which ranks Thailand as the sixth country in terms of the highest increase of residents in Czechia, placed right behind Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan, Moldova, and Côte d'Ivoire. The increased growth of Thai migrants reflects new opportunities on the labor market. Since 1998, the first Thai massage parlors in Prague have opened, and this has contributed to the increase in the number of these immigrants.

Generally, the main reason for leaving Thailand is predominantly economic deprivation caused by relative poverty. By leaving the country, the migrants are trying to ensure better living conditions for them and their family. The better economic situation in the target country is what attracts the migrants the most, as it naturally leads to higher earnings. The same applies to the Thais in Czechia. The survey shows that the main reason for migration is to get money to support the family (67.5 %). This answer is related to the second most common reason for emigration which is the better financial conditions in the target country than in Thailand (65.5 %).

The connection between these two answers was also reflected in the final evaluation of the emigration. Eighty-four percent of respondents mentioned at least one of these factors as the main reason for leaving Thailand. The ways they are getting to their “dream” destinations differ though. The predominant method in Czechia is an approach by a contact person (usually an owner of a massage parlor or relatives who are already working there), and they are offered a job (the migrants are contacted directly in Thailand). Migration networks are also often used to move, as are connections with Thais in the target countries, including Czechia. The relatively simpler conditions for obtaining a residence permit under Czech migration policy lead Thais to migrate here solely for job opportunities. This is also one of the main reasons why they choose Czechia as their target destination and why the majority of Thais live here legally, having obtained a long-term residence permit in order to work (the actual number is 70 % of temporary permits and 61 % of all permits in 2013). Moreover, Thais are often getting to the countries based on marriages (see more in Lisborg 2002; Butratan and Trupp 2011; Yahirun 2011). In Czechia, only 15 % of Thais have long-term visas based on marriage. The number of the marriages is, however, increasing by 2–4 % every year. This is related to the length of time Thai women are living in Czechia, as the number of marriages increases with the time they have spent here. We can see the opposite tendency here than in the other countries. The first visa is given to the immigrant on an employment basis, which changes over time to family reasons. This can be



**Fig. 8.1** Thais based in Czechia according to age categories in 2013 (Source: Based on IS CIS (2013),  $N = 737$ )

observed especially for Thais with permanent residence, where the family factor applies in 80 % of cases, but if both temporary and permanent residence are included, the number falls to 26 % (the actual situation as of 2013). This makes the Czech model distinct and different to any of the other models mentioned.

The age structure of Thai migrants in 2013, according to data from the Visa Information System, is shown in Fig. 8.1.

In comparison to the age structure of other foreigners in Czechia, where the average age is 36.7 years, we can conclude that the Thai citizens who come to the country are older (the average age of Thais in Czechia is 39.2<sup>8</sup>) (Srb et al. 2013).<sup>9</sup> 96.2 % of Thais in Czechia are of working age, with the largest group being 36–45 years old. On the contrary, relatively few Thais are beyond working age, i.e., 66 years old or older, in the 56–65 age group or under 18 (see Fig. 8.1). The number of these is also low for other foreigners in Czechia (Drbohlav et al. 2010). Although the demographic statistics are similar and they correspond with the “regularities of international migration,” even here, we can find one exception. The percentage of women in this immigrant group is quite distinct, standing at 92.7 %, which is the highest ratio among all the nationalities represented by more than 100 people in Czechia. This one-sided representation is due the fact that the majority of Thais are employed in massage parlors, which are usually staffed by women (Prachakitbamrung 2011).

<sup>8</sup> Based on a weighted average method.

<sup>9</sup> Data valid as of December 31, 2012.

The results of the survey imply that the people have usually a lower level of education. 40.1 % of the respondents answered that they have elementary education, 24.6 % lower secondary education, 28.2 % upper secondary education, and 7 % are graduates or postgraduates (usually having a bachelor's degree). However, it is important to understand the differences in the educational system. Higher education in Thailand<sup>10</sup> is fee-paying, and secondary schools are not easily accessible for people from remote rural areas. We believe that the improving quality of education in Thailand is also reflected in the structure of migrants in Czechia – whereas in 2008, most of the people moving into the country had an elementary education – the number of people with a higher level of education is now rising (e.g., 70 % of high-school graduates arrived after 2008).

