

Topicality of second culture mission: A voice from the Czech Republic

(Perspectives, 2022-04)

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Introducing Czech mission context

I was born in Czechoslovakia and as I started attending primary school, we used to say “comrade teacher”. Then in 1989 Communism fell and many things changed in the country overnight. One such change was freedom to proclaim the Christian gospel and the borders opened. Many missionaries, mainly from the West and from Latin America, came to serve in the country.

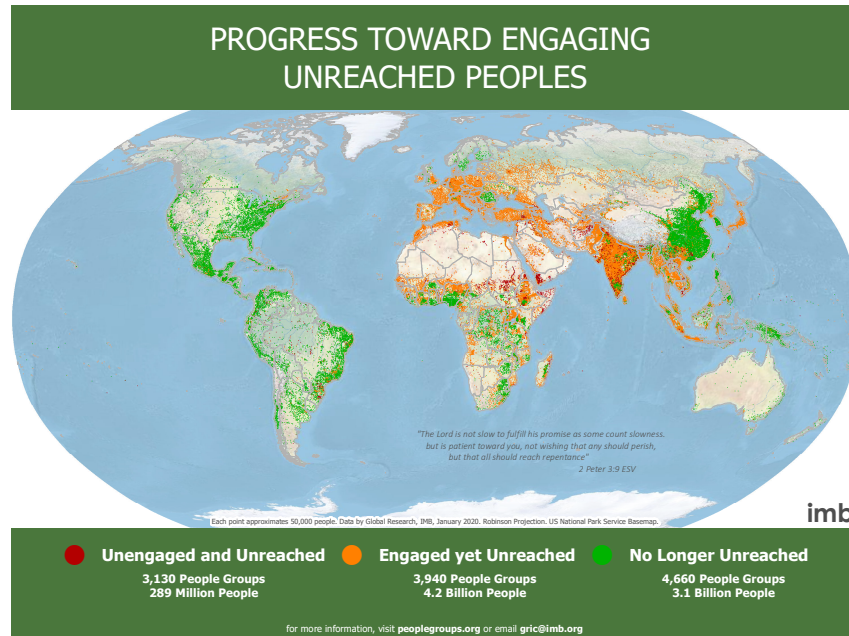
The 1990s experienced a revival. The country, in the meantime, peacefully split in two in 1993. Both Czechs and Slovaks were free to travel abroad and to send their first mission workers abroad. At first it was mainly to the former Soviet Union, particularly Ukraine, and to the former Yugoslav countries. Central and Eastern Europeans were gradually realizing themselves as nations that can contribute to the world mission. As they transform within, no matter how slow and painful process that may be, it is progressively reflected outwardly. Mission is part of that wake-up from the Communist regime and its mentality.

Czechs reached and unreached

Czechs are, if you look into statistics of some materials like Operation World or Joshua Project, “reached” people groups. So, they have the Bible in their language and the opportunity to hear the gospel. On the other hand, whenever you encounter mission mobilising materials or curriculums of courses, for instance the Kairos mission course, the Czech Republic would be number one representing the “Atheist block” of countries which are still to be reached. In the 2021 census, 30,1% of people skip the question of religion altogether. Out of the other respondents, only 18,7% declared their allegiance to a church or religious organisation, while 68,3% said they were without religious confession. Other stated they were believers in something. This census last year showed that there were less than 1% Evangelical Christians of various denominations in the Czech Republic.

As I already mentioned, there are differing statistics defining unreached nations. IMB defines them a bit broader, as places with less than 2% of Evangelical Christians. On the scale of green-orange-greed, on their map, the Czech Republic – together with most of Europe – is

orange. It is “engaged”, which means there are opportunities to hear the gospel and there is work on multiple levels going on, yet it is still not optimally reached by the gospel.



