

CHARLES UNIVERSITY  
Faculty of Physical Education and Sport

**BACHELOR THESIS**

**2021**

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**Motivation and care of foreigners in Czech ice hockey**

Bachelor thesis

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Prague, May 2021

I declare that I wrote my graduation dissertation bachelor's independently, and that I have stated all the information sources and literature I used. Neither this thesis nor any substantial part of it have been submitted for the acquisition of another or the same academic degree.

In Prague, 31. 5. 2021

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## Gratitude

First of all, I would like to thank my thesis advisor Mgr. William Morea Crossan, Ph.D., for support, constructive criticism, and useful comments. I would also like to thank all participants who agreed to be part of this project.

## **Abstrakt**

- Název:** Motivace a péče o cizince v českém ledním hokeji.
- Cíle:** Hlavním cílem této bakalářské práce je určení motivaci a rozsah péče o zahraniční hráče, kteří přijeli hrát lední hokej do České republiky.
- Metody:** V praktické části této bakalářské práce byla použita kvalitativní metoda výzkumu, konkrétně metoda polostrukturovaných rozhovorů. Respondenty jsou členové realizačního týmu, konkrétně manažeři klubů, a zahraniční hráči, které hrají v týmech české Extraligy. Všechny šest rozhovorů proběhly do dubna 2021.
- Výsledky:** K analýze rozhovorů byla použita komparativní metoda. Na základě tohoto výzkumu byla pro kluby strukturována konkrétní doporučení, jejichž cílem bylo pomoci českým hokejovým klubům zlepšit vztahy se zahraničními hráči. Tato závěrečná doporučení byla vypracována na základě provedených rozhovorů s účastníky a představena v deváté kapitole.
- Klíčová slova:** lední hokej, cizinci, migrace sportovců, motivace, globalizace ve sportu, péče o zaměstnance

## **Abstract**

**Title:** Motivation and care of foreigners in Czech ice hockey.

**Goal:** The main goal of this bachelor thesis is to determine the motivation and extent of care of athletes who have come to play ice hockey in the Czech Republic.

**Methods:** In the research part of this bachelor's thesis, a qualitative method of research was used, namely the method of semi-structured interviews. The respondents are the members of the implementation team and foreign players playing in the Czech Extraliga teams. There were six interviews conducted until April 2021.

**Results:** For analysing the interviews was used a comparative method. As a result of this research, the particular recommendations were structured for the clubs aimed to help them to improve relations with foreign players. These final recommendations were made based on the conducted interviews with participants and presented in the ninth chapter.

**Keywords:** ice hockey, foreigners, sports migration, motivation, sports globalization, employee care

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## Abbreviations

AHL - American Hockey League EHF - European Handball Federation

FIFA - International Federation of Football Associations

FISA - World Rowing Federation

IAAF - International Amateur Athletics Federation

IOC - International Olympic Committee

KHL – Kontinental Hockey League

MLB - Major League Baseball

NBA - National Basketball Association

NFL - National Football League

NHL - National Hockey League

TNC - Transportation Network Companies

# 1. INTRODUCTION

Nowadays, ice hockey may, arguably, be considered to be one of the world's most popular team sports. Every year, the number of ice hockey players around the world, both children and adults, increases. The growth and popularity of the sport can be seen in countries where it is considered to be a national sport, like Russia or Canada, as well as countries where it lives in the shadows of more popular sports, like the United Kingdom or Germany. According to the International Ice Hockey Federation IIHF, the number of hockey fans increases every year, which has a positive impact on the development of the sport worldwide. Ice hockey has become a global sport, and as a result of this globalization, players have migrated to take advantage of new opportunities. These days, athletes from over the world travel across the globe to play their sport internationally. The ice hockey players' migration has become a global trend, and now it is hard to find clubs in top leagues that do not have foreigners in the team. The Czech Republic is no exception.

Looking at the highest Czech ice hockey league, named "Extraliga", it's clear that most of the rosters have foreign players. Take the United States, Canada, and neighbouring Slovakia, as examples. More and more players migrate to the Czech Republic to play in the top league. According to Crossan and Ruda (2019), the percentage of total foreigners in the regular season 1998/99 was about 5%. By the 2016/17 season, the numbers had grown to nearly 15%. The numbers continue to increase, reflecting the impact of the globalisation process and the growth of sports migration.

The main reason for this study became the knowledge of the motives for the foreign ice hockey players' migration to the Czech Republic. This study aims to understand the motive for hockey players to migrate and how the local clubs treat them. For example, the main reason for players can be the financial element or getting experience to play in one of the world's best "hockey" countries. This work attempts to show the two sides of this process and find out why foreign players prefer to stay in the Czech league, what conditions local clubs provide, and how they care for players.

This thesis consists of a theoretical part where the focus is on globalisation, particularly its impact, the relationship of sport and globalisation, migration, its types and migrants, sports migration and motivation of sports migration, ice hockey. Employee care and career in sport will also be mentioned there. The research section consists of the

analysis of the conducted interviews, aimed to determine the motives of foreign players in Czech Extraliga and the attitude of clubs to foreigners.

The participants are divided into two groups. Group one contains members of the implementation team - the managers of the clubs in the Czech Extraliga. Group two is the group of foreign players who played the 2020/21 regular season. Interviewing these two groups will help to understand the relations between them.

After the detailed comparison of conducted interviews, recommendations are structured for the clubs, which are the expected output of this study. It includes information about what the clubs may change to improve their relations with foreigners. These recommendations have an informative character, and nobody can be forced to provide the changes. This study can help not only the participating clubs but also other clubs from Czech Extraliga.

## 2. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

### 2.1. Globalization

Nowadays, innovations are constantly developing and changing at a rapid rate. These contributions are seen globally in international communities. This push results in the growth of urbanisation and globalisation, thus, creating environmental, industrial, and social needs.

Globalisation can be defined in a variety of ways. There does not appear to be one precise definition for this process, rather multiple. Thus, different authors adapt their opinions on which areas globalisation can affect. Firstly, Giddens (1996) states: *“Globalisation is not a single set of processes and does not lead in a single direction. It produces solidarities in some places and destroys them in others. It has quite different consequences on one side of the world from the other. In other words, it is a wholly contradictory process.”*

Next in line is Bauman (1999), who describes globalisation as the irrevocable process that affects each of us equally. It can be taken as the world’s fate that significantly impacts each person in every corner of the globe. The author adds that globalisation represents the uncertain, elusive, vague “movement” of people, and there is no control centre or a board of directors and managers. Besides, the economic-political aspect is at the roots of this process. It also involves self-awareness and fragmentation of cultures over the world.

Harrington (2006) gives his own interpretation of this term, defining globalisation as a series of processes, different relations and institutions that are not limited by national borders and contain mutual international elements. Additionally, he mentions that globalisation could be considered a new type of global social change, bringing innovations, organisation structures, technologies, etc. It becomes a reason for debate on how it will impact the economic area, how technologies will help reduce hunger and conflicts, and how politicians can manage globalisation or ensure global democracy. These debates cover various social areas such as politics, economics, geography, culture, law and anthropology.

Contrary to their predecessors, Sekot et al. (2004) weigh in by clarifying that globalisation can be seen as a process leading to a reduction of cultural diversity on the

one hand and an increase in national variety on the other. Both sides are engaged in better co-management of a globally functioning world.

In recent days, Steger (2017, p.7) considers using another term for a better explanation of the content and substance of globalisation, claiming the traditional definition leaves room for to distinguish its causes and effects: *“Hence, I suggest that we use the term “globality” to signify a social condition characterized by the existence of global economic, political, cultural, and environmental interconnections and flows that make many of the currently existing borders and boundaries irrelevant. Yet, we should not assume that “globality” refers to a determinate endpoint that precludes any further development. Rather, this concept points to a particular social condition that, like all conditions, is destined to give way to new, qualitatively distinct constellations.”*

In addition, the International Monetary Fund (2002) indicates *“globalisation — the process through which an increasingly free flow of ideas, people, goods, services, and capital leads to the integration of economies and societies — is often viewed as an irreversible force, which is being imposed upon the world by some countries and institutions such as the IMF and the World Bank.”* In fact, globalisation and development are responsible for organising many international organisations in an array of social spheres, including politics, economics, culture. The list goes on. It aids in banding humanity, allowing people to help each one another and maintain good relations.

To conclude, globalisation is an international combination of varied cultural traditions, unique features of the economy, political system, and religion. From one standpoint, it brings people together and contributes to integration, interpenetration, and cultural enrichment. Contrarily, globalisation leads to the creation of the global integrity of each social area.

#### 2.1.1. Globalisation’s impact

Globalisation’s impact is extensive and can be divided into three major manifestations - political, economic, and ecological. An example of the effects of the globalisation process from a political standpoint can be seen as international integration, a faster political experience and information exchange, the convergence between different global political agendas and local political programs or providing security cooperation against terrorism. The economic point of view covers the economic transformation in other countries. This eases international trade barriers, distributing wealth, increasing the

amount of money over the world, implementing a common currency, and many more. Lastly, the ecological angle involves processes such as the fast-growing human population or even environmental abuse (Hodač & Kotrba, 2011).

Globalisation, for the most part, seems to be a positive phenomenon. Some benefits of the process include a strong potential for increased economic prosperity, a rise in workforce productivity, innovation tempo, competitiveness and geographic expansion. This brings about an excellent opportunity for progressive and underdeveloped countries to start cooperating to improve social relations in different spheres, including culture, economy and even sport. Unfortunately, there is a whopping number of people who stand in opposition to the globalisation phenomenon. Many are convinced that the negative consequences outweigh the advantages. Some examples of the adverse effects are. The primary concerns are overpopulation, culture shock, adaptation challenges due to global interventions (for example, an impact of the United States of America on Japanese culture), cheap/poor quality exported goods, and so on (Fárek & Kraft, 2012).

Globalisation both accelerates and hinders human development. The complex process brings severe challenges and difficulties. Such rapid changes can become threatening as the majority of countries try to control or manage them. Some innovations, however, do provide great potential for improvement and resolution of the actual issues, and countries are seeing faster progression in several areas.

## 2.2. Sport and globalization

The interaction of the globalisation process with sports has grown and matured over time. It is hard exactly to say when the sports industry actively began to develop. For example, in 776 BC, the first Olympic Games in Ancient Greece were held in honour of Zeus. This historic occasion served as a basis for the modern Olympics and all sports competitions in general. The history of sports perfectly shows how sport became an essential part of community life and why it is an integral part of cultural ideology (Olympics.com).

The history of sports development could be taken as part of globalisation. This global changing process is an essential value for the physical culture. The oldest sports in history include wrestling, running, boxing, javelin throwing and long jumping, polo, hockey and gymnastics. These disciplines have formed the basis for many modern professional and amateur sports categories (Totalsportek, 2021).

With the growing number of disciplines, the number of participating athletes also grew. This resulted in a large number of sports competitions expanding to an international level. According to Worrall (2006), the cricket match in 1844 between the United States of America and the British Empire's Canadian province became the first international sports event to impact the sports industry on a global scale significantly. Later, on 25 June 1892, the first international federation - World Rowing Federation (FISA), was founded. The following month, the International Skating Federation was established. In 1881 the International Gymnastic Federation was founded (Owen, 2017). It all made the beginning of global development and showed the positive role of sport in international relations.

There is a multitude of ways to describe the relationship between sport and globalisation. For a better illustration, Donnelly (1996) states that all sports development is more connected to the term "Americanisation"— a process occurring when American culture affects the people, cultures, sport, and social spheres outside of the United States — than globalisation. His argument claims four well-known global sports disciplines can be identified as "American": football, baseball, basketball, and volleyball. Additionally, there are some successful, world-famous sports organisations (NBA or NHL), products (Nike company), and American origin services. He also mentions that the game is less important in Americanized sport than the message addressed to the audience. The main

idea is competing, enhancing efficiency, being the best and winning. Nowadays, this point of view characterises global capitalism.

Essentially, globalisation can be taken as a massive trend that stimulates the development of the sport. Harvey et al. (1996) consider how globalisation changes sport:

- 1) The homogenisation process of the sport using western modified sports forms is included in the world's economic, political, and cultural aspects.
- 2) New social movements and cultures contribute to the development and changes in the sport.
- 3) There is a variety of views that the receptivity can produce to dominant sports at the national level.

Houlihan (2003) mentions the five different terms based on globalisation which are the results of the research of Scholte (2000). These terms are closely interrelated with global political, economic, and cultural processes. Houlihan ties them with examples in sports. First, there is "*Internationalisation*", which is the process that regards cross-border exchanges of different goods such as money, ideas, merchandise and many more, including people. The international trade of athletes over the world can be considered as an example. Second, "*Liberalisation*", a simple language that means the freedom of international movement of goods and services, capital, and information. For instance, he added the Bosman ruling, which is the impact of the European Union regarding the transfer of players and how many of them the club can have. Thirdly, "*Universalisation*": the process of homogenisation and unification of worldwide social aspects. The best illustration of universalisation is the growing popularity of the Olympic Games. It is reflected in the increasing number of participants and countries with TV/online broadcasting. The fourth is "*Westernisation*" or "*Americanisation*". According to Houlihan, the sports bureaucracy, specialisation and scientific approach are the best examples for this process. Finally, the fifth, "*Deterritorialisation*", is the process where social relations are dependent on a kind of spatial organisation. As an example, he mentioned the development of different fan groups in football, hockey, etc. All these terms refer to some of the global aspects. Internalisation and liberalisation are concerned with the economic process. Universalisation has close ties with globalisation. Other ideologies include the combinations of international factors.

Every year, new tendencies and trends emerge globally. For today's generation, it's hard to imagine life before the advanced technologies that have given people seemingly endless amounts of possible ways to enhance their professional skills. Today that is totally normal to use online social media, streaming platforms, different technologies for business and propagation in all possible spheres (Houlihan, 2016). Sport, as a part of the socio-cultural sphere, is on the move. Wright (1999, p. 18) in his publication defines a couple of significant globalisation tendencies in sport:

- 1) *Increased involvement by global telecommunication oligopolies, including News Corp., Disney, and Time-Warner, in the control of the scheduling and production of sporting competitions, the use of sport as a marketing device, and the ownership of sport franchises.*
- 2) *Using the new international division of labour to produce sports equipment and sports and leisure related apparel and shoes in super-exploited Third World sweatshops.*
- 3) *International sports organizations and federations -such as the International Olympic Committee (IOC), the International Federation of Football Associations (FIFA) and the International Amateur Athletics Federation (IAAF) -generating enormous revenues by selling television rights and sponsorships to TNC.*
- 4) *Promoting national leagues and specific teams (such as the Chicago Bulls, Manchester United, the Brazilian national football team, and New Zealand's All Blacks) in markets overseas as a means to promote league and team related merchandise.*
- 5) *International sports management firms, such as International Management Group, control athletes, promote events that those athletes compete in, as well as produce the televising of those competitions.*
- 6) *The proliferation of foreign athletes on professional teams.*
- 7) *The professionalization of former amateur sports, such as athletics.*

Even small changes are essential for overall progress. Therefore, these mentioned trends and tendencies of globalisation constantly evolve and form the basis for outstanding support for different sports spheres. It helps to build better conditions for global sport development.

## 2.1. Aspects of sports globalisation

Sports globalization as a process makes a powerful impact and significant contribution to the world of professional sports. The views on sports globalization vary. The process has its supporters as well as opponents. Thibault (2009) defines the positive aspects of sports globalization in the following ways:

- 1) The first and primary is spreading different sports all over the world. It reflects on the enormous diversity of athletes of various nationalities in professional sports clubs and leagues worldwide.
- 2) The second thing is the growing number of countries which are participating in international sports competitions.
- 3) The power of international sport has a significant impact on all social spheres, including politics.
- 4) Sport and cultural life inevitably involve global media.
- 5) The establishment of sports Bachelor's, Master's, or PhD programmes in colleges and universities worldwide is considered as a good impact of globalisation.