The marital status of the respondents ( $N = 152$ ) shows that the largest group of respondents are immigrants who are single (44.1 %), followed by married people (21.7 %), divorced (19.1 %), widowed (9.9 %), and people living with a partner (5.3 %). Thais who are married or who are living with a partner ( $N = 41$ ) are usually in a relationship with Thais (61 %) or Czechs (29 %); the rest are living with other foreigners. 68.6 % of the 137 respondents analyzed have children, while 30 % of people married to Czechs are without children. All the children of these couples are living in Czechia. In contrast, 96 % of children of Thais without a Czech partner live in Thailand.

Generally, the key factor leading to better integration of foreigners into the majority society is the knowledge of the language of the target country (e.g., Esser 2006). The language is not only important for maintaining contact between a migrant and the new society but also for improving socioeconomic status. The language knowledge of Thais is usually very low, which is a logical result of their low level of education. The exception is the situation in the USA. The very low knowledge of Czech or English as a lingua franca is also visible in Czechia. Due also to the fact that learning Czech is a relatively exacting task, immigrants achieve only an average knowledge of Czech even after several years of living here – usually it is the wives of the Czechs who do so. Almost half of the respondents (47 %) answered that they are not learning Czech and that they do not intend to. Another 15 % are not learning now, but expect to do so in the future. The rest of the Thais are attending language courses irregularly or they are learning by themselves, but only 5 % learn regularly.

Due to the heavy workloads and lack of knowledge of the language, there is a separation between Czechs and Thais. Again, there are two different “types” of Thais. The results of our survey show that wives of Czechs are usually willing to learn the language and – usually thanks to their husbands – they try to integrate into social networks and social life. In contrast, the majority of the migrant workers (those who have not created or reunified a family) agree that outside of work, they

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<sup>10</sup> Thailand underwent an extensive reform of the educational system in the 1990s. A very significant change was in the free compulsory education, which changed from 6 years to 9 and then to 12 years (see more in Hallinger and Bryant 2013).

do not have time to make contact with the majority society and that they have no way to communicate. So they usually spend their free time with other Thais and have no contact with Czechs, with only a few exceptions. Thus, it is clear that, except for the wives of the Czechs, there is almost no inclusion of Thais in “interactive integration.” As a community, Thais maintain strong relationships between each other – 83 % of them responded that they meet with other people from Thailand multiple times a week. That is of course due to the fact they work together, but also because of their culture, religion, and because they live close to each other. Accommodation is usually provided by the owner of the massage parlor, who rents a house or flat for his/her employees and deducts the costs for the apartment from their wages. Again, there are distinct differences between those Thai women with a Czech husband and the others. The wives of the Czechs live with their new families in apartments that are owned by their husbands or in rented apartments they pay for together. The rest of the women live in flats they share with other Thais. Only 5.9 % of the respondents answered that they live alone. But Thais do not maintain contacts only with other people from Thailand in Czechia. They also try to stay in contact with their family and friends in Thailand, be it over the Internet, by phone, or by regular visits to their home country.

Just the fact of the emigration inherently implies that remittances, which usually range from 2,500 CZK (some 125 US\$) to 15,000 CZK (some 750 US\$) in Europe, will be sent back to Thailand. A similar amount (an average of 10,000 CZK) (some 500 US\$) was confirmed in Czechia during our research. The remittances are usually sent every month (43.7 %) or irregularly (31.8 %) when they save a certain amount of money. The amounts sent vary based on the frequency with which they are sent. The most common amount is 10,000 CZK per month (some 500 US\$) for a whole year. The second variant is to send one larger amount of money, normally around 60,000 CZK (some 3,000 US\$), once a year. The preferred way of sending remittances is through Western Union, but some choose instead to send the money via other Thais who are planning to go to Thailand. In this way, they are trying to avoid the high charges for official transactions. The money from the remittances is used mainly to improve the living conditions of the family. It is also used to ensure a better education for children who stayed in Thailand or to purchase appliances. People from Isaan (one of the poorest region) also support the development in the villages during their visits, especially by giving financial support to the temples. Ultimately, after subtracting the cost of living, they sometimes end up sending almost all of the money they earn to Thailand. Also, in harmony with *bun khun* principles (Plambech 2007), by being a “good daughter,” they are improving their social status and the social status of their family in Thailand. And the strategy for the majority of Thais is not to stay in the host country permanently, just to earn enough money to improve their own living standards and those of their family. Replies to our survey and interviews revealed that after they earn enough, their goal is to return to their home country. This situation logically does not allow for identificational integration, which is present only in the American model.

