

## **Magazine Přes**

### **Author of the case study**

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### **Abstract in English**

“Přes” means in English “over” or “beyond”. In this case it is the name of a magazine, published by the Czech NGO "NESEHNUTI". It is said to be the only magazine in the Czech Republic which concentrates on the topic of refugees in the country. It contains background information about refugees' countries of origin, about the legal and living situation of refugees in the Czech Republic and also serves as a medium to call attention to the activities of "Nesehnuti".

### **Area**

Media

### **Kind-category of project**

Newspaper, journal, magazine

### **Kind-category of actor**

NGO

### **Country**

Czech Republic

### **Year**

Since 2004

### **5 key-words**

asylum seekers, refugees, magazine, right for asylum, information, sensitization

## **1. THE PROJECT**

Main goals:

The magazine PŘES is part of NESEHNUTI's campaign “Safety for Refugees”. It consists of activities like educational programmes at schools and direct help for asylum seekers living in camps. Providing information for its readers and influencing the public is also a main goal. Hence, the journal PŘES plays an important role in order to provide the following objectives:

- To influence the political sphere in order to implement a less restrictive asylum policy by direct lobbying or in a less immediately way, to inform the public of deficits in asylum policies.
- To help reduce and abolish stereotypes and xenophobia in the public opinion.
- To encourage people to become active and to join projects to help refugees.

The full name of the paper also demonstrates its aims and fundamental attitude: “PŘES hranice, PŘES předsudky, PŘES lhostejnost” (beyond borders, beyond prejudice, beyond indifference).

Subjects of interest:

NESEHNUTI does not aim to stick to formal and legislative definitions, but it tries to include every kind of refugee or migrant. Due to this you can also find reports about the Vietnamese work migrants in the Czech Republic.

Activity/ content:

The content of the paper can be divided into two parts.

The biggest part is about the background information and theories of a main topic, which is featured in every issue. Mostly you can find a country of origin of a refugee group in the Czech Republic, especially countries/regions situated in the former Soviet Union like Chechnya. Moreover, there are special main topics like the role of women and the question of gender in the context of refugee movement and ethnic minorities. On one hand PŘES delivers information about the historical and contemporary context. On the other hand it gives involved people a chance to show oneself and to clarify the situation in the Czech Republic; for example by the means of interviews.

The second part comprises of different items. The whole content of the journal to a wide extent depends on the available supply of authors.

Within the variety of themes, the reader can find

- theoretical articles about migration in general
- information about the migration/asylum policies in Europe and in the Czech Republic
- concrete cases of refugees and their experiences in the Czech Republic
- the rubric “Mezi paragrafy” (“Among paragraphs”) which contains descriptions and explanations of new laws and other legal matters

The fundamental principle is **to serve as a platform for involved people**. It can be clearly recognised in the two sections “Z různých stran” (“From different perspectives”) and “Za plotem” (“Behind the fence”). The first allows people like state officials to show their point of view. The second gives the refugees a chance to express themselves.

It also shows in short surveys the opinions of external experts or famous people in the Czech Republic.

Following the goal of encouraging people, another important column is dedicated to the information about the activities of NESEHNUTI, which in most of the cases ends with a call to participate. Moreover, it is often connected with the above mentioned information about the people’s situation. Thus potential participants know what the offered aid might be.

Due to its unstable situation regarding its authors, it seems to be necessary to say that the relatively new magazine has not found a clear and recurrent appearance yet. The above mentioned categories must not be seen as a strict conception.

### **When and how long: structure and steps of the project**

Due to its close connection to the whole campaign of NESEHNUTI, the history of PŘES has been seen in the context of these activities. NESEHNUTI started to act in this area at the end of 2003. At this time NESEHNUTI was already engaged in other fields of social and ecological problems. The initial impact came from an unexpected request for help from people from Chechnya, who were threatened to be deported. According to its own statements NESEHNUTI had to recognise, that the situation of asylum seekers in the Czech Republic was not only on a bad level regarding the enforcement of their rights but also publicly.

Thus the project "Safety for Refugees" started in order to compensate this deficit and in doing so, the first issue of PŘES was released in winter 2004 with a print run of 500. Up to now the magazine is being published quarterly and six issues have been released.

The development of the paper can be described as a mutual process, the better known the paper became, the more interested and professional writers (today there are over 1,000) it could achieve. Thus the size of the magazine grew from 12 pages in the first issue to today's 30. And not only has the size grown, but also "the journal has improved itself concerning the quality of articles", said Milan Stefanec the Chief Editor of PŘES. He also admits that the relative high publicity and acceptance of PŘES is due to its unique position in the Czech Republic.

### **Place and context**

The main focus of PŘES lies on asylum seekers. In the period from 1999 to 2003 2,252 people sought asylum in the Czech Republic. Most of them came from Romania (474), Afghanistan (175) and the former Soviet Union (175). As mentioned earlier, Chechnya also belongs in this group.

