

**CZECH UNIVERSITY OF LIFE SCIENCES PRAGUE**

**Faculty of Tropical AgriSciences**



**Career Pathways and Employment Strategies of  
Graduates of Czech Governmental Agricultural  
University Scholarships for Studies in the Czech  
Republic**

**BACHELOR'S THESIS**

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# Declaration

I hereby declare that I have done this thesis entitled “**Career Pathways and Employment Strategies of Graduates of Czech Governmental Agricultural University Scholarships for Studies in the Czech Republic**”, independently. All texts in this thesis are original, and all the sources have been quoted and acknowledged using complete references and according to the Citation Rules of the FTA.

In Prague, April 18th, 2024

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'AYASSOU' with a stylized flourish.

Narcisse Yao Ayassou

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## **Abstract**

With more than 20,000 postsecondary students from the Global South supported, the Czech Republic stands as one of the global leading scholarship donors. However, due to the lack of a database on former scholarship holders, little information is available about the alumni's career paths, their opinions on their beneficial deeds to society, and how much it diverges across regions. As a result, measuring the effectiveness of the Czech scholarship scheme is challenging. The study investigates the career paths and employment strategies of scholarship graduates from Czech state agricultural universities. Based on a qualitative method and using a semi-structured individual interview, the paper compares the perspectives and experiences of 21 alumni who originated from Georgia, Ethiopia and Zambia and graduated from the University of South Bohemia in České Budějovice, Mendel University, and the Czech University of Life Sciences Prague. The results provide evidence of notable human capital development for the middle-income country (Georgia) and least-developed countries (Ethiopia and Zambia) but with variations depending on the cultural context. For graduates from Georgia, personal growth precedes and is a step to societal development whereas community engagement, family support and self-fulfilment are equally important or codependent to the African alumni. It follows different initiatives of giving back at a societal level. Owing their employment to their individual actions, alumni recommended the creation of a communication platform between scholarship beneficiaries and also with the programme for more social and professional networks. Finally, the study offered suggestions for future research that would look at gender differences in career paths and investigate how generational theories affect employment choices in agriculture.

**Keywords:** Czech Republic, Governmental Scholarship, Scholarship Impact, Career Pathways, Employment strategies.

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## **List of abbreviations**

DIR: Department of International Relations

DIC: Department of International Cooperation

DISP: Development-oriented International Scholarship Programme

DDCHA: Department for Development Cooperation and Humanitarian Aid

HDI: Human Development Index

MEYS: Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports

MFA: Ministry of Foreign Affairs

MI: Ministry of Interior

OECD: Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development

ODA: Official Development Assistance

SDG: Sustainable Development Goals

UN: United Nations

## 1. Introduction

Education reduces intolerance, decreases crime, promotes healthy lifestyles, lifts entire communities out of poverty through dignified and well-paid employment, and is therefore a key dimension within the Human Development Index (HDI) measurement (UN 1995). Access to education at all levels is crucial, and the United Nation's (UN) 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development has made it the fourth most aspirational goal toward which all countries are committed. More remarkably, after being excluded from the Millennium Development Goals, higher education became the focal point (Bisbee et al. 2019).

Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 4b calls for an increase in scholarships available to students and trainees from developing countries who want to pursue tertiary education in developed countries, but not exclusively (UN 2015), making for the first time international student mobility a vehicle for development (Campbell & Mawer 2019). In response to the call, development-oriented international scholarship programmes (DISPs) have spread out, especially thanks to their embodiment in the Official Development Assistance (ODA) by governments. Over 70% of all tertiary education ODA disbursements are directed there and are unsurprisingly provided in their majority by countries from the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) namely, Germany, France, Japan, Turkey, and the United States (Galán-Muros et al. 2022).

The Czech Republic, which is also a member of the OECD, has a long history of providing scholarships to countries of the South dating back to the 1950s. Created and implemented through the cooperation between the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports (MEYS) and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA), the Czech scholarship program has a budget of approximately 6 million euros, and finances tertiary education in the present days of approximately 600 students per year (Němečková & Krylova 2014) coming from eight different countries, namely Zambia, Ukraine, Moldova, Georgia, Ethiopia, Cambodia, Bosnia and Herzegovina and Belarus (MEYS 2023a). The country has stated the official aims of the scheme as to give students who would not otherwise have the possibility to study the opportunity to obtain a qualitative tertiary education that is relevant to their lives and to improve the country's connection with developing nations



(MFA 2012). In other words, like the other OECD countries, the Czech Republic establishes its foreign policy on the belief that providing scholarships would help improve human development, reduce poverty, and promote socioeconomic development in economically less advantaged countries (Feřtřová et al. 2018).