The last important part of integration is its cultural dimension, which is about acquiring the cultural values and competencies of the target country, as well as the

same common knowledge. The main premise for convergence is, however, a common language. From this standpoint, only the American model fulfilled this type of integration. For the other models, the signs of cultural integration can be recognized only in the cases of Thai wives. In Czechia, the situation is similar. It is obvious that Thais are maintaining their own culture and meeting with each other. Cultural habits and customs associated with Buddhism are an integral part of Thai lives, not only in their home country but also in Czechia. Thais meeting each other maintain their habits and rituals – 86.5 % answered that they keep the Thai traditions and customs and 98 % of them celebrate them with others (it concerns the main Thai festivals such as Songkhran, Loi Krathong, and the King's Birthday on 5th December). For example, Wat Thai Prague (the Thai temple in Prague) founded in 2010 is very important for the cultivation of faith. It is essentially an apartment with relics placed inside, which are cared for by Buddhist monks from Thailand. The question as to whether they celebrate Czech public holidays as well was answered negatively by 35.5 % of Thais. The majority (62.6 %) answered that they participate in some traditions, especially Christmas and Easter. This is also because it is another chance to meet. Due mainly to their heavy workloads and the difficulty of gaining information or coming into closer contact with the majority society, Thais do not know about Czech culture, and they are usually not interested in learning about Czechia or its culture.

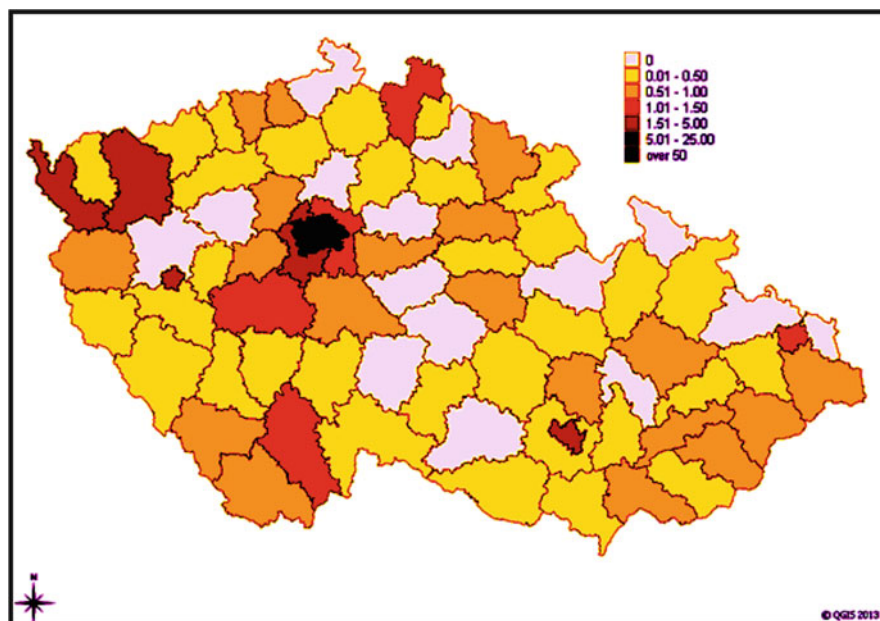
Larger cities like Prague, Brno, and Ostrava are the most attractive destinations for foreigners. In Bohemia, Prague is the dominant destination, as almost one third of all registered foreigners live there (Čermák and Janská 2011). Prague's attractiveness is even more pronounced in the case of migrants from Thailand, more than 50 % of whom live in the capital city. The reason for choosing the larger cities is that they are better adjusted to accepting groups of migrants than the smaller towns. However, the distribution of foreigners is uneven and it does not depend only on size. Attractive destinations also include spa towns, border regions, or cities that are well-supported with investment from foreign countries (Čermáková 2010; Uherek 2003). This fact is also supported by the distribution of Thais who are also represented in greater numbers particularly in Brno, Pilsen, Cheb, and Karlovy Vary as well as Prague. This fact is reflected in Fig. 8.2.

The very uneven spatial distribution (by Czech districts) is confirmed by calculating the Gini coefficient, which is almost twice as high for migrants from Thailand (reaching a value of 0.784 – see Table 8.3) than the distribution of the whole Czech population.

It is noticeable that Thais with permanent residence are more evenly distributed than those with long-term residence. This is mainly due to the fact that, in contrast to “family-oriented migration,” residence for work (long term) is primarily focused on economic activities in the larger cities. A similar situation applies also for other groups of foreigners (see Čermák and Janská 2011; Janská et al. 2013; Novotný et al. 2007).