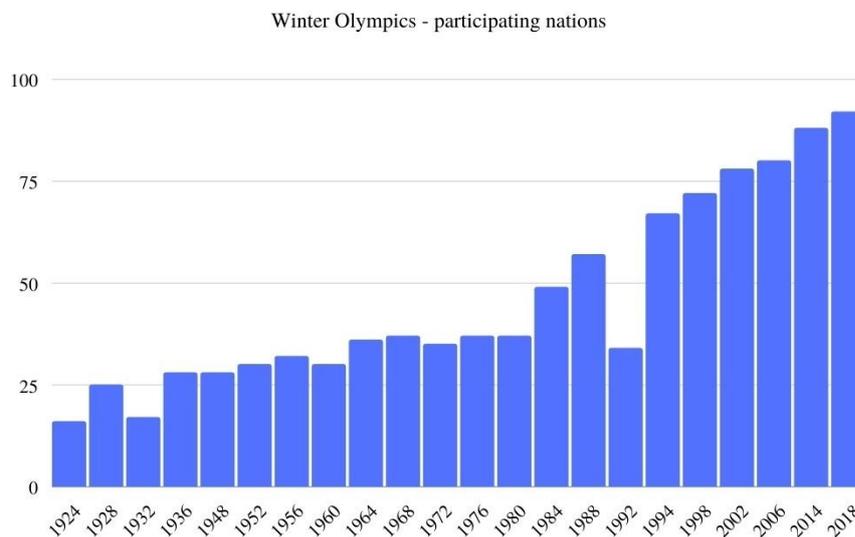
This work provides detailed examples of each aspect to help the reader better understand the advantages of sports concerning globalisation. Before all else, the team sports industry is growing and mainly prevailing on the North American, European and Asian markets. Currently, there are major “big four” professional team sports leagues in the United States and Canada - National Hockey League (NHL), National Basketball Association (NBA), National Football League (NFL), Major League Baseball (MLB) (Weston, 2006).

The European market is filled with various types of sport with its professional leagues. According to Parker (2019) the most popular team sport in Europe is football. There are thunders football leagues like for example English “Premier League”, Spanish “La Liga” and German “Bundesliga”. The second one is basketball with “Euroleague Basketball”. Also, ice hockey with “Kontinental Hockey League” and “Champions Hockey League”, as well as handball with “EHF Champions League” likewise can be taken as popular European sports. The existence of a professional level allows athletes over the world to aspire to the highest level of their career, choosing the country in which

there are the most suitable conditions for their future development, better training system and sporting performance.

The second aspect of globalisation impact relates to the changing number of participating nations in international competitions (Thibault, 2009). For example, the structure of the Olympic Movement is constantly developing. These changes have reached the major constituents, the format of the event, the number and types of sports, technologies, the entire social media landscape, participating nations, and athletes. For a better illustration, according to Olympics.com data, there is an average of participating countries throughout the whole history of the Winter Olympics:

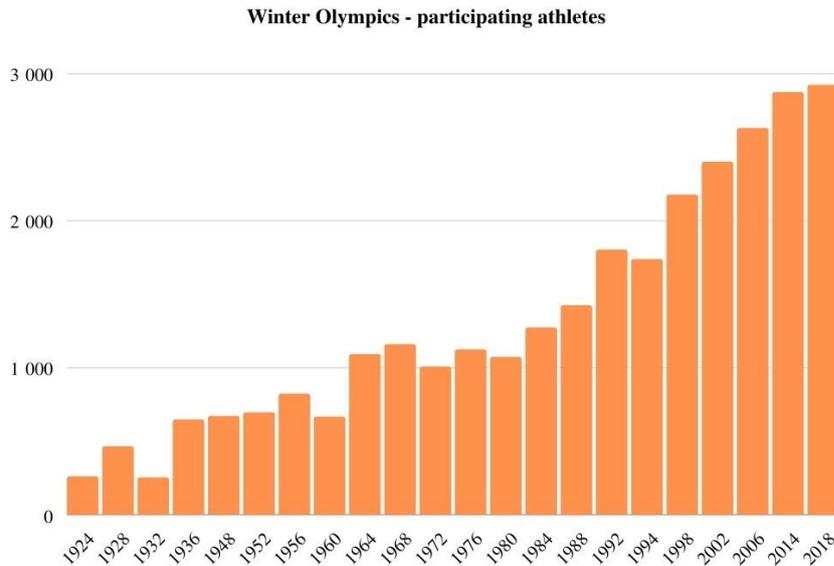
Figure 1- The number of participating nations through the history of Winter Olympics



*Resource: The graph was compiled by the author based on data from the Olympics.com*

Figure 2 contains information about the changing number of participating athletes throughout the same years (Olympics.com). In this date it is possible to see how the numbers of nations and athletes have increased over the years.

Figure 2 - The number of participating athletes through the history of Winter Olympics



*Resource: The graph was compiled by the author based on data from the Olympics.com*

The 13th Winter Olympics, taking place in the United States - circa 1980, has a record of only 1072 participating athletes from a mere 37 countries. This stands as a clear example of how the globalisation process could affect the changing basis of international professional sports competitions. A tremendous change can be seen when looking at the statistics for the 23rd Winter Games in South Korea, taking place in 2018. There are a recorded 2922 participating athletes from 92 countries (Olympics.com).

The third aspect, as mentioned above, characterises the relations between sport and politics (Thibault, 2009). Nowadays, there is a widespread opinion that sport stays out of politics, although the authorities frequently use sport as the policy tool. The cooperation between North and South Korean athletes at the 23rd Winter Olympics in 2018 in Pyeongchang, South Korea, can be taken as a good example. Both countries had marched under one unified flag and formed a joint North-South women's hockey team. This cooperation helped both countries to reach an agreement in some international relations and demonstrated to the world the way how sport can help to settle confrontation situations (Sang-han, 2018).

The fourth aspect described relations between sport and media. With developments in technology, there are new streaming tv-channels, online streaming platforms, and different types of social media almost every year (Thibault, 2009). Sports

marketing is fast-changing and actively developing. All marketing specialists are discussing the perfect way to propagate the sports industry. One of the popular ways these days is the trend of social media. It is the fastest and best way for both the clubs and athletes to gain popularity and get more extensive attention in their particular sport (Newman, 2017). The next one, for example, could be the growth film industry. It likewise has a very effective and positively influential role in society. It perfectly shows sports management and organisation inside and helps to build a good attitude of sport. Nowadays, people can find a relevant film or series on every single sport. For example, there are well-known series “Last Chance U” (American football), “I, Tonya” (figure skating), “Icarus” (cycling), “I am Bolt” (athletics) and many more. Thanks to this, sport is considered from a different point of view, and its influence grows. It helps people see how this industry works inside: the athlete's life and their training process, clubs' management and their past or possible future projects, a business side of the sport, history of particular sports or athletes' autobiography.

The next and the last aspect is related to the growing number of sports programmes in schools. There are various such as exercise science and psychology, sports management, coaching and physical education, physiotherapy in sport and sports technology (Thibault, 2009). It's hard to say how many colleges or universities have sports specialities. For example, there are The Ohio State University (Columbus, Ohio, U.S.A), Loughborough University (East Midlands, England, U.K), and St. Catherine University (Matsuyama, Japan). Almost all universities in the world could offer programmes orientated on sports science. It significantly helps to make the international sports industry more progressive and prosperous.

All debates on issues of globalisation may help to understand the role of the sport. The opponents could say sports globalization brings too intensive changes. Not all worldwide trends have such positive effects on the sport system. Soon these changes may start having negative consequences. There is a broad range of views among the experts regarding the possible structure of the sport. However, both sides have the truth. The diversity of opinions forms the basis of the sports industry, helping it develop in the right direction (Houlihan, 2016).

## 2.3. Migration

The phenomenon of migration is characterized in various ways. Kahanec and Zimmermann (2008, p. 2) clarify that *“the international migration of people lies at the core of the ongoing process of globalization. People migrate to improve their economic prospects, ensure a more secure living environment, re-unite with their family members, or avoid persecution in their country of origin.”* As previously mentioned, globalisation aims to develop human relations and bring people together, using the world language, reducing national borders between some states and many more. The impact is enormous, both positive and negative, and it affects all segments of society. Therefore, classifying migration as one result of globalisation (Lidák, 2010).

It's possible to describe the meaning of migration in many ways. According to Dictionary.cambridge.org, migration means *“the process of a person or people travelling to a new place or country, usually in order to find work and live there temporarily or permanently.”* However, not only humans migrate but also any biological species like animals or even plants.

These days migration has become a global trend. According to Migrationdataportal.org, at the mid-year of 2020, 281 million migrants lived abroad, where 15% of migrants are below 20 years, 12% are older than 65, and 73% are of working age. The most considerable per cent of migrants lives in Europe. It is 86,7%. The median age of migrants is 39 years. Female migrants constitute 48% of this amount, and 12% are children. Most migrants are going abroad to improve their well-being. That is why this year, there are about 164 million labour migrants, which is 59,2% of the migrant population in 2017.

International migration is an integral part of globalisation processes. Together with technological modernisation and development, these processes stimulate and impact migration and even contribute to its development. Consequently, human migration is a natural and normal human activity taken as one of the most critical global problems. It has been seen as a mere mechanical movement of people and a complex process involving many social and economic aspects (Lidák, 2010).

### 2.3.1. Migration types

Kahanec and Zimmermann (2008, p. 2) illustrated different types of modern migration: *“driven by a multitude of possible reasons, migrants may move temporarily*

*or permanently, transnationally and nationally, individually or in groups, return to their countries of origin or migrate to another country, or move between two or more countries in a circular way.*” Based on this explanation of migration, it’s possible to identify several types of migration.

The migration could be divided into internal and international migration. Internal (domestic) migration is a movement within a country. For example, it may be travel for the reason of working or education. International migration is more global. It’s a permanent, long-term or short-term movement of individuals or groups of people across international borders. People seek to leave the country they live in into an economically better-developed country for various reasons (Lid’ák, 2010).

Referring to Palát (2013), there are different types of migration:

1) Self-imposed or forced.

For example, the USA’s category 5 Atlantic hurricane Katrina in August 2005 caused many deaths and incredible destruction. Because of this occasion, many people from New Orleans and the surrounding areas had lost everything, became homeless and didn’t have anything to eat. It caused massive internal displacements in the USA, which could be characterised as forced migration.

2) Individual, a group of people, the massive displacement, or the mass exodus.

A trade of athletes can be exemplified as individual migration. Every year between the seasons, the professional sports leagues are used for trading players. It is a transaction between local clubs or foreign clubs. These tradings are standard “procedure” in the more significant leagues as North American NHL, NBA or European KHL. Players can choose to play somewhere abroad for some reasons and automatically become migrants.

3) Short-term, long-term, or transitional.

The Erasmus Programme is an excellent example of short-term migration. It is an international exchange programme, where students from all over the world can study abroad for 1 or 2 semesters. Usually, this programme is six months or one year long. That is why it can be defined as the short-term displacement of people.

4) Legal or illegal.

Nowadays an illegal migration is an important problem for some countries. A good example can be the wave of young Nigerian people who illegally migrate to Europe for better employment, social equity, or education. Usually, it is France, Germany, or the United Kingdom.

The fundamental dynamics of migration depend on the general tendency of the specific country to migrate and the presence of purposes for migration (social, economic, political, ethnic, religious, demographic) and environmental reasons.

### 2.3.2. Migrants

The migration of the population has played an outstanding role in the history of humanity. According to Dictionary.cambridge.org, a migrant is “*a person that travels to a different country or place, often in order to find work*”. The definition of the migrant can be divided into two types – immigrant and emigrant. Based on Dictionary.cambridge.org, an immigrant is “*a person who has come into a foreign country in order to live there*”. On the other hand, an emigrant is considered “*someone who leaves their country in order to live permanently in another country*”. Besides, Palát (2013) mentions the following categorisation of migrants:

- 1) Refugees
- 2) Individuals who are located outside his or her home country and have legitimate concerns about persecution on the grounds of racial, religious, national, or social class or his or her unacceptance of particular political views.
- 3) Asylum seekers
- 4) Illegal migrants
- 5) Temporary labour migrants
- 6) Highly competent migrants
- 7) Family members
- 8) Returnees

Groups of migrants living abroad join together into well-organized, sustainable communities that help home and host countries cooperate fully. Consequently, financial, cultural, and human capital and information and ideas actively circulate within these communities. Migration has become an integral part of the modern global economic system and a powerful source of its development (Lid'ák, 2010).

In view of the preceding, migration is a complex economic, social, and political process involving the movement of people from one country to another. The main reason for migration is the difficult financial situation in their origin countries and their desire to find better-paid jobs. The political or social status in the home country of migrants has a vital role likewise. The main directions of migration flows are economically developed countries (for example, the United States, Canada, the United Kingdom and Western European countries). In recent years, however, the Middle East is famous for its oil reserves and has become increasingly attractive to migrants. For both sides, migration has positive and negative consequences. The main positive factor for the host country is that migrants are cheap labour. However, there are also negative aspects. For sending countries, the main benefit is remittances. Also, emigration relieves labour market tensions. Based on the problems and consequences, each State chooses a specific migration policy that regulates all the processes related to migration (Dingle & Drake, 2007).

### 2.3.3. Sports migration

The migration of athletes is natural and accessible, and it is not a novelty nowadays. In search of better leagues, teams, training plans, earnings, or the opportunities to compete in some major world's international competitions, many athletes, coaches, or even managers migrate to other countries and sometimes even renounce their citizenship. Weston (2006, p. 831) characterises sport migration as a *“player movement in international athletics is, essentially, sports’ version of free trade. The global connection through sport and the increasing presence of international athletes are generally welcome and beneficial. The expanded market of talent increases the quality of competition for the consumer fan and the strength of athletic programs at colleges and universities”*. Thus, sports migration is regarded as one of the types of migration, and it is closely bound up with the sports industry.

Falcous and Maguire (2011) define that the tendency of migration of high-skilled people, including professional athletes, rapidly increases these days. The controversy over a "brain drain" has moved to debates about "brain exchange" and "brain circulation." As for elite athletes, the exchange and circulation include not only “brain” but physical fitness as well. It involves educators, coaches, performers, etc. Orłowski et al. (2016) defined that for the elite sport coaches, the exchange includes the professional know-how, which is provided to the athletes from other countries.

Besides, Maguire (1996) identifies many factors on which sports labour migration can depend. Movement of sports labour can occur between countries on the same continents or take a transcontinental character. Time also plays an important role. Professional athletes can migrate for a season or longer or even stay in the “host” country and change their allegiance. In addition, a type of sport takes place in this process because a particular sport can determine the form of migration. For example, in rugby, a migration is seasonal, but in tennis, athletes often shift their place of work each week.

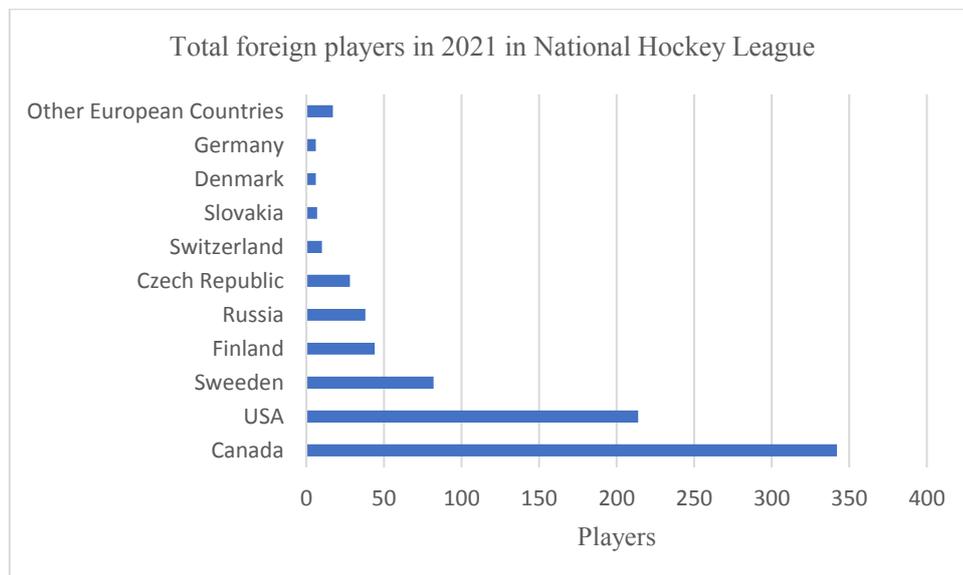
The history of sport knows many cases when athletes changed their allegiance to the different countries to compete at the Olympic Games. Hoddgets (2018) said that 178 athletes, which is about 6% of all participants, will compete for a non-native nation. In fact, these changes are usual for the athletes because for some of them. It's the only opportunity to participate in international competitions such as the Olympic Games. For example, the American-born snowboarder Vic Wild, who had received a Russian passport, brought two gold medals to Russia at the Olympic Games in Sochi in 2014. The American-Jamaican bobsledder Jazmine Fenlator-Victorian changed her allegiance to Jamaica after competing in the American team at the Olympics in Sochi.