However, the social development brought about by scholarship programme graduates depends on a large number of parameters. Numerous scholars have postulated that the proportion of returnees to their home country, the application of newfound skills for collective benefit, the alignment of acquired education with domestic needs, the location of residence, the professional occupation, the familial background, and the supplementary education of past scholarship recipients are all factors in determining the success of scholarship schemes (Perna et al. 2014, 2015; Hejkrlík et al. 2018; Campbell & Mawer 2019; Novotný et al. 2021). The effects of scholarship programmes related to development expectations are thereby challenging to ascertain (Novotný et al. 2021). Scholarship programmes have frequently faced scrutiny regarding their lack of clear transparency (UNESCO 2017; Kirkland 2018), thus supporting the ongoing notion that DISPs sponsored by ODA benefit the providers rather than the developing countries (CONCORD 2018).

Similarly, the Czech programme exhibits significant shortcomings in terms of measurement of development effectiveness (Novotný et al. 2021). In some cases, impact assessments pointed out brain drain effects (OECD-DAC 2007) and a lack of data on the migration patterns of beneficiaries after graduation (Jelínek et al. 2004; Hejkrlík et al. 2018), in other cases, they brought about partial results related to financial restrictions (Němečková & Krylova 2014). Since 2018, no research has been undertaken to examine the trajectory of the participants in the still-active programme which offers tertiary education to almost 600 students annually, as noted earlier. Significantly, previous studies carried out to identify the scheme's effects consistently relied on a broad examination of its results for all recipients without considering their origin. No study was specifically tailored to the citizens of a single nation. However, when comparing the attitudes of postgraduate alumni from Georgia and Moldova, Campbell (2017) found that their views on contributing to their respective home countries varied and were context and time-dependent as specified by Hejkrlík et al. (2018). As demonstrated, there is a shortage of current and accurate information on alumni's post-study paths hindering talk about the

program's effectiveness. This study aims to address this gap and explore the career pathways and employment strategies of graduates of Czech government agricultural university scholarships from Georgia, Zambia, and Ethiopia. They studied at Czech agricultural universities, namely the University of South Bohemia in České Budějovice, Mendel University in Brno, and the Czech University of Life Sciences Prague. Specifically, the primary goal is to examine the graduates' motivations for applying for the Czech Government scholarship. The second goal is to explore the transitional period between the alumni's graduation and their first employment while the third goal is to describe graduates' professional occupations. The fourth objective is to assess the graduates' perceived transformative effects of their education and mobility experiences.

The corpus of the thesis is divided into 9 chapters, beginning with an explanation of the concept of international scholarship, its consequential individual and global impacts, as well as the construction and evolution of alumni's careers. The following chapters describe the key features of the Czech State scholarship programme, the objectives, and the methodology used to conduct the research. The final chapters elaborate on the results and subsequent discussion before ending the study with its conclusions.

## 2. Understanding the Concept of the International Scholarship Programme

This chapter comprised an examination of the theories that explain the intervention logic of scholarship programmes and the mechanisms ensuring the management of post-study transitions.

### 2.1. Logic of Intervention of DISPs

Between 2015 and 2019, aid to encourage international student mobility grew by 30% worldwide, from \$3.4 billion to \$4.4 billion, with governments being the major sponsors (UNESCO 2021). DISPs became a conventional instrument for international cooperation but are also highly people-centred, providing access to universities for meritorious but underprivileged students (Campbell & Neff 2020). Novotný et al. (2021) identified several theories that explain their intervention.

- *The Human Capital Approach*: According to this first theory, DISPs serve as a tool to enhance the human capital within the home countries of the programme participants (Perna et al. 2014, 2015). Thus, designing a scholarship scheme entails creating a study programme that aligns with the needs of the destination nation. The expectation is that the beneficiaries will complete their education successfully and return to their home nations, where the knowledge and skills gained at prestigious universities will be applied to local organisations and communities to create a good impact in the long run (Campbell 2017).