Source: <https://grd.imb.org>

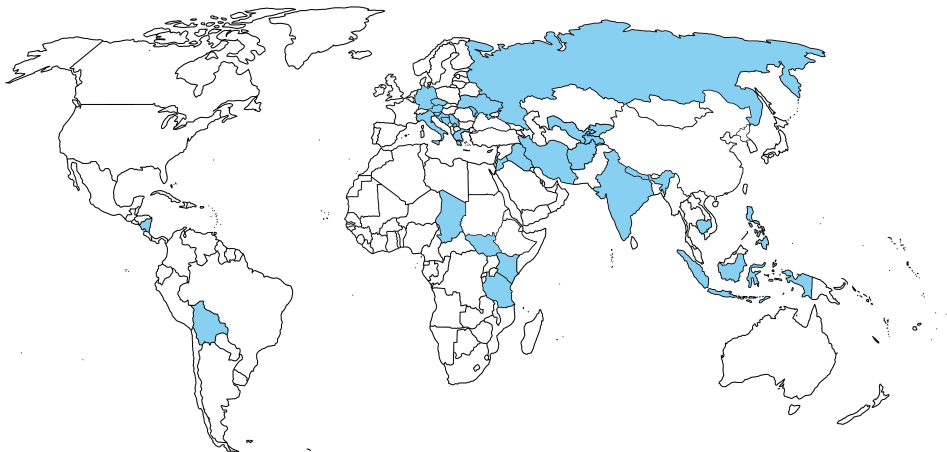
In multiple materials, therefore, my country the Czech Republic figures as a needy place for preaching the gospel. And I agree there are legitimate needs here. I also believe that out of the lack, people in the Czech Republic can give. Let us remember the story Jesus tells of a poor widow (Mark 12:44). Czechs can be busy evangelising their homeland and at the same time be joyful givers (2 Corinthians 9:7) – and send second culture workers to other nations.

Example of mission from Czechia

Mission from Czechia, despite the relatively weak sending base of missionaries, can in my opinion grow. And we can see it grow already. Let me give you an example from the field. I am part of Endowment Fund Nehemia, which serves both as agency for relief and development work and both as agency preparing, sending, and taking care of long-term second culture workers. There are over fifteen workers in three continents: Europe, Asia and Africa. This might not be a striking number, yet only three four years ago, we only had a handful of people. God has called some quite recently and opened door for their ministry, only in 2021 and early 2022, right after Covid restrictions loosened in the goal countries, we’ve sent seven workers abroad!

Just last week I met up with a new candidate, God is adding and calling more Czechs, Slovaks, Roma and others to go, not to look solely on domestic needs, but to serve Him “till the ends of the earth”. We are very encouraged by this. Also in February 2022, a new book I co-authored got published – it is a practical guide for missionaries and those who support them. We believe God will use it towards bringing about a breakthrough in how Czech church leaders think about mission and in enhancing missionary care.

The most known second culture worker in Czech church circles is Jiří D. He said about the word he received from the Lord back in 1992, after the old regime fell: “God is calling Czechs and Slovaks to mission in former Yugoslavia – and we will be the first.” He and his wife, these pioneer workers went out, and others followed, to Croatia, to Ukraine, and later to a more distant countries in the world. Czech missionaries got to translate the Bible on remote Pacific islands, bring the gospel message by a small boat in jungles in Central America, be a witness at vast spaces of Central Asian “-stans”, or carry literature tracks to villages under the peaks of Himalaya mountains.



Illustrative map of countries where Czech second culture workers have served since 1989.

In total, currently, it can be estimated that there is about fifty second culture workers from the Czech Republic, serving in other European cultures and on other continents, which are sent by local churches and by over six mission agencies. These are rough estimates, and they concern only Czechs. We only see a fragment in a mosaic of a more coherent picture and are privileged to partake in the global work our Lord is doing.

From the West to the rest, from the rest to the West, and from everywhere to everywhere

I strongly think, along with the stand of most missiologists, that there is time for breaking standard mission paradigms. Actually, as I talk to mission agency leaders, we see them already broken. Western countries have weaker sending capacity than before and mission from Christian majority world is prevailing. I sort of dislike the usual division between the global North and the global South, because it does not count with delicacies of regional fragmentation. “South” has different forms and so does the “North” – the nuances of West and East, or of former East, post-Communist countries. Nigerian, Brazilian or Korean mission are rising. There also are other, not that visible, mission forces. Looking at my broader region, I primarily mean Romania, Ukraine, but also there have been more and more second culture workers coming from Hungary, Poland, Slovakia and other countries in the region of this “Northeast”, along the Czech Republic.