Nowadays, the percentage of foreign athletes playing professionally abroad is constantly growing. Every professional sports league is trying to get foreign athletes. From the league's point of view, it helps to improve the image of clubs. For athletes, it's an excellent chance to enhance their career and incomes. There are several globally popular professional sports leagues:

- 1) NFL - National Football League, American football (the United States)
- 2) MLB - Major League Baseball, baseball (the United States, Canada)
- 3) NBA - National Basketball Association, basketball (the United States, Canada)
- 4) NHL - National Hockey League, ice hockey (the United States, Canada)
- 5) KHL - Kontinental Hockey League, ice hockey (Russia, Belarus, China, Kazakhstan, Latvia, Finland)
- 6) Premier League - soccer (England, Wales)
- 7) La Liga - soccer (Spain)
- 8) Bundesliga - soccer (Germany)
- 9) UEFA Champions League - soccer (European countries)
- 10) FIA Formula One World Championship - auto racing (Worldwide)

All leagues above are globally known. Their income reaches millions or sometimes even billions of dollars per year, which allows them to have a special budget for recruiting new international players. According to Szporer (2021), in NHL in season 20/21 there are 238 international players from Europe (Sweden - (82 players) 10,3%, Finland - (44 players) 5,5%, Russia - (38 players) 4,8%, Czech Republic - (28 players) 3,5%, Switzerland - (10 players) 1,3%, Slovakia - (7 players) 0,9%, Denmark - (6 players) 0,8%, Germany - (6 players) 0,8% and 17 players from other European countries - 2,3%) and 556 players from North America (Canada - (342)43,1%, USA - (214)27%). In total, there are 794 players. In fact, it is the most known ice hockey league in the world, and this is why it is packed of foreigners (Helfrick, 2021). All numbers mentioned above are presented on the Figure 3 below.

Figure 3 - Total foreign players in 2021 in National Hockey League

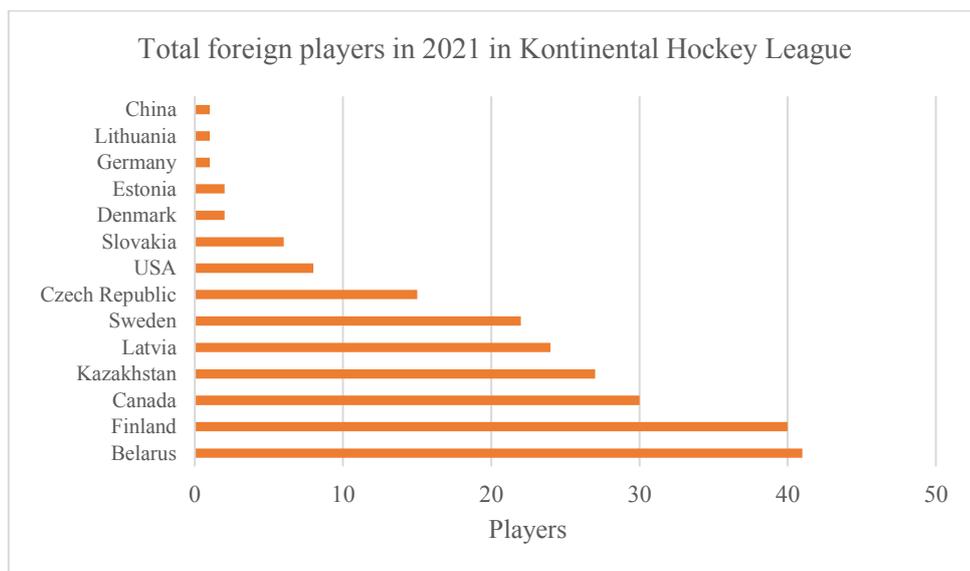


*Resource: The graph was compiled by the author based on data of Szporer (2021)*

On the other side, there is the Russian KHL league. It is the second known ice hockey league based in Europe (Helfrick, 2021). This league is known for its diversity of players and teams. What about foreigners who played the 2020/21 season? Based on Sport-express.ru (2021), it is possible to show the whole picture of foreigners' presence. The KHL is dominated by Russian players, with 630. It can be caused by the fact that most of the clubs are Russian. Figure 4 below shows the other nationalities represented in the KHL. Then, there are countries like Belarus with 41 players, Finland with 40, Canada with 27. Kazakhstan has 27 players in the league, Latvia 24, and Sweden - 22. Part of this can be explained by the location of one team in each of Belarus, China,

Finland, Kazakhstan, and Latvia. The Czech Republic has only 15 players, and some countries have several players. These are the USA with eight players, Slovakia with six, Denmark and Estonia have two, and all Germany, Lithuania and China have only one athlete. Totally, KHL had 850 players who participated in the 2020/21 regular season, and NHL had 796 players. Without Russians, there were about 200 foreign players in KHL this season. Same as in NHL, without Americans and Canadians, there was an almost identical number of athletes.

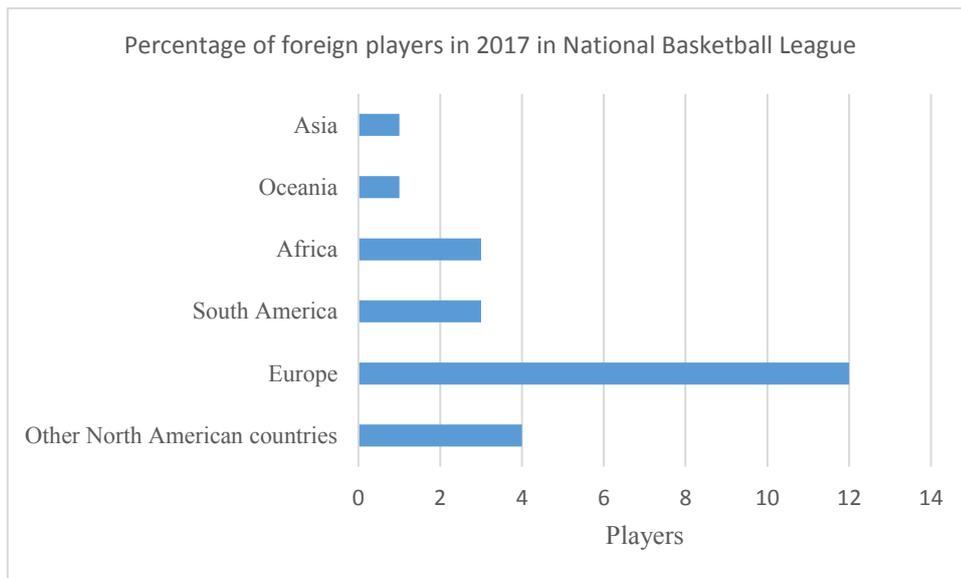
Figure 4 - Total foreign players in 2021 in Kontinental Hockey League



*Resource: The graph was compiled by the author based on data of Sport-express.ru (2021)*

According to Gregor et al. (2017), for another example, in the NBA's 2016/17 regular season there were 80% of players from North America, USA - 76% (not presented on the graph for a better illustration) and other North American countries - 4%, and 12% from Europe, 3% from South America, 3% from Africa, almost 2% from Oceania and less than 1% from Asia. Based on these two graphs, in comparison with the NHL, the NBA has less numbers of international players. It can be affected by the popularity of this sport in other countries.

Figure 5 - Percentage of foreign players in 2017 in National Basketball League

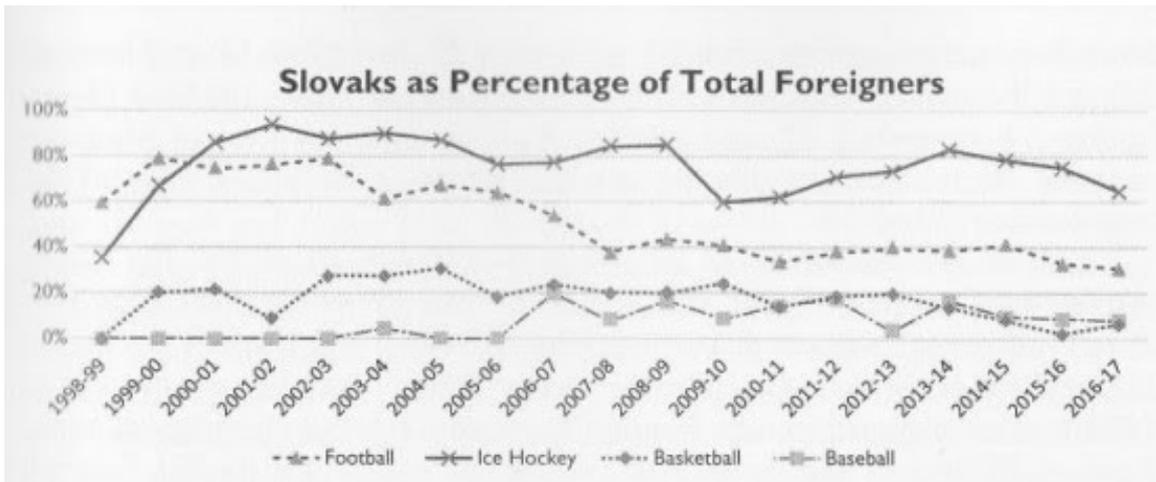


*Resource: The graph was compiled by the author based on data of Szporer (2021)*

In contrast to the NHL and NBA, the National Football League is not famous for having partnerships with foreign players (Figure 5). In the NFL's 2016/17 regular season, 98% of players were from North America (USA - 97% and 1% of players from other North American countries). The countries from Europe, Oceania, Africa, South America and Asia had about only 2% of players in the league (Gregor et al., 2017).

What about sports migration in the Czech Republic? According to Crossan and Ruda (2019), the percentage of foreign players noticeably increases by over nineteen seasons in two primary sports like ice hockey and football and two secondary sports - basketball and baseball. The primary sports are most likely compared to the national level and have more media attention. Also, secondary sports are those which are played on the professional level and have numerous participants. What nationalities are these players? This is a difficult question to answer because, in many cases, Slovak players are not considered as foreigners in Czech sports leagues, and many Czechs do not consider Slovak foreigners. It may be due to the various complicated reasons resulting mainly from the former union between the Czech Republic and Slovakia. It's also stated that Czech leagues and the national team are superior in rank. Therefore, the best Slovaks prefer to play in the Czech Republic. The total percentage of Slovaks in Czech leagues is reviewed in the Figure 6 below:

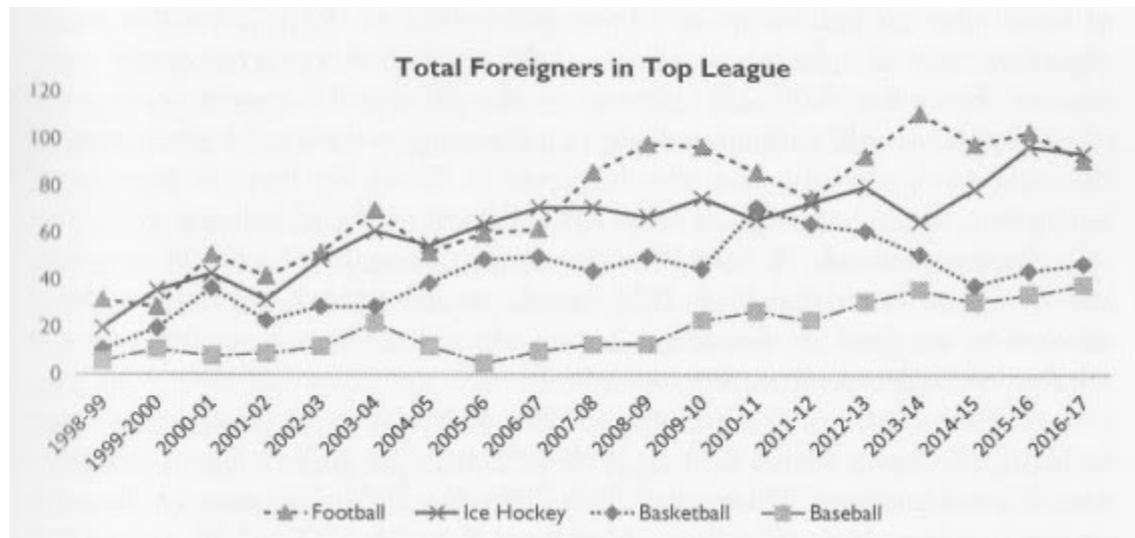
Figure 6 - Total foreigners in top league



Resource: Crossan & Ruda, 2019, p. 61

From the mentioned above percentage, it is possible to define that primary football and ice hockey teams have more Slovaks than secondary basketball and baseball. The higher numbers of players come from ice hockey which shows the international development of this sport. Despite this, the total numbers of all foreigners in the top Czech leagues vary.

Figure 7 - Total foreigners in top league



Resource: Crossan & Ruda, 2019, p. 61

The Figure 7 above contains the data of the changes in the total number of foreigners throughout 19 seasons. The year 2000 begins with low numbers. Incredibly the 2013/14 season shows a huge leap in the number of foreigners playing in football in comparison. This is the higher number in comparison with other sports through 19

seasons. At last, the 2016-17 season shows the first glimpse of consistency as the numbers begin to reach a plateau. The numbers of foreigners in ice hockey and football are similar - as in secondary baseball and basketball. But, due to several reasons, primary sports have more players than secondary sports.

Ice hockey is one of the most popular sports in the Czech Republic because of high attendance, media attention, etc. Crossan (2019) defines that Czech players have become one of the leaders in ice hockey labour migration. The number of ice hockey talents exceeds the space for them in top leagues. Thus, the tendency of managers', coaches' and players' migration rapidly increases. He adds that the trading of ice hockey players makes sense when they have better skills, or they are cheaper than locals. Therefore, it is possible to say that the development of ice hockey is related to the economic problem.

#### 2.3.4. Motivation of sports migration

Sport is a unique physical activity for individuals, which requires the athlete positive motivation for daily training, self-improvement, self-education, and self-development. Such specific activity causes the formation of the athletes' professionally important mental qualities and personality, which are significant for a concrete sport or valuable in everyday life.

Sports psychologists and skilled coaches believe that without knowledge of the true motivation of the young athlete, it is difficult to prepare him/her for competitions. The coach must be informed about his/her wards' personal motivation and helps them achieve the best possible results. It is necessary to emphasise that it is one of the essential personality traits of the athlete. Motivation, like character, is formed throughout life, starting from early childhood. External factors such as the family, teachers and coaches have a positive impact on a kid's mental state, as well as a significant influence on the formation of motivation to achieve success in sports (Slepička, Hošek & Hátlová, 2006)

Maguire (1996, p.339) determined the five categories of sport labour migrants based on their motivation:

- 1) *Mercenaries* - athletes whose primary motivation is short-term gains, and they are used to be employed as "hired guns". It's a person who has no or little attachment to the local country and has no sense of home in the place where they are doing their job. For example, tennis players can be classified as mercenaries.

- 2) *Nomadic cosmopolitans* - players who are highly motivated by a cosmopolitan engagement with migration and desire to know new peoples and cultures. They aim to learn something new, use their sports for a journey. This includes athletes such as surfers, snowboarders, performers of extreme sports, etc.
- 3) *Settlers* - individuals who migrate to another country to play at least five playing seasons or decide to stay there for the rest of their playing career or life. As an example, can be taken basketball or ice hockey players.
- 4) *Returnees* - individuals who return to his/her home country because he/she cannot stay long abroad. These athletes are, for example, F1 Motor-Racing drivers, PGA Tour Golfers.
- 5) *Pioneers* - people who are exceptionally highly passionate about their particular sport with almost religious fervour. For example, it can be the athletes of 19th Sokol/Turner movement.

The motivation for success in sports is twofold. On the one hand, it's long-term aimed at the strength and stability of the motive for future goals. On the other - situational aimed at the reason for success and the best result at the moment. In turn, the motivation for success leads to the athlete's attitude to purposefulness and self-confidence. Year after year, this attitude is fixed in his/her consciousness. As a result, it becomes the characteristic feature of his/her personality. It finds the reflection in high sporting achievements and his/her life out of sports. Generally, migration plays a significant role in the development of society. It has an important influence on the structure and pattern of growth of the world's population - from individual settlements, regions to entire countries and continents. The results of migration are contradictory because it has different consequences for the origin and host countries (Slepička, Hošek & Hátlová, 2006).

In summary, migrations directly affect the social structure, social arrangements, new ethnic groups, and global population changes. Sports migration can be taken as a specific type of migration. It has a great advantage because the athletes who want to migrate have particular motivation and goals. They know precisely what they have to do and how this process works. For migration, the athletes usually have specific conditions to be satisfied. Thus, sports migration can be considered as a stable and, in a way, safe process.