The survey showed that as in other European countries, the Thai migrants come predominantly from the northeast part of Thailand (43 % of respondents). At the





**Fig. 8.2** Spatial distribution of Thais in Czechia in 2013 (Source: Based on data in IS CIS 2013. Note: The ratios represent the number of Thais in the districts compared to the total number of Thais in the whole Czechia)

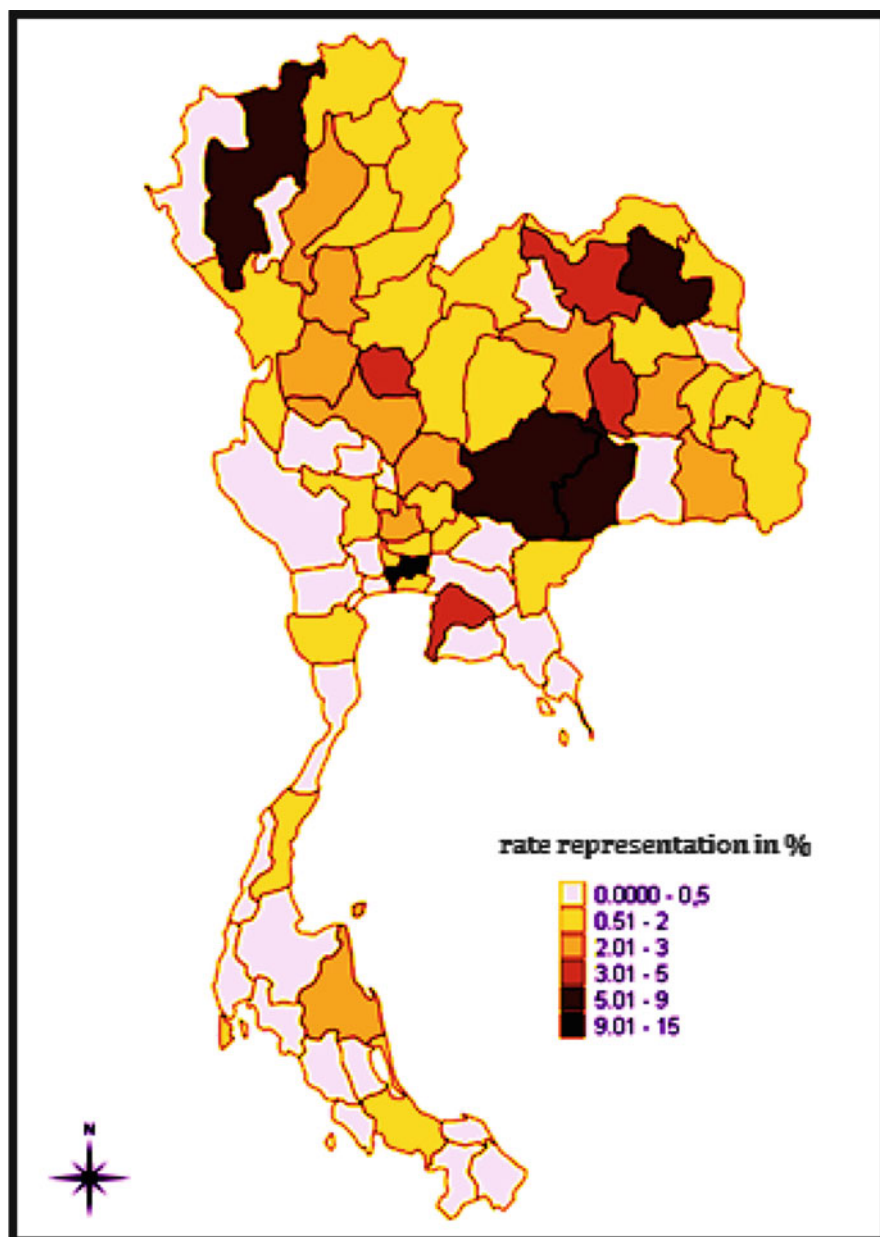
**Table 8.3** Geographic concentration of the Czech population and foreigners (Gini index)

<b>Total population</b>	<b>0.40</b>
Total foreigners	0.67
<b>Thai population</b>	<b>0.78</b>
Vietnamese	0.65
Ukrainians	0.74

Source: The Thailand value was calculated based on data from IS CIS (2012). Other indexes were taken from Janská et al. (2013). Note: The value was calculated from the data from the 76 districts and Prague. For Thais, the data reflects the situation in 2011, and the rest reflects the situation in 2010. The values are in interval (0; 1). A concentration of the population in one district would equal 1 and a uniformly distributed population would equal 0

provincial level, the largest number of Thais came from Bangkok, Sakon Nakhon, Chiang Mai, Nakhon Ratchasima, and Udon Thani (Fig. 8.3).