- *The Rights-Based Theory*: The defenders of this theory base DISPs' existence on the UN Declaration of Human Rights (1948) ensuring everyone equal access to resources that enable them to benefit from a high-quality education. This conception justifies itself also by the recognition by law in most countries in the world of the principles of non-discrimination and education as fundamental rights. DISPs seek, therefore, to increase adherence to fundamental freedoms and create opportunities for people who would otherwise not be able to receive a quality education (Campbell & Mawer 2019).

- *The Capability Approach*: Turshen & Sen (2001) explained that people are free when they can take actions that will lead them to the point they want to be. The authors pointed out that studying abroad empowers recipients to comprehend their potential for

playing significant roles in their lives and society. It is posited that, by supporting people's education, governments recognize that DISPs' alumni can contribute to development in a variety of ways and locations.

In addition to the human capital, the right-based, and the capability models that position DISPs within an idealistic international development framework, three other theories form the intervention logic of DISPs. They are summarized in Table 1.

- *The Soft Power Model*: Borrowed to international relations and offering a realistic perspective, this model, also referred to as an 'opinion leader' by Scott-Smith (2008), implies that donor nations use DISPs for their foreign policy objectives, which extends beyond the altruistic aim of supporting the socio-economic growth of recipient countries (Nye 2004; Novotný et al. 2021). A study conducted for the University of Oxford that looked at trends and tactics for bringing students from Central Asia, the Caucasus, and Russia to the United Kingdom discovered that educating international students helps to build bridges between countries as students grow to appreciate their host country and become exceptional representatives of the culture they have embraced (Chankseliani & Hessel 2016).

- *Historical Institutionalism*: Developed in 1989 in Colorado, the theory belongs to political science and describes how institutions change over time. According to Thelen's (2004) research, formal institutions do not endure for extended periods by staying stationary. They actively and continuously adapt to changes in the political and economic environment in which they find themselves to survive. When it comes to the design of study abroad programmes, historical institutionalism suggests that their structure and functioning are strongly influenced by their historical background, including previous policy decisions.

- *The garbage can model*: It is a theoretical framework that elucidates policies and decision-making in organisations as an unconventional and unstructured process (Wilson 2015). The theory implies that choices are not made as part of a logical and systematic approach but arise from a kind of 'garbage can' of concerns, quick reactions, stakeholders, and options. Regarding DISPs, the model suggests that the way that various agendas interact and the involvement of stakeholders come and go owing to conflicting interests and objectives all have an impact on the conceptualization of scholarship (Cohen et al. 1972).

**Table 1. DISPs' intervention logic**

	Objectives (expected impacts)		Assumptions (prerequisites for achieving objectives)
	Micro level	Macro level	
Human capital model	Acquired knowledge and abilities that boost one's productivity and income	An increase in the human capital of the nation of origin contributes to both its societal and economic growth and competitive advantage.	The study's objectives are in line with national agendas and labour market demands. There is no comparable training provided in the home nations. Students finish their coursework. Graduates go back to their nations. Graduates land suitable jobs
Rights-based approach	To ensure that individuals who lack access to it can nonetheless receive high-quality education	Improving human rights. Decrease in social inequality	The DISP is crucial in enabling the beneficiaries to access a satisfactory education.
Capability approach	To increase their capacity (opportunities and talents) and freedom to make moral decisions.	Human progress is seen as multifaceted happiness.	Enhancing one's abilities through quality education results in transformational change. Scholars can support development in a variety of ways (other than simply working in their home countries).
Soft power/opinion leader	To develop public figures who have strong personal ties to the donor nation	To show solidarity and foster a favourable view of the donor nation.	Beneficiaries get a good outlook and ties to the donor nation, which they maintain and utilize. Beneficiaries advance to positions of power in their home nations or abroad. Donors have strategic objectives in the nations that DISPs target
Historical institutionalism	To explain how organisations experience path-dependent changes across time.	DISPs' performance depends on previous policies and institutions.	The DISPs are dependent on their journey.
Garbage can model	To portray organisational decision-making as a fluid, unorganised process as opposed to a methodical, logical one.	DISPs result from an unconventional and unstructured process	The DISP is the responsibility of various individuals and institutions, each of which incorporates its unique preferences and habits into its design. Uncertainty in the change theory and failure to comply with stated goals.