## 2.4. Ice hockey

Ice hockey is a high paced team sport played on the ice with many actions, physical contact and unexpected changing game situations. According to Fischler and Eskenazi (2020), hockey came from Canada from the mid-1800s and was basically invented by British soldiers. It's a game between two teams with six players, who wear special equipment and compete for three 20-minute periods. The object is using the puck to score a goal into a net with a goalie. These days it's one of the most famous international sports globally and all because of its high intensity, speed, physical contact and strength. Ice hockey has been officially an Olympic sport since 1920. There are many different international competitions, professional leagues, clubs and more than a million performing players worldwide.

### 2.4.1. The origins of hockey

It's hard to define where and when hockey was born. There are reports that hockey has existed probably since ancient times. This game was played in the 16th-17th centuries in England, four and a half centuries ago in China. For example, the frescoes exhibited in the National Anthropological Museum of Mexico City could be evidence of ancient hockey existence (Gut & Vlk, 1990).

Some sources argue that hockey with the puck has started in India. Several of them think it has come from the north of America, where people competed on the ice in the game with the sticks. Danish, Russian and Canadians, for example, believe that their country is the homeland of hockey.

However, most historians agree that ice hockey was born in Canada, and the first match was held in Montreal in 1879. A few years later, in 1893, the Governor-General of Canada, Lord Frederick Stanley, established the special Cup for the best competing team. This prize became known as the Stanley Cup. It was played by amateurs and professionals who played together in mixed teams. In 1917, the National Hockey League (NHL) was formed, bringing together all Canadian professional teams. Then seven years later, in 1924, the first American team from Boston (Boston Bruins) joined the Canadians in the NHL. Ice hockey came to Europe at the beginning of the 20th century. The first international championship was played in 1910. It was attended by the national teams of Great Britain (the winner), Germany, Belgium, and Switzerland. The first world championship in ice hockey was held in 1920 at the VII Summer Olympic Games. The

first winner became Canada. And in 1954, when the USSR national hockey team debuted, Canada had already fifteen top titles out of 20 possible. The Czechoslovak national team became world champions twice. The national teams of Great Britain, the USA and Sweden were only once. Such was the arrangement of forces in world hockey by 1954 (Gut, Vlk, 1990).

#### 2.4.2. Hockey migration according to the IIHF

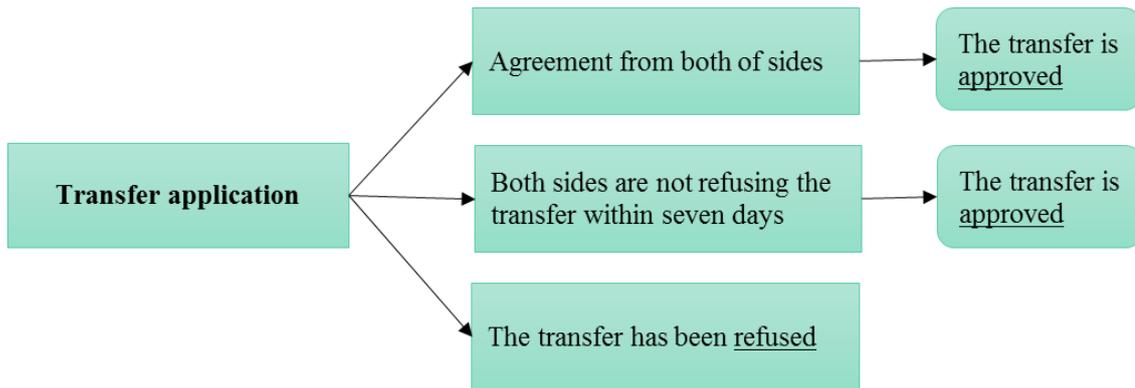
What does regulate the international hockey migration flows? The transfer process of countries-members controlled by the IIHF begins with an application form, which a player-member can find in the online system of the association. After a form has been filled and submitted by the association, there comes three possibilities (Figure 8):

- 1) The transfer is approved due to an agreement from both sides. In this case, the new club will pay a total of 800 CHF (Swiss franc), which is about 19.000 CZK (Czech korunas), for the transfer and others transfer related costs.
- 2) In case both sides (a club and player) would not disagree within seven days, the transfer will automatically be approved. Then a club will pay the same amount mentioned above and other transfer costs.
- 3) The transfer could be refused due to the following factors: a player has a valid professional contract; a player has other contractual obligations to the club; the player has financial commitments to the club such as debts or unpaid equipment; other reasons for a transfer such as disqualification, etc (Iihf.com).

In case the transfer has been refused, a player-member may appeal the decision to the IIHF within seven days. In this appellation, a player must state reasons for his/her transfer and respond to some particular objections of IIHF. The association supposes to answer within the next seven day. The answer should include the reasons why the transfer should be refused (Iihf.com).

When the professional contract has been breached, a player must return or be released by the last club. If neither option exists, a player will face a four-month ban and the club - a one-year transfer ban of cooperation with foreign players (Iihf.com).

Figure 8 - Transfer process between members of IIHF



*Resource: The scheme was compiled by the author based on data from Iihf.com*

### 2.4.3. Ice hockey in the Czech Republic

Hockey became an integral part of sporting life at the beginning of the 20th century. This game started to be popular in both North America and Europe. Several countries became leaders on the international level - Canada, USSR, Czechoslovakia. To become the best, the Czech Republic (before Czechoslovakia) went through a lot.

According to Ceskyhokej.cz, in the early 20th century, there were about five ice hockey teams in Prague, which played regularly. The first match between Slavia Praha and the Bruslařský závodní klub (BZK) was reported in the press on January 6, 1901. Besides, Slavia Praha, famous primarily for its footballers and athletes, played its first international match with Vienna's Training-Eisklub in 1901. A couple of years later, in January 1909, the Bohemia national ice hockey team (from 1914, the Czechoslovakia men's national team) participated in an international tournament in Chamonix, France. Seven-man line combination consisting of Jaroslav Jarkovský, Otakar Vindyš, Jan Fleischmann, Josef Gruss, Jan Palouš, Boleslav Hammer, Ctibor Malý was later nicknamed Musketeers with a Hockey Stick (czech - *Mušketýři s hokejkou*). After this, in 1910, the European championship in Switzerland, organised for countries associated with IIHF, was played for the first time. Prague hosted the third European championship in 1912. By the start of the First World War, the Czechoslovakia men's team won two titles out of five in the European championships. In the 1933 and 1938 World Championships, Czechoslovakia won bronze. Also, the national team won the European Championship in 1922, 1925, 1929 and 1933. Five times they got silver and four times - bronze. After the Second World War in 1947, the team won gold medals for the first time on their home ice in Prague on Štvanice. Long time the national team could not succeed due to

communism and political issues within a State. Although little known, the national team had these legendary players: Jaroslav Drobný who was presented the Czech Republic, Egypt and then the UK; Ladislav Troják who was the first Slovak player played for the national team; and the coach Mike Buckna who was Canadian, however born to Slovak parents. Fortunately, in 1972 Czechoslovakia men's national team became champions at the World Championship in Prague. After the fall of communism, the borders were open, serving a players' migration. Then, young players like Jaromir Jágr and Dominik Hašek tried their luck across the ocean and eventually became one of the best players in ice hockey history. In 1993, Czechoslovakia was dissolved into two independent countries - the Czech Republic and Slovakia. That is why at the 1994 Olympics in Lillehammer, Norway, they played against each other for the first time. The triumph at the 18th Olympic Winter Games in 1998 Nagano, Japan, stirred the whole country and gave hockey players unprecedented confidence. It became the symbol of the golden age of Czech ice hockey. And right after between 1999 and 2001, the Czech national team won three consecutive World Championships as Canada and USSR back in the day.

Nowadays, the Czech Republic men's national team has become one of the best ice hockey teams in the world. Totally, the Czech national team has six gold, one silver and five bronze medals from the IIHF World Championships and one gold medal from the Olympics. Czechs become one of the most sought-after professional ice hockey players. In the NHL's 2020/21 regular season, 33 Czech athletes have played in different clubs. Compared to the NHL's 2017/18 regular season, where there were 37 Czech players. It has been in decline since the high of 77 players in the 2001/2002 season. But the start of the KHL in 2008 also contributed to this decline (Crossan, 2019). The numbers are not constant and may change in the future because the Czech Republic could be taken as a country with the vast potential to realise primacy in ice hockey and sport in general.

There are several ice hockey leagues in the Czech Republic. A more detailed overview of the structure of ice hockey competitions is provided in the Figure 9 below (Ceskyhokej.cz). The lower competition is the fifth County Hockey Championship - an amateur league, where competing teams are divided by the Czech districts. The next one is the same amateur level Regional Hockey Championship. It's the fourth hockey competition in the Czech Republic, where the winner moves up in the higher league. The third one is the half professional 2nd Czech Republic Hockey League. There are three divisions with 27 teams in general. The principle is the same as in the lower league.

However, the worst team can be eliminated and move down. The second competition is the 1st Czech Republic Hockey League for 16 professional teams, where the winner advances to the highest-level league - Czech Extraliga. It is the professional league with 15 teams with the highest attendance, sponsors, and well-trained professional players.

Figure 9 - The structure of Czech ice hockey leagues



*Resource: The scheme was compiled by the author based on data from Ceskyhokej.cz*

Otherwise, this study will be focused specifically on the Czech Extraliga.

## 2.5. Employee care

Being a professional athlete is a full-time job. In fact, a professional sports career is a long-term activity aimed at achieving high sports results with constant improvement of the athlete in selected sports disciplines. An athlete can be considered as an employee; therefore, he or she must be treated the right way.

In theory, it is difficult to define a precise definition of “employee care”. The very concept is broad. Each country has its own regulations and rules on what ideal care should be. Therefore, care for employees can be divided into 3 distinct groups. The first is the required care, which is provided by law, regulations, and collective agreements of the top management. The second group is contract care, which is given by collective agreements at the organizational level. And the last group is voluntary care, which depends on the employer decision (Koubek, 2009). For example, Downs (2019) defines the following required conditions, which in accordance with the law the business owners in the USA must provide:

- 1) Social Security, Medicare taxes
- 2) Workers Compensation Insurance - a kind of financial support for people who cannot work in a result of a workplace injury or illness
- 3) Family and Medical Leave
- 4) Unemployment Insurance - it helps employees who lost their jobs
- 5) Disability Insurance - specific financial support for employees that suffer some illness or injury.

Besides, Páleníková (2014) identifies the favourable benefits from employer in following ways:

- 1) Workplace
- 2) Health insurance
- 3) Safety
- 4) Meals
- 5) Skills development
- 6) Transport to or from work
- 7) Employee’s accommodation
- 8) Activities for their free time
- 9) Other services provided to employees and their families

## 10) Social funds for employees

In general, Kloubek (2009) described his interpretation of the concept of caring for employees, which includes all aspects. Characteristics are depicted in the following ways:

- 1) Working hours
- 2) Working environment
- 3) Safety
- 4) Personal development
- 5) Services provided to employees at the work
- 6) Health care

Employers in the sports industry must offer the same necessary conditions. As the favourable benefits, they may offer, for example, the gym, special meals, retraining courses, a car, etc. It must help build good relations with labour athletes and make them feel comfortable with their job.

### 2.5.1. Employee care in sport

The sports industry is full of different sports jobs, careers, and internships over the world. There are team sports such as ice hockey, soccer, basketball or baseball, and individual sports like swimming, figure skating, tennis, etc. All these sports include many sports job positions, which can be:

- 1) Professional athlete
- 2) Coach or sports instructor
- 3) Sports lawyer
- 4) Sports manager
- 5) Sports marketing manager
- 6) PR and social media specialist
- 7) Sports photograph
- 8) Sports teacher
- 9) Physical therapists
- 10) Psychologist

Essentially, sport type in much affects career of the professional athlete. There is a big difference between the conditions of an athlete who is engaged in individual sports or team sports. In terms of determining the legal arrangements, the area of collective

sports seems very sensitive. The athlete as a rule is bound by the club's and coach's very detailed instructions concerning sports preparation including, for example, diets, workplaces like sports halls, ice rinks, time of matches and breaks, transports, cooperation with other athletes, the need to submit to team play under the direction of a coach, etc (Morávek & Štefko, 2016).

The employment contract is the first step of cooperation between the employer (professional league or clubs) and the employee (an athlete), which is supposed to determine their obligations and rights, namely employee care. As it was mentioned before team sports has specific arrangements. According to Zielinski (2004), players can sign three types of contracts in ice hockey. First of all, it's a "one-way" contract. The basic principle of this type is a player, who has been signed in NHL or AHL, will receive the same amount of money regardless of the league he plays. Secondly, it's a "two-way" contract. This type bases on a mutual agreement by both sides, a player and the club's management. This contract determines an athlete's monthly wage value and depends on the league player plays (NHL or AHL). And the last is the "free agent" type of contract. A free agent is an independent player who is not bound by restrictions searching for a new club or signing a new contract with other clubs. All agreements must include the same primary necessary conditions. However, it can consist of different favourable benefits. That is why players need to arrange the employees' contracts to begin their cooperation with the clubs and get the offered care.

### 3. GOALS

#### 3.1. Main goal

The main aim of this bachelor thesis is to determine the extent of care of foreign players who have come to the Czech Republic to join the ranks of professionals in Czech ice hockey receive, and their motivation to play and manage abroad. The goal is to understand the similarities or differences in care and make the respective recommendations for the Czech clubs.

#### 3.2. Sub-goals

It is possible to divide the main aim into different sub-goals, which will help examine the main problem. Sub-goals split into:

- 1) Selecting relevant literature for a topic
- 2) Studying the correlation between employee care and employee's performance. Determining the differences and similarities and also the players' motives.
- 3) Contacting selected respondents
- 4) Creating a base of the interview questions
- 5) Conducting the interviews
- 6) Analysing the respondents' answers
- 7) Making the respective final recommendations

## 4. METHODOLOGY

This chapter will review and analyse the methods used for this study. Specifically, one of the qualitative research methods was used for this study: the semi-structured interview conducted with certain foreign players and the club management.

### 4.1. Research aim

Ice hockey is a global sport, and player migration becomes very common. Generally, these days foreigners are an integral part of all kinds of sport. They bring innovations and help the team in many ways. For the quality of player's performance, the clubs' management must offer excellent conditions for them, which will be just as good as in any other country.

The research aim in this paper is to determine the satisfaction of foreign ice hockey players with the employees' care which the management of Czech ice hockey clubs provides. Besides, player migration's motives and purpose will be analysed and presented in the respective final recommendations. All analysed data were collected by the method of semi-structured interviews. The final results will be proposed to the clubs' management to help them to improve their internal communications with foreign players.

### 4.2. Data sources

Data collecting plays the most significant role in making a proper study. It is important to have adequate information to define the research and its main aim. For this paper, the various primary data have been collected by the interviews with certain foreign players and managers about what benefits are included in the employees' care, the athletes' satisfaction and their motivation to play abroad.

### 4.3. Data collection methods

Theoretically, there are qualitative data on the one hand. These data are crucial to understanding all the extensive details and the context of research. On the other hand, there are quantitative data, which numerically define the different values and terms of the study. Besides, there are two types of data collection - primary and secondary. *“Primary data are data that are collected for the specific research problem at hand, using procedures that best fit the research problem. On every occasion that primary data are collected, new data are added to the existing store of social knowledge. Increasingly, this material created by other researchers is made available for reuse by the general research*

*community; it is then called secondary data.*" (Hox, Boeije, 2005, p. 593) A method of primary data collection was selected for this paper. Basically, primary data are data that didn't exist before and are collected for the first time for a specific purpose, such as customer marketing surveys. In this, Hox and Boeije (2005) define a couple of examples of primary data:

- Qualitative data - open interviews, unstructured diary, focus group, observation of various participants, etc.
- Quantitative data - experiment, interview, mail and web survey, passive observation, monitoring etc.

For this study, a method of a semi-structured interview was selected to collect the required data. It is a type of interview where the interviewer does not strictly follow a formalised and structured list of questions. The interviewer can prepare a list of questions but not necessarily ask them all or touch them in any particular order, using them instead to lead a conversation. The questions were more open, allowing a discussion with the interlocutor rather than a simple question-and-answer format. For this study were selected the following questions:

The interview questions with the club's management:

- 1) What is your team's position?
- 2) What are the benefits of taking on foreign players for your team?
- 3) When choosing foreign players, do you have a preference in nationality?  
Why?
- 4) What are your requirements for new foreign players?
- 5) How do you pick the new players? With the agencies help or by yourself?  
Do you contact the club's management or the coaches?
- 6) How experienced should the picked players be? Do you prefer the older and experienced players, or do you give some chances for young players as well?
- 7) What role do finances play in your decision to bring in foreign players?
- 8) What benefits can you offer to your players instead of payment?
- 9) Which language does your coach use for all players? Have any problems with communication occurred?