In this respect, Czechia is closest to the Scandinavian model, which shows a very similar distribution. The high concentration of Thais in Prague resembles the situation in Vienna or London in contrast to the examples from Germany or the USA, where the Thai population is distributed more evenly through the country. It should be noted that, as in other countries, Thai wives in Czechia do not always follow the trend of choosing the most attractive destinations mentioned above and



**Fig. 8.3** Map of the provinces with the places of origin of Thai migrants in Czechia (Source: The survey. Note: The map shows places of origin of Thai migrants in Czechia by their representation in percentages ( $N = 144$ ))

they move to the places where their husbands live even if these do not have a higher concentration of Thais.

## 8.7 Conclusion

We tried to analyze the migration of Thai people into Czechia while focusing on the nature of their integration process. Our work is based on the results of a questionnaire survey of 159 Thais (snowball sampling, conducted between April and July 2012), who represent some 24 % of Thais living in the whole Czechia for a longer time period. Such “basic research” – which has so far never been done – enriches knowledge in the given field of migration and integration especially when applying comparative perspective. For this purpose, we defined and used four models representing different types of migration and integration of Thais in the Euro-Atlantic area (the American, British, German, and Scandinavian models). These models served as a frame of reference for specifying the main outcomes of our own survey.

Integration was conceptualized in harmony with the social integration framework as defined by Heckmann (2006) via the following main dimensions: structural integration, cultural integration, interactive integration, and identificational integration.

Overall, we can state that in terms of the characterization of immigrants, the situation in Czechia is similar to other countries/models. To be more precise, we have a high percentage of women in the population of migrants and a high percentage of migrants from the northeast part of Thailand. There is also a similar structure of the level of education as the migrants consist mostly of people with a lower level of education.

On the other hand, the main difference between Czechia and all the other selected developed countries/models in the Euro-Atlantic area with Thai immigrants lies in the fact that the migration to Czechia is still “young.” It does not have a sufficiently long tradition and thus is still small, immature, and not greatly differentiated. Hence, our analysis and results can also effectively assist those who will study Thais in Czechia after some time and will be interested in revealing character of the development of their migration and integration processes over time. Such possibilities – concerning various immigrant groups – have so far been rather rare.

Moreover, Czechia does not fit into any of the integration models outlined, mainly because of the atypically narrow focus on just one segment of the market, the different process for getting a residence permit (the focus on long-term residence for the purpose of work), and the low number of intercultural marriages. Closer identification of Thais with Czechia is usually completely absent. We can distinguish two main groups of Thais in Czechia: wives of Czechs and migrant workers. In comparison with other countries which enter models we are working with, the number of Thai wives is lower in Czechia. This is caused by the nature of

migration of Thai women itself. They are often contacted in their home country where they are offered a job in Czechia, which is also related to getting necessary permits for stay and work there. Thus, in this case, there is a small incentive to use family reunion as a channel for migration. The second reason is the fact that in Czechia, the gaining of a long-term visa and consequently a long-term residence permit for the purpose of work is easier than gaining a long-term visa/residence permit for family reasons. Hence, from what has been mentioned, it is clear that Thai wives may appear in our case as a less important group. On the other hand, we have to acknowledge and also take into consideration the “overlapping roles” played by Thai women who can be both wives and workers at the same time (see more in Piper and Roces 2003). Anyhow, wives are important and constantly growing group. It is the wives who integrate better into the majority society institutionally and culturally and in terms of the language, social ties, and relations. In contrast, Thais who came mainly because of job opportunities typically do not have many contacts with Czech society outside of work and maintain strong relationships within their own community.

In terms of the gained knowledge that might be useful for “applied research,” we found out that even though the Thai women (migrant workers) have very limited ties to Czech majority society, they socialize very intensively within their immigrant group. They do not create spatially and socially separated, segregated, or even marginalized groups where correction/remedy intervention of anybody like the state or cities/towns would be needed or appreciated.

We can see that from a global point of view, the migration to Czechia is most similar to the Scandinavian model and it differs most from the American model. The situation in Czechia might represent a new model that is focused primarily on legal migration for work without any attempt to integrate into other social structures. A similar situation might be beginning to come to the surface perhaps in Slovakia (see Štatistický 2011). There is a question of how the situation in the field of migration and integration of Thais is developing in the other post-communist countries of Central and Eastern Europe and whether Czechia is preceding the development in the whole region or not.

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