**Sources:** Novotný et al. (2021) inspired this chapter. Specifically, we followed the work of Perna et al. (2015) for the human capital model, and Campbell & Mawer (2019) the rights-based and capability approaches. Thelen (2004) examined the importance of historical changes in institutions and we used the reference to Cohen et al. (1972) in Wilson (2015).

## **2.2. Managing Post-Study Transitions in Scholarship Programs**

Drawing on the results of Loerke (2018), this section investigates how scholarship programme administrators handle the post-study period in order to meet the objectives. The author stresses the significance of carefully equipping grantees to handle challenging and unclear decisions, like an early return home, delaying return via another foreign experience, or staying longer in the host nation. Pre-departure orientations, academic advising, and comprehensive support for advanced degree study are some examples of the mechanisms that scholarship programme administrators have implemented to help students and make sure that programme objectives are in line with the realities of each beneficiary's experience.

The Fulbright Foreign Student Programme, for example, has created a global network via the Internet that enables graduates to engage in international exchange (through Enrichment Seminars, and the International Exchange Alumni Network) by promoting community service and small donations in their home country (FFSP 2024). Grantees of the Commonwealth Scholarship connect with alumni through LinkedIn, where they debate problems and share information about academic projects as well as professional opportunities (CSCUK 2023). The same is done on the German side, with the mentorship of new applicants being their particularity (DAAD 2023).

This is what Raetzell et al. (2013) called the critical mass: associations of competent people able to cooperate and reach larger societal influence as it stimulates diplomatic proximity, capacity building, and leadership development in transitioning societies. Besides, critical mass is thought of as an extra support network for alumni who are typically lone guns in the business world (Dassin et al. 2018).

There is little proof that alumni associations consistently carry out this function in the context of larger scholarship initiatives. However, according to Campbell's (2017) investigation in Georgia, they can be a vibrant source for cooperative thinkers and doers. In the Moldovan case, the research team found that such cooperation was generally sought but feebly implemented as a result of the country's fellowship grantees' relatively poor return rate.

### **3. Extent of the Impact of International Scholarships**

More perceptible after a certain time, scholarship effects on career and society are usually measured 5 to 10 after expiration In France and Canada (Mawer 2017).

#### **3.1. Micro-Level Effects**

##### **3.1.1. Individual Capacity and Cultural Disposition**

Scholarships are essential in solving the issue of insufficient schooling years and refuting the myth that only the rich can afford education. Interestingly, United Kingdom (UK) Commonwealth Scholarship awardees stated that they could not have continued their degree programmes without financial assistance (Mawer 2014). There is copious evidence showing that participants in scholarship-funded projects experience notable improvements in their savoir-faire. Over 2,000 Commonwealth Scholarship recipients participated in multi-year research, and in the results, Mawer et al. (2016) discovered significant gains in knowledge, technical proficiency, and capacity for analysis, as well as greater assurance in applying creativity in the workplace and improved managerial abilities. However, after their studies, scholarship recipients from the UK, Australia, and Germany frequently postpone going home in order to continue their education in the host nation and hone the skills they acquired while on scholarship (DAAD 2013; Grigg 2016).

Personal outcomes also include one's thinking, intercultural competency, and their impact on the individual. Fostering sympathy for the values of the donor country is a common goal of scholarship programmes (Atkinson 2015). Studies run by the governments of China and Germany show that many of the beneficiaries are interested in building long-term partnerships and working together with their host countries (Dong & Chapman 2008; DAAD 2013). Chalid's (2014) investigation of Indonesian scholarship recipients demonstrated how language learning and involvement with the public institutions of the receiving country influence the assimilation of novel viewpoints on social and political organisation. 93% of former beneficiaries living abroad say they are sensitive to the values that France promotes around the world (Leroy et al. 2017).