- 10) Who mainly communicates with the foreign players from your club staff during the season?
- 11) How many foreign players have you had during the last 3 seasons?
- 12) How many of them still play now?
- 13) What was the reason for foreign players from past seasons leaving?

The interview questions with the players:

- 1) Can you please introduce yourself? (gender, age)
- 2) How long have you been playing ice hockey? How long have you been playing at a professional level?
- 3) Have you played ice hockey abroad? How many times have you changed clubs?
- 4) Which countries have you played in? Explain your experience in these countries?
- 5) What was your motivation or reasons to play abroad?
- 6) Why have you picked the Czech Republic to play?
- 7) Do you like the training process? Have you noticed some improvements?
- 8) Does your coach speak English? Have any problems with communication occurred?
- 9) How do the other players receive (treat) you? How are you received by the other foreign players? How are you received by the Czech players?
- 10) Has the team's management fulfilled their obligations? Aside from your salary, what other benefits does your team provide to you?
- 11) Are you paid in time?
- 12) If given the option to extend your contract with your current team in Czech, would you want to play here another season?

#### 4.4. Data collection

Overall, all potential respondents are professional ice hockey players and club managers. They all have pretty tight schedules, and it is usually complicated to get the required information from them. Thus, all interviews were scheduled during the whole hockey season. Most of them took place during the state of emergency in the Czech Republic, from 5th October 2020 until spring 2021, when all sports activities, no matter amateur or professional, were prohibited. For this study, 58 players were considered as

the potential respondents and asked to give an interview. Of all players, only 7% (4 players) of them had agreed to be interviewed. So, totally for this topic were six conducted six interviews - 2 of them with the clubs' staff and 4 with the players.

Usually, the interviews with ice hockey players take place at ice rinks. However, due to the pandemic situation and government restrictions in the Czech Republic, all interviews had to be conducted online via special videotelephony software. All respondents were informed ahead about the subject, data processing and anonymisation. It took players and managers an average of 15 minutes to answer all provided questions. The interview process was recorded as audio recording and then converted into a written form.

#### 4.5. Data analysis

After all the interviews were conducted and written in text form, they had to be processed. This study took the comparative method of analysis, which involves comparing based on the information received. Basically, the research analysis examined or looked for similarities or dissimilarities between two or more respondents' answers. It helped to understand and reach the conclusion of this topic in the form of suggested recommendations for the clubs' management.

## 5. RESULTS

The complete set of results will be discussed in this chapter of the paper. This part will be separated into four subchapters. There will be some statistical data and the rosters comparison between the last and future seasons in the first chapter. The second and third subchapters will analyse the interviews with the club's management and foreign players. And in the last subchapter, I would like to express my opinion in the form of suggestions devoted to improving employee care in ice hockey clubs.

### 5.1. Czech Extraliga

According to IIHF.com world ranking, the Czech national ice hockey team is the fifth-best in the world. Most of the national team is players from Czech Extraliga. It is the most-watched ice hockey competition in the Czech Republic. There are regularly 14 teams (in the 2021/20 season, 15 teams) competing between each other during the regular season for 52 games. The next step is pre-playoff. The fifth to 12th place teams compete to make the playoff (Czech - *osmifinále*). After the Generali Playoff starts. The first part of the playoff is the quarter-final (Czech - *čtvrtfinále*), where the four best teams play against those 4 “winners” of pre-playoff. Then four teams are competing in the semi-finals, and only 2 of them will make the final. The last winner of Czech Extraliga (the 2020/21 season) has become HC Oceláři Třinec.

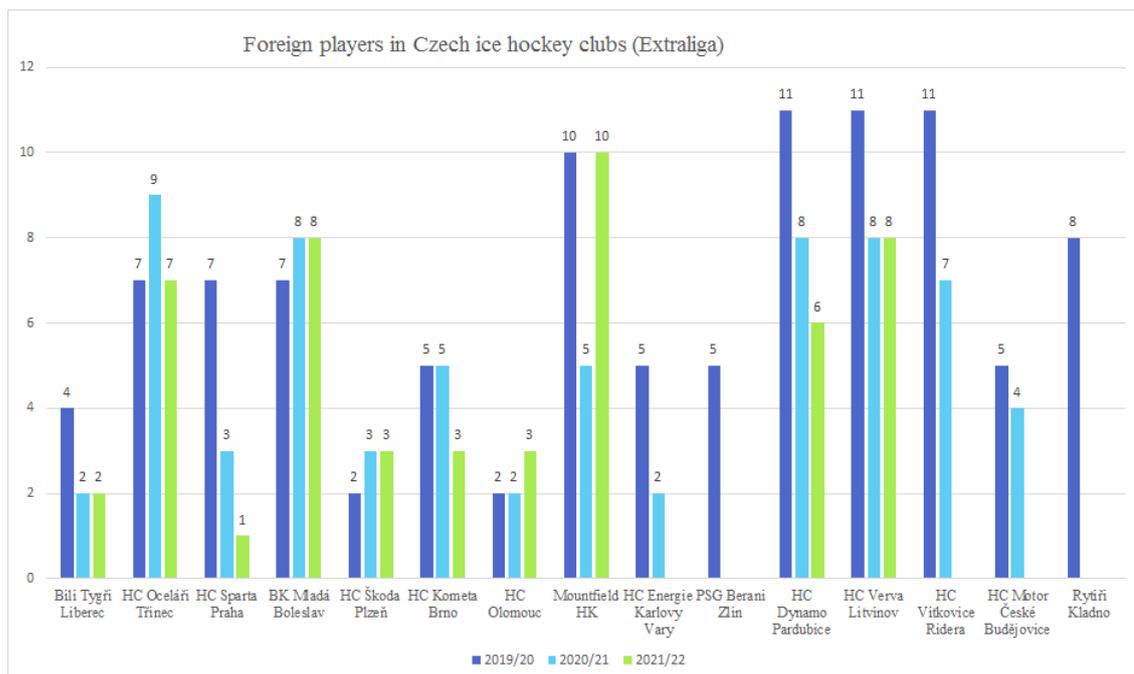
Due to the pandemic situation, the 2019/20 and 2020/21 seasons were not financially safe for ice hockey clubs in the Czech Republic. The 2019/20 season was shut down. And the biggest part of the 2020/21 season had been played without the audience because it was a state of emergency in the Czech Republic. Many players and staff management were in quarantine during the season. All clubs and the league, in general, suffered substantial financial losses, which mainly affected its budgets (Hokej.cz).

Comparing the three seasons, it is possible to see how the Extraliga clubs manage their finances. Of course, it mainly depends on sponsors' support and marketing, but cooperation with foreigners also plays an important role. Sugden and Tomlinson (2013, p. 226) mentioned the two opinions about foreign players' cost in English soccer. The first opinion belonged to the former manager at Manchester City and Everton. He said that the local (English) players made themselves expensive in comparison with foreigners. Therefore, most clubs took these players because they are cheap. Crossan and Ruda (2019, p. 65) define: “*in football, ice hockey and basketball the primary reason to*

*purchase foreigners is that they are cheaper than paying the transfer fees of the Czech players.”* In fact, foreign players ask for lower salaries than local players and usually have much better skills because of more considerable competition, which could be a significant advantage for clubs. However, that would mean more spendings and responsibilities: visa, accommodation for players and more benefits.

As it was mentioned, the 2019/20 season was completed ahead of schedule. The 2020/21 season was conducted under specific conditions prescribed by law without any audience. Because of coronavirus and all the financial losses, it brought, the Extraliga clubs became very “sensitive” on any spendings at some point. All of them are using their prepared strategies and plans to come back to normal. Several clubs have already published the future team rosters for the new 2021/22 season. It includes different changes. For better illustration, there are 14 team rosters of clubs participating in the Czech Extraliga over the three seasons on the Figure 10 below (Hokej.cz).

Figure 10 - Foreign players in Czech ice hockey clubs (Extraliga)



*Resource: The graph was compiled by the author based on data from Hokej.cz*

Essentially, there are significant changes in the clubs’ rosters. The 2019/20 season was full of foreigners. In total, there were 100 foreigners playing the regular season. For example, HC Dynamo Pardubice, HC Verva Litvínov and HC Vítkovice Ridera had 11 players from abroad each. Mountfield HK had 10 of them and Rytíři Kladno had 8 players. The following 2020/21 season, as it was mentioned above, was conducted with

strict rules due to the pandemic situation. The numbers of foreigners in the league went low. In total, there were 66 players, which is a big decline. The higher number was nine players in the team - HC Oceláři Třinec. HC Dynamo Pardubice and HC Vítkovice Ridera had 8 of them. This season has ended, and some clubs have announced the new rosters for the 2021/22 season. In accordance with the published rosters, there are already 55 players signed to play the regular season. There are five clubs which have not announced the rosters. Other clubs have decided to take more foreigners than they've had before - Mountfield HK and HC Olomouc. It is noticeable that the situation is changeable. With the new season it will be clear which clubs will express an interest in re-engaging with the foreigners.

## 5.2. Results of interviews with the clubs' management

First of all, it is necessary to consider the results of the interviews with the clubs' managers. I was able to conduct interviews with two head sports managers from different clubs. They gave me clear answers to particular questions about recruiting, the organisational structure, benefits and many more.

### 5.2.1. Benefits of recruitment

The first question has been orientated on the benefits of the players' recruitment. Why do the clubs want to hire foreigners to represent them on the ice? Do they have some advantages of profit? These questions are aimed at finding the best optimal reasons why clubs recruit foreigners.

One of the respondents emphasised equality between all players. He explained that for "his" club, the nationality has no role. The player needs to be "the best" on the ice and show excellent results. However, he added that the final decision would be based on financial requirements if they have two capable players.

The second respondent commented: *"These foreign players fit into our conception and line-up of the team. Usually, those players bring something special like different attributes that Czech players lack, know-how, or higher professionalism."* In fact, the presence of foreigners can make a better image of the company and show clear well-developed policies. This principle can work in the sports industry as well. The clubs also follow up with certain conceptions which are based on their preferences. Thus, foreign players' presence helps the clubs set exemplary performance and behavioural standards to make the company more modern and prosperous.

### 5.2.2. Preferences in nationalities

The second task was sharing different preferences in nationalities. Hockey is a global sport and there are many of players playing over the world. What nationalities are preferred in the Czech Extraliga? To answer this question, the author researched all nationalities of players from the fourteen teams playing the Tipsport Extraliga's 2020/21 regular season using the data from Hokej.cz. The clubs' preferences are divided in the following ways:

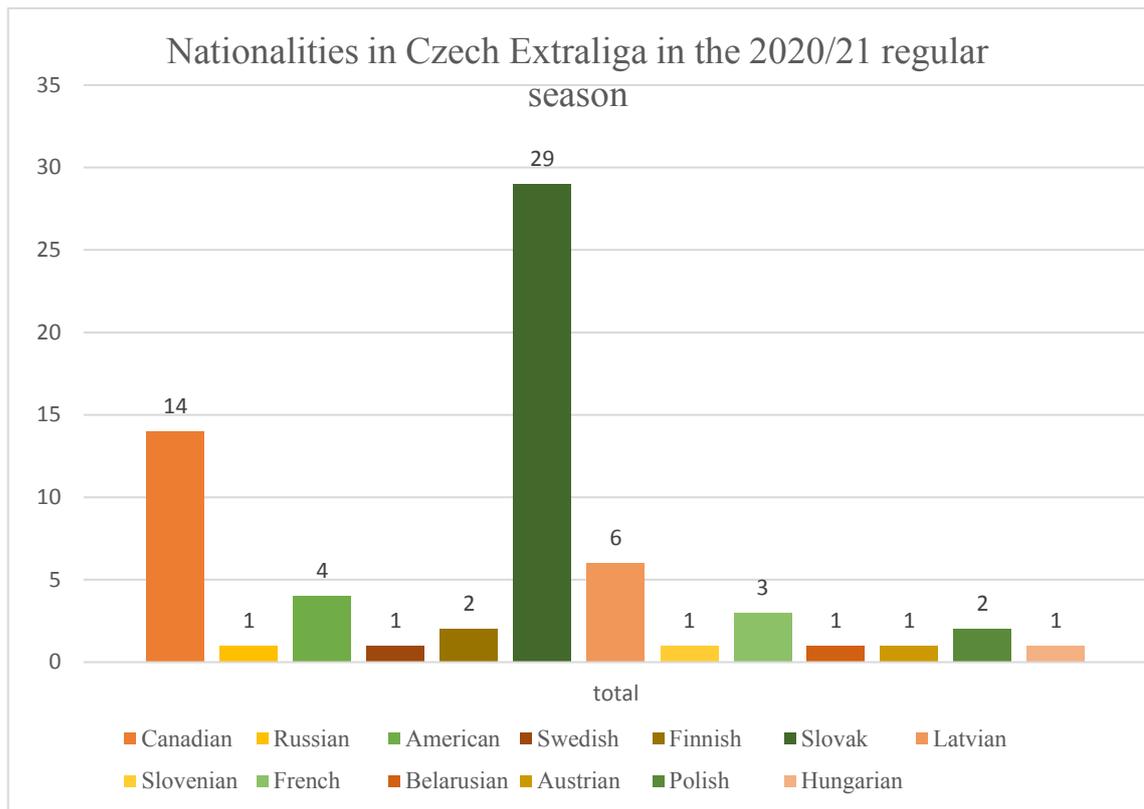
Figure 11 - The nationalities of foreign players in Czech Extraliga in the 2020/21 regular season

2020/2021 season Clubs	Nationalities												
	Canadian	Russian	American	Swedish	Finnish	Slovak	Latvian	Slovenian	French	Belarusian	Austrian	Polish	Hungarian
Bílí Tygři Liberec						2							
HC Oceláři Třinec	2					5	1					1	
HC Sparta Praha						3							
BK Mladá Boleslav	2		1		1	1	1	1	1				
HC Škoda Plzeň				1	1	1							
HC Kometa Brno	1		1			1	1				1		
HC Olomouc						2							
Mountfield HK	1		2			1			1				
HC Energie Karlovy Vary						2							
PSG Berani Zlín													
HC Dynamo Pardubice	1	1				5				1			
HC Verva Litvínov	3					2	2					1	
HC Vítkovice Ridera	2					3	1						1
HC Motor České Budějovice	2					1			1				
<b>total</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>29</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>1</b>

*Resource: The table was compiled by the author based on data from Hokej.cz*

Players of the following nationalities played that season: Canadian, Russian, American, Swedish, Finnish, Slovak, Latvian, Slovenian, French, Belarusian, Austrian, Polish, and Hungarian. In total, 66 foreign players are playing the Czech Extraliga. What nationality is more prevalent? From the data above, there are 29 players from Slovakia. This predominance may have happened because: *“Most Czechs would not consider Slovaks as foreigners, but rather they are the “younger brothers”* (Crossan & Ruda, 2019, p. 59). Besides, there are 14 players from Canada. Canadian hockey school is well-known for its highly skilled players. Therefore, most clubs first choose players of this nationality. For the better understanding, the preferences are depicted as:

Figure 12 - Nationalities in Czech Extraliga in the 2020/21 regular season



*Resource: The graph was compiled by the author based on data from Hokej.cz*

Besides, the respondents were asked about the clubs' preferences. According to the data in the Figure 12, it is possible to say, that the clubs prefer Slovaks to others. The first respondent explained their choices with: *“Of course, Slovak mentally is closer to Czech, so we usually prefer to offer them a place in our team. Besides, Canadians have the best hockey skills and strength of character, and these players, I can say, are quite “cheaper”. Thus, for us, it is a perfect deal. Probably, it is because they have kinda big competition or I do not know, but here it is a good opportunity for them to keep playing good hockey. Latvians are also taken into consideration. International-level players have really good hockey skills, character, and conduct.”* In this answer, it is clear to see that Slovak players are preferred over others. However, the financial side plays an important role. Thus, if the club will have an opportunity to hire a “cheaper” Canadian player, they would most likely sign a contract with this player.

Besides, the second respondent expressed the contrary view: *“In general, all players are chosen by a coach and I think there is no preference in nationality. It really does not matter if a player is American, Canadian, Finnish, or Russian.”* In reality, a coach knows exactly how he wants to empower the team and what exactly the players

need to do. This decision-making helps a coach to not focus on nationality or ethnicity preferences and choose according to the potential.

### 5.2.3. Requirements

Before an employer chooses the candidate, an employee has to meet some requirements. The same thing works in sport as well. Before a club signs a player, he or she must show some skills and results. They want to make sure that the chosen player will be good enough.