Because of the so-called Dublin-II regulation, the Czech Republic, which does not have any EU external border, seems to be in a position to delegate a lot of requests for asylum to other countries. This might be one reason for the decreasing number of requests for asylum in the past years.

Request for asylum:

year	requests
2002	8,484
2003	11,396
2004	5,459
2005	4,021

[all data from [www.mvcr.cz](http://www.mvcr.cz)]

Problems and critiques according to NESEHNUTI/ PŘES:

- The rate of granted asylum is compared with other countries of the European Union, very low. The Czech asylum system seems to be stricter than others.
- A lack of consideration of the real situations in the countries of origin.
- Deficit of transparency of the whole asylum procedure.
- Almost inhumane treatment of asylum seekers, for instance the often extreme long waiting time before any decisions of the court are made or very bad living conditions in the camps for asylum seekers.

[<http://uprechlik.ecn.cz/cz/doc/pap.rtf>]

Aside featuring stories about asylum seekers PŘES also delivers background information about other examples of immigration into the Czech Republic, for example, the Vietnamese community, which is - after the Ukrainian and Slovakian community - the third largest in the Czech Republic (12,756 members).  
[www.mvcr.cz]

### **Target:**

According to the small edition, PŘES is distributed only to a small circle of readers. Amongst them you can find other NGOs, Libraries of Universities, ecological centres, well-known people (for example members of parliament) and a small group of interested people. The institutions mentioned above can be seen as multipliers of the journal, which makes it available to the broader public like students or other activists. As Milan Stefanec adds, a larger edition is not possible nowadays due to the financial situation.

By the way, for concrete activities NESEHNUTI uses the whole range of classical media in order to call attention.

### **Methodology:**

- Voluntary participation of authors.
- Different point of views in almost every issue (activists, refugees, state officials).
- Using publicity of well-know people.
- Combination of a theoretical and practical approach to the topics.

### **Authors and networks:**

Writers contribute to PŘES on a voluntary basis. First of all, there are members of NESEHNUTI. Additionally, PŘES publishes articles of freelance authors on request, which depends on the current main issue. Amongst them are experts, journalists, famous people, state officials and interviewed refugees.

Furthermore, PŘES also receives information from other organisations like Amnesty International or the Czech group SEDMAGENERACE.

### **Funding:**

The whole team and all the writers contribute for free. So only printing remains a problem.

One part of the financing is the profits from selling the magazine. Thanks to the support by the European Union, in the beginning the price had been only a symbolic (5 Czech Crowns). But now they had to raise the price up to 10 Crowns. Furthermore, PŘES can get money from advertisement but this concerns only a small part of the last page of advertisement. Facing the small size of the edition, PŘES is not able to acquire a larger amount of money from advertisement. Additionally, NESEHNUTI understands itself as a non commercial and independent organization: a principle, which might be threatened by too much advertisement.

### **Strengths, critical points, and comments:**

Following Milan Stefanec from PŘES, the big advantage of the magazine is the principle of voluntary and often external authors. That means that PŘES can benefit

from the new ideas and new perspectives which are brought by every new writer, instead of a monotone inflexibility that a fixed team might produce.

At the same time, this also means a big problem for the magazine. According to Stefanec, there is a permanent uncertainty in planning for the future because of the constant change of writers.

The importance of PŘES in the Czech Republic lies to a wide extent in its unique character. Evidently there is a big need to inform the public about people with foreign origins in order to fight stereotypes and prejudice. Because of this publishing PŘES is of big value.

It is questionable, if the small edition can really achieve improvement of the situation. Milan Stefanec also spoke about his ambition to enforce the circulation of PŘES. This is probably necessary in any case in order to fulfil the goal of changing society's attitude. However, it has to be mentioned that PŘES is only one example of all of the activities of NESEHNUTI. Beside this they try to affect the society's attitude by the means of exhibitions and by educational programmes in schools.

It can also be criticised that the magazine mainly works as a journal of activists for activists and other people. Except for some interviews, it does not fit with the conception of empowerment at all.

Nevertheless, the project, with its unique character, has to be seen as very necessary in order to enrich the medial scenery in the Czech Republic by another view than the official one. Of course it remains a big demand for more variety of medial products in this field. Milan Stefanec also favours more of these types of journals due to the lack of different views.

Finally, PŘES is the first step to fill a gap in the medial landscape of the Czech Republic.

## **2. LINKS**

[www.nesehnuti.cz](http://www.nesehnuti.cz)

homepage of the mother organisation

<http://uprchlik.ecn.cz/cz/pres.html>

homepage of the journal where one can find previous issues online

[www.mvcr.cz](http://www.mvcr.cz)

homepage of the Ministry of the Interior in the Czech Republic where one can find statistics about asylum seekers