### **3.1.2. Migration Behavior of Postgraduates and Contributing Factors**

Studies reveal that participation in international scholarship programmes frequently results in greater percentages of migration among graduates to donor countries after they finish their education (Khoo et al. 2007; Czaika & De Haas 2014). For instance, Novotný et al. (2020) examined the migratory patterns of foreign university students funded by the Czech Development Cooperation and found that just 31% of the graduate interviewees in the study truly went back to their home nations, raising the issue of brain drain. Similarly, 25% of international students choose to remain in the countries where they studied, according to Czaika & De Haas' (2014) analysis of OECD data.

Multiple factors shape this migration behavior and find their ground in the country of residence (pull factors) and in the country of origin (push factors).

- *Some pull factors:* Elements that attract alumni to their countries of residence
  - Human capital: Graduates pursuing higher education overseas have greater human capital and are more marketable to employers in their new nation (Beine et al. 2008).
  - Better employment prospects: Alumni relocate to take advantage of positions that align with their advanced training outside of their own country (Marsh & Oyelere 2018).
  - Social networks: Network theory contends that social and business relationships made while pursuing education increase the likelihood of relocation (Mahroum 2000).
  - Lenient immigration laws: They allow a switch from a student visa to a work visa, converting more foreign nationals into long-term residents (Czaika & De Haas 2014).
  - Cultural affiliation after an extended stay.
- *Some push factors:* include considerations that deter graduates and thus motivate them to return to their home countries (Hejkrlik et al. 2018).
  - Language barriers, rigid administrative processes in the host nation, racism, xenophobia, and cultural differences.
  - Economic climate.
  - Family history and ties to home nations.

### **3.2. Macro-Level Effects**

The available literature offers insight into the effects on international relations on the one hand and socio-economic and civic growth on the other.



### 3.2.1. Socio-Economic, and Cultural Impacts

Globalisation and its corollaries affect the educational and professional aspirations of young people in developing countries, where a considerable number view study-abroad programmes and emigration as means of improving their professional and financial conditions. Referred to as “*brain drain*”, this phenomenon is the result of proficient people leaving their native nations to live elsewhere (Baruch et al. 2007).

The departure of highly educated individuals from developing countries—many of whom attended universities supported by the government—causes an instant disadvantage for the countries of origin. Future tax revenue declines exacerbate this loss (Capuano & Marfouk 2013). Concerns have also been raised about the declining number of innovators required for social and economic transformation, especially in smaller nations (Marsh & Oyelere 2018). However, one argument made in opposition to the brain drain problem is that emigrants frequently remit money home, where it can support economic growth. That is what Beine et al. (2001) called the “*beneficial brain drain*”. Others discuss *brain circulation*, contending that immigrants may further social change by returning home with newfound knowledge and experience (Dawson 2007).

Another social impact related to international scholarship is *brain waste*, which describes the circumstance where beneficiaries of international scholarships fail to complete their studies for a variety of reasons. In addition to being a loss of investment for the donor countries, brain waste corresponds to events in which graduates fail to utilise the education they received in their home country, in which case it signifies an erosion in human resources for the nation of provenance (Hejkrlik et al. 2018).

According to Mawer (2018), scholarship winners frequently make a significant and lasting contribution to their home countries, especially if there is a bond with the home country. Due to family support and financial ties to their countries, alumni return home after graduation and this promotes the transfer of knowledge and technology.

Building on the cultural disposition at the individual level, immersive travel abroad enables participants, to develop positive perceptions of the people and culture of their host nation, facilitating cooperation and cross-cultural understanding among nations (Czaika & De Haas 2014; Mawer 2018). Moreover, alumni create and maintain social networks, which increase the likelihood of making an impact on public policy upon their

return home. The strategic evaluation of the French government's scholarship states that between 65% and 85% of alumni become buyers of French goods and recommenders of studies, trips, and relationships with French companies (Leroy et al. 2017).

### **3.2.2. Diplomatic and Political Impacts**

Sometimes, when scholarship programmes are not renewed or new ones are invested in, as was the case when Australia and Canada stopped supporting the Commonwealth Scholarship, diplomatic effects can occasionally be seen (Mawer 2018). Otherwise, recipients' engagement both during and following scholarship programmes is the second key pathway to influencing international relations. Wilson (2015) asserts that alumni have a greater political impact when they become significantly high-powered in their career path (such as elected officials or senior administrators) or when they have other substantially strong influences on the public's perception and behavior (public advocates, educators, or news reporters). Chauvet & Mercier (2014) found that returnees have a favourable impact on the voting system as they transfer democratic values to non-mobile citizens in Mali.