Furthermore, I personally consider, there is a valid and ongoing space for mission from the West. Western missionaries are skilled, they have resources, and they are in many places welcome. I myself became a believer in Christ partially thanks to British, American and Canadian missionaries in Prague. Well, then for instance Persians in Greece can get to know Christ through Czech missionaries, and people in the UK can be re-evangelized by Persian believers. This is the wonderful beauty of mission from everywhere to everywhere!

Towards engaging full potential

A mission motivator once said that, regarding intercultural mission, there are three types of Christians: those who go, those who support, and those who are disobedient. I am not sure how about you, but I do not like such mobilisation statements. Neither I like that much presenting statistics, nor pictures of children with ragged clothes or damaged buildings. In our part of Europe, we are doing well, people have a general access to the gospel, relative poverty is low. Still, the support of second culture workers and mission projects should, according to me, not be based on the sense of guilt. It should spring from the heart and be based in one’s conviction.

So, as I see it, mission is for everybody. We are all sent (in Latin *mitto*, in Greek *apostello*) to preach the gospel and make disciples, no matter where we are. The “Great Commission” from Matthew 28:18-20 is valid for every Christian and so do apply to us Jesus’ words at the end of the gospel of John: “As Father sent me, I am sending you” (John 20:21). Still, not all of us have the calling to serve in other cultures abroad. We can be missionaries in our work, in school, in family, in the neighbourhood we live in. And we can also join in the worldwide mission – and in the first-place mission in Europe which is the wider context we live

in – and we can support a missionary. When one says “support”, finances are usually the first that comes to mind, but there is much more.

I have spoken to about thirty Czech missionaries, and I have not met anyone who would say: “I can do my work alone.” Every second culture worker needs a team of people who would cover his back and support him: prayerfully, morally, financially, practically in other ways. These workers need the support before they get to the mission field, during their stay and very importantly after they get back. By our participation we help fulfil the Great Commission when we should go to the ends of the earth with the gospel. It is a privilege.

There is strength in second culture mission

I would like to suggest there still is place for second culture mission, a fresh new wave of Christians loving their neighbours where they live and sharing the love of God to their “neighbours” in other countries. Yes, going abroad is more complicated: it costs more, one often needs visas, travels far, one experiences culture shock and makes mistakes. But a second culture worker is often also less distracted and more focus on his work. While there, he can help find locals blind spots, and often is bolder than if one is to witness to people who know him from his childhood or in his own village. Above all, there is a need in places where there is yet no other witness for God.

The Lausanne of 1974 helped commence the shift from focusing on countries to focusing on people groups and we can think more strategically of where and whom to reach. Ralph Winter, a significant character at the congress, elaborated the evangelism scale and said: “Until every tribe and tongue has a strong, powerfully evangelizing church in it, and thus, an E-1 witness within it, E-2 and E-3 efforts coming from outside are still essential and highly urgent.”¹

New faces of mission

In conclusion, returning to Czech perspective in this article, there are both shortages in second culture mission and many rising opportunities. Be it the existing community of foreigners of varying background in the Czech Republic, or refugees coming from the war afflicted areas, such as presently Ukraine, or migrants in Greece, or those already settling in Germany and Austria, . . . , the harvest is still plentiful, and the workers are few. Let us trust God will prompt workers to Czechs, other Europeans and everybody who needs to be reached.

¹ Winter, Ralph: The New Macedonia: A Revolutionary New Era in Mission Begins. In: Perspectives on the World Christian Movement: Reader, ed. Winter & Hawthorne, 2009: 350.

I tend to get very imaginative when pondering on possible faces of a mission work. Now, when Covid-19 is hopefully behind us, perhaps the international flights will return to their preceding intensity? Maybe Prague will be invaded by stag party people from the UK again? I did my PhD in the UK, it was a distance study, and some of the other passengers on the plane were stag party tourists of different kinds. Mission can be fun. So, how about to introduce stag prayer parties? Mission teams could come for a weekend, easily by Easy jet, they could pray for Prague, minister to local people and to the fellow Brits in the streets of Prague and on the plane. Just an imagination pointing at how I see mission – both reflection and practical action. Let us receive and let us give. Let us act.