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Czech green card project for non-EU skilled workers

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The Czech Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs in cooperation with the Ministry of Industry and Trade and the Ministry of Interior are currently preparing a green card project to attract workers from third countries. Work on the project started in spring 2007 and was motivated by the shortage of university educated experts (technical experts, project engineers, designers or programmers) and other qualified workers (toolmakers, locksmiths, welders, blacksmiths) on the Czech labour market. The lack of a labour force is becoming a serious threat to the economy.



The proposed program builds on a pilot project of the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs called “Active Selection of a Qualified Foreign Workforce” which has not fulfilled expectations. It fails to attract as many workers as planned because it suffers from excessive bureaucracy that discourages both potential employers and foreign workers, and complicated visa procedures along with a limited number of participant countries (potential workers can be from only 12 selected countries). The green card program should simplify and speed up the process of getting a work permit and visa from the current four months to only 30 days.

The creators of the green card concept found inspiration in the active immigration policy of other European states such as Ireland, the United Kingdom and the Netherlands.

Proposed green card concept

The green card will be a single document that will incorporate a long-term residence permit and a work permit. It will be tied to a specific job. However, if a foreigner loses their job they will be given a chance to find another position in the sector within two months. If they are unsuccessful they must leave the country.

Two groups of foreigners will qualify for the green cards:

1. Highly qualified workers and so called “key personnel” with university degrees
2. Skilled manual workers

Foreigners in the first group will be allowed to be joined by their families after half a year, those in the second group after a year in the Czech Republic.

The green cards will be issued by Czech embassies (for foreigners living abroad) or by the Ministry of Interior (through the Foreign Police, for foreigners staying legally in the Czech Republic). The Interior Ministry will have the right to refuse to issue a green card to people that might endanger national security.

The green cards will be valid for a limited period of three years maximum. If workers want to remain in the country after the period expires they will be able to apply for a permanent residence permit in accordance with current law. The holders of green cards will be obliged to pay social and health insurance.

A database of vacancies on offer for foreigners will be publicly accessible. It will contain all positions suitable for foreigners that have not been filled by a Czech or EU citizen for a certain period (probably 15 or 30 days). The Labour and Social Affairs Ministry will monitor the database

and verify that there are no appropriate Czech or EU candidates for the vacancies. The Ministry will also be able to interfere to prevent possible distortions of the labour market.

Implementation

The Czech government approved the plan for the introduction of green cards on 22 October 2007. Ministry experts are discussing the necessary legislative changes (amendments to the Act on the Residence of Aliens in the Territory of the Czech Republic and the Act on Employment will have to be made) and the program should take effect within 2008.

However, the program does not seem to resolve the problem of illegal workers as it does not give them a chance to legalise their status in the country.

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