Soft power-focused scholarship programmes frequently boast about their impact on emerging global figures and their capacity to disrupt military, commercial, and diplomatic agendas. Nevertheless, there isn't much proof to back up this assertion. Dreher & Yu (2016) investigated the impact of cultural connections with past host countries and alumni's drive to show political commitment to their native countries among officials from developing nations who had their education overseas. Their analysis of voting trends from 1975 and 2011 in the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) revealed that these personalities agreed less with their previous host nations. It appears that concerns about displaying political commitment might override sentiments of affinity.

Generally speaking, most DISP grantees are unlikely to have the ability to exert influence on their own in diplomacy, particularly at forums such as the UNGA, even considering the evidence of leadership actions. In addition to traditional foreign policy domains, building institutional affiliation and promoting scientific interchange hold tremendous potential for facilitating political discourse and cooperation (Raetzell et al. 2013).

## 4. Career Pathways of International Scholarship Alumni

Based on Dassin et al.'s (2018) research, this chapter looks at DISPs' outcomes for alumni's careers and presents the variables that shape career paths in the actual globalised labour markets. But the first section starts with a definition of the career pathways.

### 4.1. Definition of the Concept of Career Paths

To understand the concept of *career pathways*, we need to know that a career refers to a person's professional experiences and goals influenced by internal and external factors (Hall 1986). In the same vein, Baruch (2006) proposed that a career be the development of a worker who has taken on several tasks in one or more companies. In the recent past, another definition characterized careers as changing trajectories of people's occupations over time (Biemann et al. 2012).

The concept of career pathways is not very different from a career. Traditionally assimilated to a career ladder, the career pathways indicated once a fixed-interval ascension of a worker through successive and various roles within one enterprise. The lifespan cycle was then divided into three phases: a stage of educational attainment and preparation for the workforce, a stage marked by constant work activity, and a stage of retirement. As such, having a career implies that a person has worked for the same company for several years and has either turned down promotions, climbed the career ladder to retirement, or accepted another opportunity (Hedge & Rineer 2017).

In the twenty-first century, however, professional paths have become progressively more complex, and this long-established categorisation has grown less typical. Today, the possibilities have become numerous. Professional trajectories are equated with a series of vertical movements<sup>1</sup> or horizontal movements<sup>2</sup>. More and more people are combining school and work, advancement is occurring outside of the same geographic business unit, and people can hold different positions at the same time or start a second career (SHRM 2015).

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<sup>1</sup> About the hierarchy

<sup>2</sup> Changing jobs without moving up in the hierarchy

Occupational paths are rapidly evolving due to technological advancements and an unstable economy,. It is thereby widely acknowledged that the notion of an idealized career trajectory defined by a set of predictable transitions that all employees experience at specific points in their lives is non-existent (De Vos et al. 2021). On the contrary, a contemporary interpretation of career development posits that career paths may be perceived as the attainment of desired work-related objectives by individuals at any moment throughout their lifespan (Ballout 2007; Carter et al. 2009).