The answer would be clear; a player has to be the best on the ice no matter his position. The first respondent defined a good example: *“For a Canadian player, we usually expect a more active personality, experience in fighting and aggression, also a good shot and pressure in front of the goal line.”* This is an understandable club’s requirement, where they exactly know what they want a player to do. In contrast, the second respondent did not mention any specific requirements for players. He said: *“It is quite simple; they have to be the best. Nothing special. Their hockey skills must be excellent, and they have to show some results on the ice.”* It shows that coaches have full authority and freedom to choose players due to their preferences.

### 5.2.4. Recruiting

There are many ways how a club can recruit a player. As mentioned before, players can be free agents, noticed by sports scouts, work with agencies etc. The managers were asked a series of questions about the recruitment process. The first one shortly explained how to find new players, referring to all mentioned types of recruitment. However, the second respondent used a more detailed explanation: *“It is the responsibility of our head coach and his team to find some qualified players. Mainly, some agents offer us players they are used to working with. Besides, we receive a lot of recommendations from agents or coaches like, for example, someone who knows some coaches, managers or a player who could be interested in transferring to our team.”* It shows how the internal processes work, who is responsible for recruitment and how the club works with agencies and agents.

There are many ways how the clubs can connect with a potential player. Both of the respondents said that clubs usually use the coaches, teammates or implementation teams for collecting specific information. Then the responsible person, a coach or manager, can define the particular requirements for a player and how experienced he must

be. Again, both participants concurred regarding the following question about the preference between older and experienced and young players. A professional athlete must have a perfect physical condition and certain personality traits. Basically, a player can be young or older but still be confident and show excellent results on the ice.

#### 5.2.5. Finances and benefits

Finances are one of the most crucial factors in the recruiting process. It is the first thing that a club and a selected player should discuss before the agreement would be signed. The next couple of questions were used for a discussion of this problem. The first participant spotted that it is important to know before all requirements the player wants. It will help to avoid difficulties in the potential future cooperation. The second stated that the club has a special budget for recruiting. If the financial situation is weak, it will not allow the club to have more players, no matter foreigners or locals.

Every club must fulfil their obligation included in the employment contract. The next topic we discussed with participants was about extra benefits. I asked them what they could offer extra on top of the payment. The first respondent told about the standard benefits they offer to players - an apartment for living and a car. The second mentioned the same common benefits; however, he added that the club helps with visas, taxes, and insurance. The official agreement should include mentioned above benefits. If the employee wants to work legally in Europe, it is necessary to pay all required taxes and get medical insurance. The visa process indeed brings a lot of complications with all documents and applications. It is a pretty good extra benefit and a huge advantage when a club takes responsibility in this process. It helps to save time and avoid problems in the country of employment.

#### 5.2.6. Communication

Communication is the key in any process. The respondents were asked about the communication type and what language is preferred. Essentially, communication between players and coaches on the ice carries more verbal character. The first respondent stated: *“Coach speaks Czech, but when it is necessary to emphasize something, he switches to English.”* So, basically, it means that all communication on the ice and locker room is going in Czech. As he mentioned, if the player needs a specific explanation, the coach translates it into English. It is a benefit; however, it may make the communication one-

sided. Then, there was a supplementary question about who mainly communicates with the players. The respondent said the whole process is the responsibility of the coach.

The second respondent answered: *“There is no problem with communication. Our head coach played in the NHL for about 15-20 years and, you know, almost all the hockey terminology is in English. That is why everyone understands everything without switching. But usually, the communication is in Czech, but if he wants to explain something to a particular player, he will speak English.”* The fact that the coach was playing in the NHL is a significant advantage because he is more open to international players and has English speaking experience. It is true, almost all terminology in ice hockey is in English. It makes communication easier without switching the language. This conception is more comfortable for foreign players because there is no chance, they can feel misunderstood. On the following question, he added that the players mainly contact the coaches. Then, he said: *“if they want to sort something out of hockey they will ask me. Unfortunately, my English is not so good, so they usually ask for help from their teammates or the coach or I do this. And then we can sort everything out. All players are very friendly and they understand that not all people can speak English very well. I appreciate it very much.”* The respondent’s position is as a manager of an A-team. Even if his English is not good, he finds a way to improve their communication, using the help of other players and coaches. It is a good problem solution and team management.

#### 5.2.7. Players

The following couple of questions were structured to find out the information about players’ transfers: how many of them had been playing during the last three seasons, how many of them still play these days, and why they left the club.

Firstly, they answered the question about the number of foreigners playing in 3 regular seasons. The first respondent gave a very detailed answer: *“In the season 2017/18 there were 4 players (3 of them were Slovak and 1 Polish). 2018/19 - there were 9 players (5 Slovaks, 2 Latvians, 1 Polish, and 1 Canadian), however, during the season 2 players left because of poor performance. In 2019/20 we had 8 players (4 Slovaks, 1 Latvian, 1 Polish, 1 Canadian, and from 31.12.2019 1 American player became a part of the team). There is one interesting fact, we have one Slovak player who plays in our team from his 14 years and another, who plays from age 9 years.”* According to his answer, it is clear

that the club supports the cooperation with foreigners. Two of three seasons, there were more than five players on the roster.

The second respondent counted them all together: *“In general, I know that in these 3 years, we had 7 players. 2 of them are Slovak and the rest of them are from all over the world. Now there is a French guy, so nowadays, it is 8 players.”* The situation in the second club is changeable. Totally there were not so many foreign players in the club these years.

Therefore, the follow-up question was about the current numbers. The first respondent answered: *“This last season (2020/21) we have 8 players - 5 of them are Slovak, 1 Latvian, and 1 Polish player. As I said, two Slovaks are training with us from a young age.”* Eight players are a good number, however, 5 of them are Slovak. Crossan and Ruda (2019) defines that it is very debatable to consider Slovaks as foreigners. Besides, a couple of them have been training in this club from a young age. Thus, it is possible to notice that this club has no solid international environment. The second one said: *“This season we had 5 foreign players, and next one there will be only 2 of them - French and American. One Slovak player is leaving the team and the second one is finishing his career.”* Here it is possible to notice a big decline in the numbers. For some reasons, the second club is not interested in recruiting foreigners. It may be a financial factor, or they can find more suitable local players.

The last question was about the actual reason why players leave the club. The answer of the first respondent was straight and clear: *“In most cases, it was underperformance or a transfer to a KHL competition.”* Underperformance is a serious reason, and it is fully a club's decision. If the coaches are not satisfied with the player's game, the contract with the foreigner will be terminated. Besides, transfers to other leagues is a common practice in the sport, which is understandable. The second respondent almost repeated the first one. He mentioned the transfers to other leagues and added that players used to finish their sports career. In fact, all professional careers come to an end. It does not depend on age, achievement or skills. There are many factors like injuries, personal motives, family and many more affecting the athlete's decision.

### 5.3. Results of interviews with players

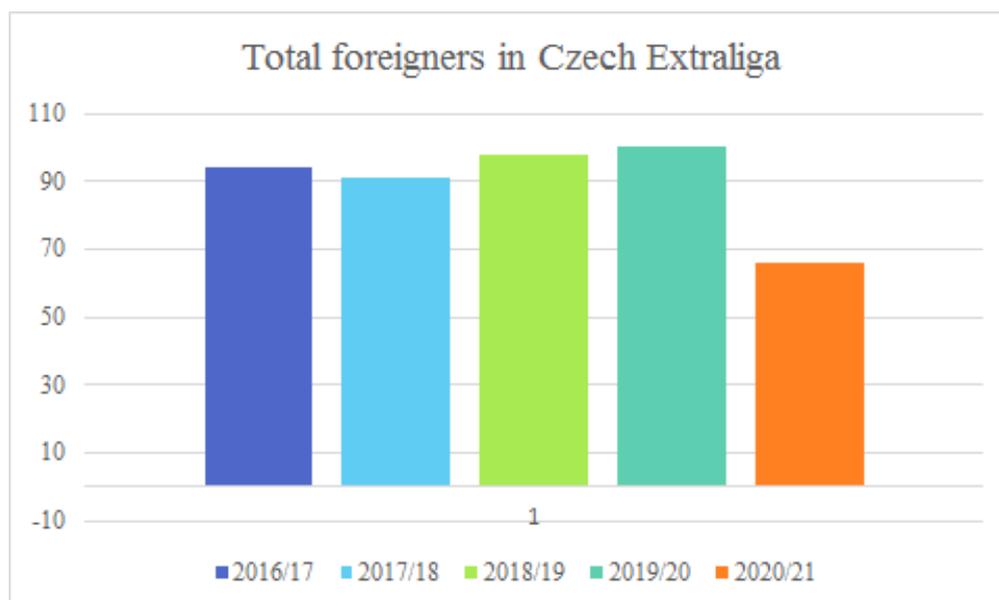
To start this chapter, the respondents must be introduced. Due to the anonymisation of all interviews, no respondents or clubs' names will be publicised. These

interviews contain some information about players and their professional experience, motivation, satisfaction with the training process and communication. It also includes the information if the clubs fulfil their obligations and pay in time. In total, there were four interviews with players from the different teams, and the participants expressed their views freely.

The respondents' age ranges from 25 to 32. Three players are from Europe (Swedish, French and Polish), and one is from North America (Canadian). Every respondent plays ice hockey from a very young age. The first respondent from Canada started when he was 3. It is the quite common age to start skating in "hockey countries". He began to play professionally when he was 21. The second is Swedish, and he began when he was 7 or 8, and his professional career began at 18. The third is French, and he started at five, professionally at 18 as well. And the last is Polish. His first time on the ice was when he was 8. When he turned 16, he started to play professionally.

According to Crossan and Ruda (2019), 94 foreigners played the 2016/17 regular season. The following 2017/18 regular season, there were 91 players, and in the 2018/19 - 98 players (Hokej.cz). As was mentioned before, 100 players played in the 2019/20 season. These numbers are quite stable. However, there is a considerable decline in the 2020/21 season - 66 foreigners playing in the Extraliga. For a better illustration, all numbers are present in the Figure 13 below.

Figure 13 - Total foreigners in Czech Extraliga



*Resource: The graph was compiled by the author based on data from Hokej.cz*

The global pandemic situation could be a possible reason for this decline because it could cause an internal economic problem. All respondents have been playing the 2020/21 season. And all of them are signed for a couple of future seasons with current clubs in Czech Extraliga.

At the beginning of the interviews, the respondents were asked about their professional experience playing abroad and how many times they had changed clubs. Some of them have years of playing abroad. Others' experience ranges from 2 to 5 years. The first respondent said: *"In my professional career - a lot. In North America, if you not on NHL contracts you will change a lot, so, I think I was on 16 teams in North America. And then when I came here to Europe, I have been on 7 teams."* So, in total, this player had changed 23 clubs during his professional career. For a better illustration, he clarified: *"I have played in Russia, Finland, Croatia, Czech Republic, Germany, Poland."* Then he was asked to explain his experience in these countries. At first, he mentioned Finland: *"So, Finland was great, I loved when I was near Helsinki. That was really fun to experience, you know, this Scandinavian culture. It was really cool"*. The following country he mentioned was Croatia: *"I was living in Croatia, in Zagreb. Croatia is a beautiful country too. And we were playing in the Russian league, in KHL. Like travel was a lot because we had to come to Russia almost every game. There are only maybe 6 or 7 teams that were outside of Russia. But it was fun, because you are playing the Russian league, but you are living outside of Russia, which is cool. And you are living next to the sea, it is beautiful weather."* For example, in the KHL's season 2013/14, six teams were from Europe, like Prague, the Czech Republic or Riga, Latvia. Nowadays, there are five teams from over the world. He mentioned that they (the team) had to travel a lot to play the matches, but it was a good experience. And he also highlighted how he liked to live next to the sea and at the same time play a winter sport. Then he mentioned Germany. He said that the food and culture reminded him of North America. However, the experience in Russia was different, but it was not negative. He said: *"Russia was completely different. It was the middle of Russia. It was really cold and it made me learn a little bit of Russian. That part of Russia where I was playing was completely different from Moscow or other cities. People were king and they treated me really well because I was only Canadian there."*

The second respondent is slightly younger than other players and changed only two clubs in his career. He said: *"This is my second year playing hockey abroad, last year*

*I also played in Czech but then in Chance Liga. I have changed professional clubs only two times in my career. First from Swedish second league to Chance Liga and the second time to my current club.*” In comparison with the first respondent, the second one has not a rich experience. However, he added: *“If you compare Sweden and Czech a lot of things are the same regarding ice hockey but at the same time, there are some differences. For example, ice hockey in Sweden is maybe a little bit more focused on defence, and here in Czech, it is much for focus on the offence. One big difference I got to experience here in Czech Republic is that people who are playing with me, in general, are not so good at English compared to Sweden.”* He mentioned a couple of differences between Swedish hockey and Czech. He also noticed that there is a problem with communication in the club. He clarified that not everyone speaks good English, which may cause many complications for a player.

The third participant has an interesting experience. He said that he started to play ice hockey on the French islands of Saint-Pierre and Miquelon, which is right next to Canada. Then he moved to France to live and play there. From 22, he began to play in Finland until 28. Last year he played in the Czech Republic. Totally, he changed six clubs in his career. Then he added: *“For many years I played in France, you know, I was young and I started to play professionally right away at the age of 18. Then, as I said, I moved to Finland. I think this is a place where I have learned how it feels to be a real professional ice hockey player. Their program for hockey is unbelievably excellent, I can say - one of the best in Europe. And now I am playing in the Czech Republic. I quite like it here - good professional league, good hockey.”* The respondent played only in three countries but identified Finnish ice hockey as one of the best in Europe compared to French or Czech. As the second respondent mentioned, every country has its hockey advantages. Some are focused on the game in the defence and some in the offence. Thus, this comparison is quite debatable because all these countries have different types of technical training of hockey players.

The fourth respondent has almost the same experience as the third one. He played in Poland, which is his home country, Germany, and the Czech Republic. Totally, he changed four clubs. When he was a junior, he showed good results: *“I started in Poland because I’m from there. When I became the best player in the junior championship, I decided to try how it is to play in the best ice hockey country. Then, I went to Germany to play for the U20 (under 20) team. Later, I came back to Poland, where I started to play*

*at the professional level. After 2 years I became the second-best shooter in the league. And then I went to play here in the Czech Republic.*” His experience is an example of what a player can achieve if he is resultative on the ice.

### 5.3.1. Motivation

The next two questions were stated to determine the players’ motives to play abroad and why they chose the Czech Republic. As mentioned, there are many factors why people migrate. Compared with regular, sports migration may be more stable because when athletes migrate, they know why, where, and what they need to do to migrate. Maguire (1996) defines five types of sports migrants - mercenaries, nomadic cosmopolitans, settlers, returnees, and pioneers. The respondents will further be grouped into these types according to their answers.

The first player named an experience as the primary motive. He added that if the player does not play in the NHL, he will not make a lot of money. Therefore, a player should take this excellent opportunity to go and play abroad. He also said: *“Because, as I said, hockey is a job. It is some experience that is going to be with you for the rest of your life.”* According to his answer and his experience in playing many leagues, it is possible to classify this player as a “mercenary” — the individual who migrates on short period to the place where they do their “body work”. The second participant also answered: *“I wanted to try something new, get some new experience, and see what that could lead to.”* Thus, he will also be classified as a “mercenary”. The third respondent mentioned a different motive: *“When I was younger, I wanted to challenge myself and play in the best leagues in Europe.”* But still he can be identified as a “mercenary”. As he is young, he is only at the beginning of his professional experience, thus he is trying to try more clubs he can play in. The fourth respondent gave a different from others answer: *“It is mainly my family. And I really feel big respect for my team and coaches. For me, it was a long-time goal. I think that I play in one of the best ice hockey countries in the world - the Czech Republic.”* Based on this answer, this player can be classified as a “settler”. His goal is to play as long as possible and stay in the host country with his family. As he mentioned, it is the best opportunity for him, and he is very comfortable with his choice.

The respondents represent almost same type of sports migrates – mercenaries and settler. These types help to understand their motivation and goals. However, why did they

pick the Czech Republic? Why did they choose this one of all possible countries? All participants gave different answers. The first one mentioned that the club offered him good money. And even if it is a small city, the club's staff treated him accordingly. On another side, the second participant admitted that he, basically, had no choice. So, the best option was the Czech Republic. The third one was inspired by Czech hockey enthusiasm. He noticed that the Czech fanbase is very supportive, and it is a significant advantage. For the last respondent, it was a great opportunity. The club contacted his agent when he was in Poland, and he said yes right away, without hesitating. All participants were very motivated to play abroad, and none of them did not act indifferent. Although each of the players is differently experienced and has different views on ice hockey, all respondents agreed the Czech Republic is an appropriate country for skills development. At the same time, it is a good step in the career of each ice hockey player.

#### 5.3.2. Training process

As mentioned before, the Czech Republic is the fifth-best in the IIHF world ranking of national team success (IIHF.com). Does it mean that Czech ice hockey school is bringing up good professionals? The participants were asked about was the training process and noticeable improvements. The first respondent answered that the last season they got new coaches, thus, he felt better than the season before. The second one also responded positively and clarified: *"I think I have improved my offensive game slightly during this one and a half years, because of the bigger focus in that part of the game during practices."* In fact, if the players see their skills improvements, it proves that the training process brings positive results. Both the third and fourth participants responded they also noticed some progress. Besides, the third stated: *"It is still a little bit different in comparison with Finnish hockey but it's also good to learn and see a different vision of hockey."* This can again serve as a reference to different types of hockey training. In general, all participants expressed a positive opinion about the training process.

#### 5.3.3. Communication

The following questions were referred to the communication problems. Players play and live in the small Czech cities where people on the daily communication do not use English. Or sometimes, the coaches do not speak proper English, which may cause some complications. The first respondent said that the season before last, their coach did not speak any English. Thus, one of the Czech players always had to translate foreigners

what he said. However, he added the new coach was playing in the NHL, so there was no problem last season. Also, the respondent had really good relationships with other foreign teammates and even called them a “family”. The second participant responded: *“One of my coaches speaks English, but the other one does not. Sometimes it is difficult to understand everything they want during practice and games. But you can always ask one of the players to translate for you.”* The participant framed the standard communication issue between the coaches who do not speak English and foreign players. However, he, like many others, used the help of Czech teammates with translation. On one side, it helps build a connection with Czech players, but it still may complicate the training process. The third respondent mentioned that all their coaches spoke English, and there was never a problem. Same as the first respondent, he characterised the relationship with teammates by following way: *“We are all good friends, and we are having fun in the locker room. It took a little bit of time to feel fully comfortable, but the Czech guys are really nice and friendly. Other foreign players are also super nice. We are mostly in the same situation here. We do not have our families here, so that is why we spend a lot of time together out off the ice.”* The last respondent has a significant advantage - he is speaking both Czech and English. He said that it was not a problem to learn the Czech language as he is Polish. Therefore, he understands everything that coaches and other payers (including foreigners) say. It helped him to build friendly relationships with all teammates.

#### 5.3.4. The contract’s obligations

The club, as well as the players, must fulfil all the terms of the contract. The author addressed the next couple of questions to the problem of fulfilling the clubs’ obligations. According to Rsport.ria.ru, several years ago, there was a massive scandal where a couple of clubs from the KHL owed large sums of money to players. Players were not paid salaries for several months, which led to the termination of contracts. The league’s representative said that the relevant documents had been sent to these clubs demanding debt repayment and liability measures. It included a ban on the application of new players, imposing a disqualification on the heads of the club and a huge fine for non-compliance with the decisions of the KHL disciplinary committee.

Referring to this incident, respondents were asked if Czech clubs always perform their contractual duties. The first participant responded very positively. He agreed that the club always fulfilled its obligation and added: *“They also pay for my car and my apartment as well. And they pay taxes too.”* It means that the club fulfils all the necessary

conditions and offers favourable benefits as well. Then when he was asked if they paid him in time, he commented: *“Since I have been here since last year, they always paid me on time. So, we do not have any issues here. But when I was on my KHL team in Croatia, I faced this problem. They were late with payments, and we did not get the last two paychecks.”* This respondent faced the scandal in KHL mentioned before. He shared that he did not get paid for a couple of months, which is a serious breach of contract. Probably it was a reason why the player decided to change his club. The rest of the respondents answered the same as the first. They all got paid in time as well as a car, an apartment or insurance.

As the last question, all respondents were asked if they could extend their contract with the current team in the Czech Republic, would they want to play here another season. According to the interview, all participants flattered about Czech clubs and the league in general. Each of them expressed a desire to play for their current club if they would have an opportunity. The first respondent clarified that he had already signed a contract for the next two years with his current team. Participants are delighted with the local surrounding, contract terms, training process, and the people around them (teammates and coaches). Therefore, they will be happy to play in the Czech Republic for another couple of years.

#### 5.4. Recommendations

In this chapter, the author would like to give a couple of recommendations to the participating managers who presented particular clubs and Czech ice hockey clubs in general. These recommendations are intended to help top managers and coaches improve their relations with foreign players, care, and offered conditions.

Thanks to the interviews with the clubs' management, it might help understand why clubs choose foreign players, what requirements they have and what methods they use to recruit. Respondents also shared information about the terms of the contract, what else they offer to foreign players and told about internal communication with foreigners in the team.

Through interviews with players, it is possible to see the other side. Players shared their experiences and explained the motives for their migration to other countries and, indeed, why they chose the Czech Republic. In addition, participants expressed their opinions about the training process in their current teams, how internal communication took place and shared if the club fulfilled all obligations specified in the contract.

The final recommendations were formulated in the following ways:

- 1) First of all, the club should make a clear plan of internal communication. It would be good to find a responsible person - a communication provider both on and off the ice. It is inappropriate to leave it on coincidences. The club cannot leave the primary way of building important relations with players on someone from players or someone who cannot speak properly. It may cause some complications on the ice, such as misunderstanding on the ice session and off the ice - certain administrative matters. Thus, it would be helpful to manage the provider who will deal with issues of the communication process with foreigners in the club. It may really help to improve the efficiency of employees and internal relations.
- 2) The second recommendation aims at a recruiting process. Hockey clubs usually get offers from various agents and almost every day. Besides, they also use the suggestions from the players. If the club has got an excellent foreign player who meets all the requirements and shows good results, the management can find the player with similar abilities through that particular player. It allows the club to save some time and money and get a new good

player. According to the interviews, this way has not been mentioned yet. Therefore, it may be actively used as well.

- 3) The third recommendation is closely related to the second. The main aim is to keep good foreigners with excellent skills. If the club has a high-skilled player, they could offer him a multiple-year contract and not only a one-year type. It may cost the club more money; however, they will long-term empower the team and not lose a capable player.
- 4) The fourth recommendation would be a suggestion to complete all aspects of employee care. It is really important for the foreign players to get the proper care. With all acceptable benefits, a player would receive the best results, and in general, it would help keep a good image of the club.
- 5) Overall, the fifth one applies to the concept of payroll. The club must pay in time. It is really a vital term which the club must meet. It does not suppose to happen the similar situation from KHL, which one of the respondents (players) has told about. His experience with the payroll in the KHL club from Croatia was unpleasant. That clubs owed him and other players a lot of money. Thus, it is better for the clubs to keep the payroll policy stable, so the players (and everyone from the management of the particular club) would be paid in time.

Lastly, the recommendations were merely a suggestion and in no way encouraged clubs to change their policies. The author's opinion is based on the conducted interviews with players and managers; therefore, they have purely informative character.

## 6. DISCUSSION

Currently, foreign players are a big trend in ice hockey. It may improve the image of the club and, to some extent, strengthens the team. The market of foreign players is filled with both young talents and experienced players. Clubs, in turn, choose players for different reasons. One of the objectives of this study was to find out the reasons why clubs choose foreigners. Are there any benefits from that, and which one?

One of the questions the first group of respondents (club managers) was asked was aimed to understand these reasons (see the 5.2. chapter). The participants responded approximately with the same view. Players must be the best on the ice and show the best results, and it can be considered as a certain standard. However, this is not the only reason. In fact, hockey clubs are quite picky with foreign players. According to the second respondent, the player must fit into the concept of the club itself. A beginner should bring something to the club - some novelties, know-how and professionalism. Mrazová (2019) researched a similar problem in the Czech Republic National Basketball League. She defined that without foreign players, Czech teams would be less competitive. She expressed the opinion that foreigners take roster spots for local places. However, they are quite resultative, and it is enough to compensate for it. At the same time, she said that it could motivate young Czech players to work on themselves and get into the higher league because of their skills. Compared to this, there is the fact that the clubs want players to show them the best what they can do on the ice. They want to empower their teams; thus, they keep the best-chosen foreigners and recruit others because of many factors, such as a low price and the high skills of the player.

But how does it depend on the choice of players? Perhaps, everything is based on their nationality. Several follow-up questions have been aimed at this fact. Thanks to the data from Figure 11, it can be concluded that the Slovaks may be the most preferable. The first respondent has confirmed this fact. However, referring to the fact that the player can bring some benefits, he clarified that, for example, players from Canada have better skills and the best hockey sense. This may be taken as a confirmation of what affects the reasons for recruitment of foreigners. Coaches or managers look at the concept in detail and exactly decide what they are missing in the team. After that, they decide what they want and what players they need.

In the following chapters, it was discussed how many foreigners play in specific leagues. The basis was the regular season 2020/21. Specifically, there were considered: the most popular ice hockey league – the NHL, which takes place in North America. This ice hockey league is the most successful and prosperous. Ice hockey players from around the world are dreaming of playing at least one game in this league. The second most popular league was considered - KHL. This league is located in Europe and unite clubs from different countries like Belarus, Finland, etc. And the last one was the Czech Extraliga, which is on the 5th place of the most popular leagues over the world (Helfrick, 2021)

If we compare these three leagues, what is the difference between the Czech Extraliga and the two best leagues in the world? According to Figure 3, in the NHL's 2020/21 regular season, most players are from Canada and America. But could they be considered as foreigners? Because the league is located in North America, these players cannot be counted as foreigners. If we look at the rest of the players, Swedes, Fins, Russians and Czechs are in the majority. The minor part is the players from other European countries. Figure 4 displayed the data of the KHL league, where most of the players are Russian. But again, players cannot be considered as foreigners because this is the Russian league. Otherwise, Belarus, Finland, Canada, Kazakhstan, Latvia, Sweden and the Czech Republic have about 30 players participating KHL each. In the minority are representatives of the United States, China and other European countries. The results on Figure 10 represented the nationalities of players playing in Czech Extraliga. Compared to the other best leagues, Slovaks dominates in the Czech league. In both NHL and KHL, Slovaks do not play a significant part. Their number is 7 and 6 players relatively. The next prevailing nationality in the Czech Extraliga is Canadians. In total in the 2020/21 season, there were 14 players. If we compare it with KHL, where the Canadians are 30, it is still a good number. As mentioned earlier, Canadian ice hockey players are among the best players, thanks to their professional training techniques. Therefore, the Czech clubs prefer to recruit Canadians. Compared to NHL, the Czech league has more players from Latvia, six of them. However, it is still less than in KHL because there is a club from Latvia.

In general, based on the comparison, it can be noted that in the Czech Extraliga another preference of players is observed. Sweden, Finland, and the Russians are not as popular here as they are in NHL. And are not so popular Belarusians, Latvians, or

Kazakhs as in KHL. From Hokej.cz, in the Czech Extraliga, in total, played 259 players in the season 2020/21 and 66 of them are foreigners (compared to KHL where were 850 players in total and 220 - foreigners). On the other hand, it gives Czech players a chance to reach heights and play one of the best leagues in the world.

The next objective of this study was to find out how clubs take care of their players. The chapter 2.5. address to the basis of employee care. Koubek (2009) defined the concept of it and what it must include. These factors can be reflected in sports industry. Downs (2019) mentioned several general necessary terms of the agreement with employees. Also, Páleníková (2014) pointed out the possible extra benefits employers can offer to the employee. But what do Czech clubs offer their foreign players? Thanks to the interviews with the clubs' managers, it is possible to compare the results with its ideal. A standard contract must have the necessary conditions, such as salaries, payment of taxes, insurance, visa, and some mandatory commitments. Both participants confirmed that the necessary conditions are met. In addition, both of them mentioned the extra benefits that they offered to players. It is an apartment and a car. According to what the Páleníková (2014) had noted, this is only a small part. Clubs could offer a lot more to players, for example, from cooperation with sponsors and so on. This would attract more foreign players and motivate those who are a part of the team. On the other side, can the type of contract, as the Zielinski (2014) listed before, affect the care and offered benefits? As he mentioned, these contract types are responsible for a player's position in the league and his ability to play in leagues below the rank. Therefore, it has a direct impact on the payout of the player. Most of the time, the players get different salaries in the club, but it should not affect the level of care. All players from one team should be treated in the same way.

After the next thing was discussed the motivational reasons for the migration of players to other countries and the Czech Republic. Maguire (1996) compared several types of migrant-athletes based on their motives. These types were mercenaries, nomadic cosmopolitans, settlers, returnees, and pioneers. Based on the interviews with the players, each was divided by a type of sports migrant. Three of them were classified as mercenaries and one – settler. However, each of these types is based on a specific motivation. In general, a player who wants to play in another country has many reasons. Naturally, the main factor may be money, but there are others, such as family, personal preferences, experience, and perhaps even school/university. The respondents expressed

their main motives for migration, but there may be more. Tkadlčíková (2019) mentioned that the priority motivation for ice hockey players is a financial factor, and that means it is possible to put them into a group of “mercenaries”. This group is motivated to emigrate for varied reasons. She said the ice hockey players use their career to gain mainly finance, but there are many more factors that impact the players’ migration. Thus, it is inappropriate to classify this group of athletes into a particular group. Compared to the results of the interviews, I can agree with this opinion. The respondents mainly belong to a group of “mercenaries”, and one of them has been classified as a “settler”. However, they mentioned more reason to migrate. It approves the athletes particularly could be identified as some of those types, but the classification will not be exact on another side if it would be a group. Based on this, as a result, special recommendations for the Czech clubs were structured. Players' motivations are very helpful in understanding the process, what players are looking for and what they are waiting for.

## 7. CONCLUSION

The main aim of this bachelor thesis was to determine the players' motivation to play abroad, specifically in the Czech Republic. Also, to find out the level of care of foreign players in Czech clubs and how they are satisfied with it. The qualitative method of semi-structured interviews was used for this research, which helped to understand the essence of this study. Both the managers of the Czech clubs and foreign players were the respondents. All results of the interviews are detailed presented in the fifth chapter.

First of all, the interviews' responses with managers, namely the sports director and manager of the A-team, were analysed. The results showed the differences between clubs. It demonstrated why both of the clubs recruit the foreigners and what benefits they have from it. They told about what the players could bring to the team, how it could change, and how the new foreigners can empower the team. Additionally, they defined the preferences and requirements for the players: what nationalities are preferred in the clubs and what they have to know and how skilled they have to be. They also explained the financial side and told about contracts and internal and external communication. They mentioned the fact that the foreigners are way cheaper than local players, which many people (fans and others) do not know. The benefits system and contracts were explained and compared between these two clubs, same as communication: how and who contacts players and if there have been any problems with it. These two clubs are participants in the Extraliga, the top ice hockey league in the Czech Republic. They both did a great job in the 2020/21 regular season. The respondents were the experienced sports managers and knew their job. Both of them explained in depth all moments that were discussed. They felt free to answer all questions and understood the essence of this study.

The second parts of the interviews took place with the players. All players who were interviewed were differently experienced. Some of them had years of their career abroad, some of them only a couple. Fortunately, they all were satisfied with their job in the Czech Republic. All respondents felt comfortable with the conditions and care there had been offered by the clubs. They mentioned their previous experience in the different clubs, which allowed them to compare it with Czech ones. The contracts' terms and extra benefits fully responded to their expectations, and they have a positive impression from playing in the Czech league. For example, one of them told about a famous scandal in KHL and how clubs owed the players' salaries for a couple of months. He added that he

never faced this problem in Extraliga, which made him continue the contract with his current club. Besides, all of the players decided to do the same thing, because they liked it here and felt they could get a really good experience in Extraliga.

As the main result, the final recommendations were made for the Czech clubs. The main aim of it to explain the problems and help them to improve. These recommendations are presented as informative suggestions, could be meant for all ice hockey clubs in the Czech Republic and do not force anyone to change. It does not have to impact clubs' policies but inform them about the current situations.

Overall, the situation regarding the care of foreign players is good enough to be presented as an example to all world. The positive reactions of the players prove it. Compliance with contractual conditions, timely payout and creating a positive environment with quality interpersonal relationships are central to player retention.

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## **Attachment No.1: Interview with the club's manager No.1**

**What is your team's position?**

*My position is a sports director.*

**What are the benefits of taking on foreign players for your team?**

*Normally, we are trying to find the best players in our team and, to be honest, it does not matter what nationality he has. Sometimes, there are more equal candidates (for example, same game skills or character, etc.) and in this case, the costs of engaging the player are of concern.*

**Do you mean that local players are more expensive?**

*Yes, foreigners are often more cheaper for the club.*

**When choosing foreign players, do you have a preference in nationality? Why?**

*Of course, Slovak mentally is closer to Czech, so we usually prefer to offer them a place in our team. Besides, Canadians have the best hockey skills and strength of character, and these players, I can say, are quite "cheaper". Thus, for us, it is a perfect deal. Probably, it is because they have kinda big competition or I do not know, but here it is a good opportunity for them to keep playing good hockey. Latvians are also taken into consideration. International-level players have really good hockey skills, character, and conduct.*

**What are your requirements for new foreign players?**

*First of all, they have to be far better than Czech players. For example, for a Canadian player, we usually expect a more active personality, experience in fighting and aggression, also a good shot and pressure in front of the goal line.*

**How do you pick the new players? With the agency's help or by yourself?**

*We have some offers from certain agents. There are also various hockey scouts we work with. And we regularly check the database of free agents.*

**Do you contact the club's management or the coaches?**

*When a player is finally selected, it is important to get the specifics. These channels of information are different - coaches, teammates, implementation teams, various statistics, videos, etc.*

**How experienced should the picked players be? Do you prefer the older and experienced players, or do you give some chances for young players as well?**

*Age is absolutely irrelevant.*

**What role do finances play in your decision to bring in foreign players?**

*As I mentioned before, finance plays a major role in selecting. Basically, it is the first thing we are used to discussing with the players or their agents.*

**What benefits can you offer to your players instead of payment?**

*It is already a standard - an apartment, a car, and flight tickets.*

**Which language does your coach use for all players? Have any problems with communication occurred?**

*Coach speaks Czech, but when it is necessary to emphasize something, he switches to English.*

**Who does from your club staff mainly communicate with the foreign players during the season?**

*Coach mainly communicates with players.*

**How many foreign players have you had during the last 3 seasons?**

*In the season 2017/18 there were 4 players (3 of them were Slovak and 1 Polish). 2018/19 - there were 9 players (5 Slovaks, 2 Latvians, 1 Polish, and 1 Canadian), however, during the season 2 players left because of poor performance. In 2019/20 we had 8 players (4 Slovaks, 1 Latvian, 1 Polish, 1 Canadian, and from 31.12.2019 1 American player became a part of the team). There is one interesting fact, we have one Slovak player who plays in our team from his 14 years and another, who plays from age 9 years.*

**How many of them still play now?**

*This last season (2020/21) we have 8 players - 5 of them are Slovak, 1 Latvian, and 1 Polish player. As I said, two Slovaks are training with us from a young age.*

**What about young players?**

*As we are on the border between Slovakia and Poland, there are young players from Poland and Slovakia.*

**What was the reason for foreign players from past seasons leaving?**

*In most cases, it was underperformance or a transfer to a KHL competition.*

## **Attachment No. 2: Interview with the club's manager No.2**

**What is your team's position?**

*I am a manager of an A-team.*

**What are the benefits of taking on foreign players for your team?**

*These foreign players fit into our conception and line-up of the team. Usually, those players bring something special like different attributes that Czech players lack, know-how, or higher professionalism.*

**When choosing foreign players, do you have a preference in nationality? Why?**

*In general, all players are chosen by a coach and I think there is no preference in nationality. It really does not matter if a player is American, Canadian, Finnish, or Russian.*

**What are your requirements for new foreign players?**

*It is quite simple, they have to be the best. Nothing special. Their hockey skills must be excellent, and they have to show some results on the ice. If they do not, we prefer to stop our cooperation.*

**How do you pick the new players? With the agency's help or by yourself? Do you contact the club's management or the coaches?**

*It is the responsibility of our head coach and his team to find some qualified players. Mainly, some agents offer us players they are used to working with. Besides, we receive a lot of recommendations from agents or coaches like, for example, someone who knows some coaches, managers or a player who could be interested in transferring to our team.*

**How experienced should the picked players be? Do you prefer the older and experienced players, or do you give some chances for young players as well?**

*I think it depends on the head coach, what players he is looking for. Last couple of years we had 20 years old foreign player from France and 30 years old Canadian player.*

**What role do finances play in your decision to bring in foreign players?**

*Of course, if we do not have a comfortable budget, we will not recruit any players. It is a quite simple question.*

**So do you have a special budget for recruiting?**

*Definitely yes.*

**What benefits can you offer to your players instead of payment?**

*Under the contract, they have accommodation and a car.*

**Can I ask if you help the player with visa forms?**

*This is basically my responsibility. Yes, we help them with visa forms and they receive medical insurance.*

**Which language does your coach use for all players? Have any problems with communication occurred?**

*There is no problem with communication. Our head coach played in the NHL for about 15-20 years and, you know, almost all the hockey terminology is in English. That is why everyone understands everything without switching. But usually, the communication is in Czech, but if he wants to explain something to a particular player, he will speak English.*

**Who does from your club staff mainly communicate with the foreign players during the season?**

*Foreign players primarily contact the head coach, but if they want to sort something out of hockey they will ask me. Unfortunately, my English is not so good, so they usually ask for help from their teammates or the coach or I do this. And then we can sort everything out. All players are very friendly and they understand that not all people can speak English very well. I appreciate it very much.*

**How many foreign players have you had during the last 3 seasons?**

*In general, I know that in these 3 years, we had 7 players. 2 of them are Slovak and the rest of them are from all over the world. And now there is a French guy, so nowadays, in total we had 8 players.*

**How many of them still play now.**

*This season we had 5 foreign players, and next one there will be only 2 of them - French and American. One Slovak player is leaving the team and the second one is finishing his career.*

**What was the reason for foreign players from past seasons leaving?**

*Some of them are finishing their career or they have to leave because they do not fit our conception, and some of them are moving to different leagues.*

### **Attachment No.3: Interview with the player No.1**

**Can you please introduce yourself? (gender, age)**

*I am half American and half Canadian. I am 32 years old, male.*

**How long have you been playing ice hockey? How long have you been playing at a professional level?**

*I think I started skating when I was like 3 years old, but I started figure skating before for 1 year and 6 months, and I started I guess playing hockey when I was 3 I would say. I started to play professionally since I was 21, it is 11 years I think.*

**Have you played ice hockey abroad? How many times have you changed clubs?**

*In my professional career - a lot. In North America, if you not on NHL contracts you will change a lot, so, I think I was on 16 teams in North America. And then when I came here to Europe, I have been on 7 teams.*

**Which countries have you played in?**

*I have played in Russia, Finland, Croatia, Czech Republic, Germany, Poland.*

**Can you explain your experience in these countries?**

*So, Finland was great, I loved when I was near Helsinki. That was really fun to experience, you know, this Scandinavian culture. It was really cool. Then I came to Croatia. I was living in Croatia, in Zagreb. Croatia is a beautiful country too. And we were playing in the Russian league, in KHL. Like travel was a lot, cuz we had to come to Russia almost every game. There are only maybe 6 or 7 teams that were outside of Russia. But it was fun, cuz you are playing the Russian league, but you are living outside of Russia, which is cool. And you are living next to the sea, it is beautiful weather. Germany was a great experience as well. You know, like, the food and culture. It is more like North America. Russia was completely different. It was the middle of Russia. It was really cold and it made me learn a little bit of Russian. That part of Russia where I was playing was completely different from Moscow or other cities. People were king and they treated me really well because I was only Canadian there.*

**What was your motivation or reasons to play abroad?**

*It's for the experience. You know, if you not playing in NHL, you gonna make more money playing in Europe. And the reason why I trying to sign one year contract is mainly for,*

*you know, experiencing different countries, different cultures. Because, as I said, hockey is a job. It is some experience that is going to be with you for the rest of your life. And now I resigned my contract for 2 more years because I am comfortable, I am older now. And it is right next to Dresden and Prague, I am always in one of these cities. I always go there when I have off.*

**Why have you picked the Czech Republic to play?**

*They offered me exactly what I wanted, even if it is the smallest city in all of the cities in the Czech Republic, but they are treating me so well, so nice. That is why I decided to sign here another 2 years.*

**Do you like the training process?**

*We have got new coaches this year, they are great. I like them.*

**Have you noticed some improvements?**

*Yeah, I am definitely better than last year. We will see how it is going to be this year with all this quarantine and staff. Overall I think we should be good this year, we will see what is going to happen.*

**Does your coach speak English? Have any problems with communication occurred?**

*Yeah, our coach played hockey in North America. He played in NHL, he speaks English very well.*

**How do the other players receive (treat) you? How are you received by the other foreign players? How are you received by the Czech players?**

*Last year, yeah. Last year our coach did not speak any English. So, one of the players was translated. But this year there is no problem. In our team, we have 3 Canadians and 2 Latvians, so all the guys speak English and it is fun. With other foreign players we always go for dinner, even the local guys are so good. We always go somewhere to eat together, so we have a really good group of guys, they all speak English. We are hanging out together, we are pretty close friends.*

**Has the team's management fulfilled its obligations? Aside from your salary, what other benefits does your team provide to you?**

*Yeah. They also pay for my car and my apartment as well. And they pay taxes too.*

**Are you paid in time?**

*Yes. Since I have been here since last year, they always paid me on time. So we do not have any issues here. But when I was on my KHL team in Croatia, I faced this problem. They were late with payments, and we did not get the last two paychecks.*

**If given the option to extend your contract with your current team in Czech, would you want to play here another season?**

*As I said I have already signed 2 more years with my club and I can't wait to finally go on the ice.*

#### **Attachment No.4: Interview with the player No. 2**

**Can you please introduce yourself? (gender, age)**

*I am a 25 years old man. I'm from Sweden and grew up in a town called Arvika. I also have a little brother who plays hockey as well.*

**How long have you been playing ice hockey? How long have you been playing at a professional level?**

*I started to play ice hockey when I was around 7-8 years old. I started to play at a professional level when I was 18 years old in a club which plays in the Swedish second league "Hockey Allsvenskan".*

**Have you played ice hockey abroad? How many times have you changed clubs?**

*This is my second year playing hockey abroad, last year I also played in Czech but then in Chance Liga. I have changed professional clubs only two times in my career. First from Swedish second league to Chance Liga and the second time to my current club.*

**Which countries have you played in? Explain your experience in these countries?**

*Sweden and Czech. If you compare Sweden and Czech a lot of things are the same regarding ice hockey but at the same time, there are some differences. For example, ice hockey in Sweden is maybe a little bit more focused on defence, and here in Czech, it is much for focus on the offence. One big difference I got to experience here in Czech Republic is that people who are playing with me, in general, are not so good at English compared to Sweden.*

**What was your motivation or reasons to play abroad?**

*I wanted to try something new, get some new experience, and see what that could lead to. My agent is from Czech so he had some connections from the country so that also made it a little bit easier.*

**Why have you picked the Czech Republic to play?**

*Last year I didn't have so many more options so I couldn't really "pick".*

**Do you like the training process? Have you noticed some improvements?**

*Yes, I like the training process. I think I have improved my offensive game slightly during this one and a half years, because of the bigger focus in that part of the game during practices.*

**Does your coach speak English? Have any problems with communication occurred?**

*One of my coaches speaks English, but the other one does not. Sometimes it is difficult to understand everything they want during practice and games. But you can always ask one of the players to translate for you.*

**How do the other players receive (treat) you? How are you received by the other foreign players? How are you received by the Czech players?**

*I think very well, they are trying to make you one of the group. I'm the only "import player" on the team so that question, to be honest, is hard for me to answer.*

**Has the team's management fulfilled its obligations? Aside from your salary, what other benefits does your team provide to you?**

*Yes, they receive standard benefits. Living accommodation and car.*

**Are you paid in time?**

*Yes. Always.*

**If given the option to extend your contract with your current team in Czech, would you want to play here another season?**

*I could imagine playing here again, so it is a yes for me.*

### **Attachment No. 5: Interview with the player No. 3**

**Can you please introduce yourself? (gender, age)**

*I am 29 years old, male. I am a French ice hockey player.*

**How long have you been playing ice hockey? How long have you been playing at a professional level?**

*I started playing hockey at the age of 5 and at the professional level since I turned 18 years old.*

**Have you played ice hockey abroad? How many times have you changed clubs?**

*I started playing ice hockey on my island Saint-Pierre and Miquelon (it is right next to Canada). When I was 15 I moved to France in Amiens and I was living and playing there until I turned 22 years old. Five years from 23 years old to 28 I was playing in the club in Finland. And now I am here in the Czech Republic. So totally, I changed teams about 6 times.*

**Which countries have you played in? Explain your experience in these countries?**

*For many years I played in France, you know, I was young and I started to play professionally right away at the age of 18. Then, as I said, I moved to Finland. I think this is a place where I have learned how it feels to be a real professional ice hockey player. Their program for hockey is unbelievably excellent, I can say - one of the best in Europe. And now I am playing in the Czech Republic. I quite like it here - good professional league, good hockey.*

**What was your motivation or reasons to play abroad?**

*When I was younger, I wanted to challenge myself and play in the best leagues in Europe.*

**Why have you picked the Czech Republic to play?**

*Because it's a good hockey country, ice hockey here is really popular and I can see that there is a real enthusiasm for it. I like passion and fans are absolutely insane.*

**Do you like the training process? Have you noticed some improvements?**

*Yes, I absolutely like it. It is still a little bit different in comparison with Finnish hockey but it's also good to learn and see a different vision of hockey.*

**Does your coach speak English? Have any problems with communication occurred?**

*There is literally no problem in communication in our team. We have 3 coaches and one of them speaks English. So, I understand everything that is happening on the ice.*

**How do the other players receive (treat) you? How are you received by the other foreign players? How are you received by the Czech players?**

*Pretty good, even if we are here for a job. We are all good friends, and we are having fun in the locker room. It took a little bit of time to feel fully comfortable, but the Czech guys are really nice and friendly. Other foreign players are also super nice. We are mostly in the same situation here. We do not have our families here, so that is why we spend a lot of time together out of the ice.*

**Has the team's management fulfilled its obligations? Aside from your salary, what other benefits does your team provide to you?**

*Yes, they do. I have got a place to live, insurance and a car. And as I know the rest of the foreign players have the same benefits.*

**Are you paid in time?**

*Yes, no problem on that side.*

**If given the option to extend your contract with your current team in Czech, would you want to play here another season?**

*Yes totally. I like this opportunity. But I have to do my job really perfectly to stay here and fortunately, I do.*

#### **Attachment No.6: Interview with the player No.4**

**Can you please introduce yourself? (gender, age, team)**

*I'm from Poland (Gdańsk), I'm 29.*

**How long have you been playing ice hockey? How long have you been playing at a professional level?**

*I began to play ice hockey when I was 8, but at the professional level, I started at 16.*

**Have you played ice hockey abroad? How many times have you changed clubs?**

*Now I play in the Czech Republic, but before I have changed a couple of teams. I started in Gdańsk, Poland. After I was playing in Germany. A couple of years ago I came back to Gdańsk, later I was playing in Kraków, Poland. And finally, I started to play in the Czech Republic.*

**Which countries have you played in? Explain your experience in these countries?**

*In total, I played in Poland, Germany, and the Czech Republic. I started in Poland because I'm from there. When I became the best player in the junior championship, I decided to try how it is to play in the best ice hockey country. Then, I went to Germany to play for the U20 (under 20) team. Later, I came back to Poland, where I started to play at the professional level. After 2 years I became the second-best shooter in the league. And then I went to play here in the Czech Republic.*

**What was your motivation or reasons to play abroad?**

*It is mainly my family. And I really feel big respect for my team and coaches. For me, it was a long-time goal. I think that I play in one of the best ice hockey countries in the world - the Czech Republic.*

**Why have you picked the Czech Republic to play?**

*Imagine, my manager called me and said: "Man, that club wants you". That was a really good day for me. You know when you are playing in Poland and one day someone from the Czech Republic calls you that they want you, you definitely will go!*

**Do you like the training process? Have you noticed some improvements?**

*I like to practice, and I want to improve my level. That is why I want to play more and more, which is unfortunately impossible.*

**Does your coach speak English? Have any problems with communication occurred?**

*He mainly speaks the Czech language. Fortunately, I can speak Czech too, so for me, it is not a problem. Thus, we don't have any problems with communication. With other players I speak Czech and English for me is not a problem, so I understand foreign players.*

**How do the other players receive (treat) you? How are you received by the other foreign players? How are you received by the Czech players?**

*Here we have fantastic people. I don't have any problem with anyone. Other players have helped me a lot with acclimatization.*

**Has the team's management fulfilled its obligations? Aside from your salary, what other benefits does your team provide to you?**

*Yes, they do. I have all that has been written in the contract, for example, an apartment and a car.*

**Are you paid in time?**

*Yes, we do not have any problem with that.*

**If given the option to extend your contract with your current team in Czech, would you want to play here another season?**

*For me, it is a really good opportunity, so I will definitely say yes if the management will offer me more years.*