## **4.2. Career Key Constructs**

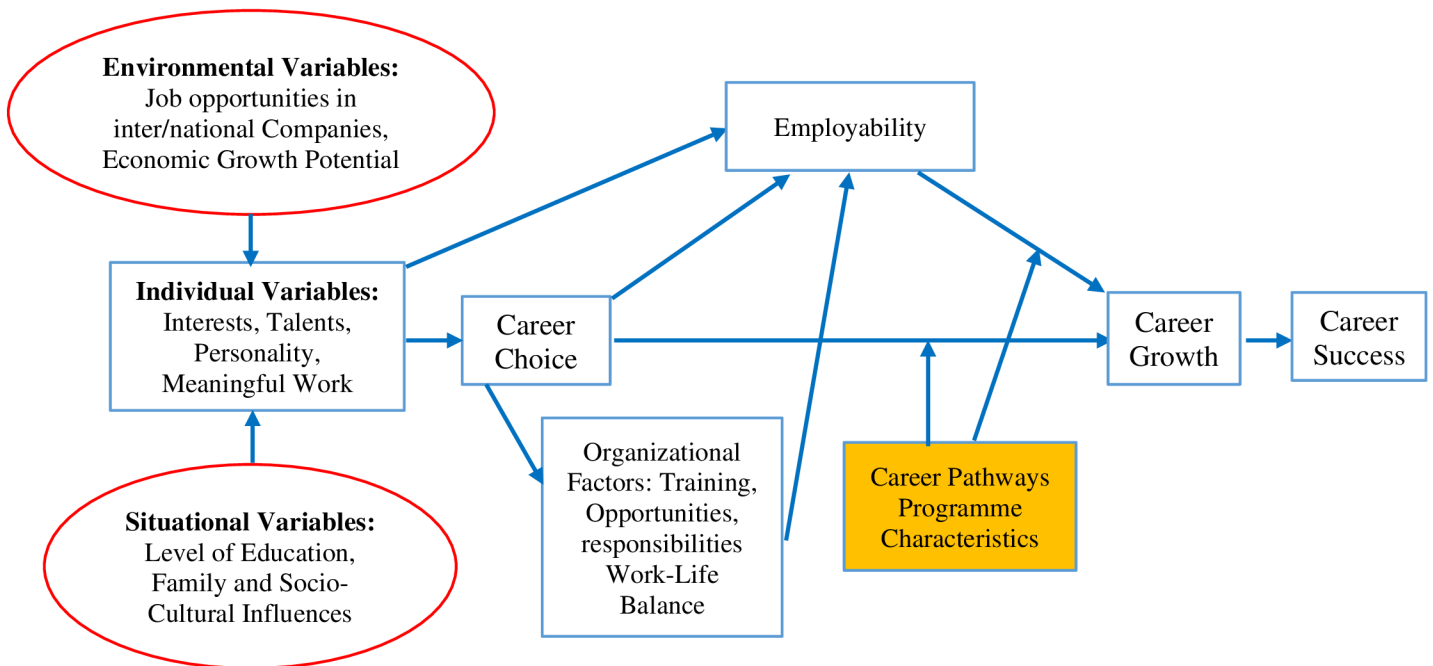
Many models, with the conceptual model of job choice (Rousseau & Venter 2009) and the employee-focused career pathways model (Hedge & Rineer 2017) being complementary examples, explain how a career is constructed (see Figure 1). One elaborates on career choice factors such as the individual, situational, and environmental variables. The other describes modern career growth as influenced by factors like employability, organisational factors, and the career pathways initiative.

- Individual factors: It is widely accepted that people plan to work in a specific industry or company, enter that market, stay, and progress based on their interests and talents. Nevertheless, the meaningfulness of work is also a valued aspect for it relates to a feel-good factor at work (working conditions, emotional, and cognitive considerations), the role that the job offers, the sense of belonging to a particular culture or community, or the social status that leads to overall welfare (Lysova et al. 2019). Additional or alternative factors are internal drive (Ryan & Deci 2002) and a calling relating to a work that one feels urged to undertake as it serves a greater, altruistic goal and is inspired by a supreme force (Duffy et al. 2014).

- Situational influences: While views on career goals differ significantly across the globe due to variations in cultural values, career choices are shaped by gender, parents, spouses, and their educational, social, and economic backgrounds.

- Environmental variables: This refers to elements such as expertise, employment opportunities, and fluctuating financial conditions in a particular industry or organisation that are influenced by the status of the global economy.

- Career choice: According to Greenhaus et al. (2018), it occurs as an assessment process guided by one's criteria, values, motivations, and talents, which is subject to change throughout the years.
- Perceived employability: This construct describes how someone feels about their capacity to carry out a job well and transition between different types of work (Hedge & Rineer 2017).
- Career growth: is determined by an organization attributing the same degree of importance as the workers to aspects like job stability, responsibilities, training, opportunities, and work-life equilibrium (Duffy & Dik 2013).
- Career success: Resulting from an overall contentment with one's professional standing, combined with visible factors such as promotion frequency.



**Figure 1. Employee-Focused Career Pathways Model (Rousseau & Venter 2009)**

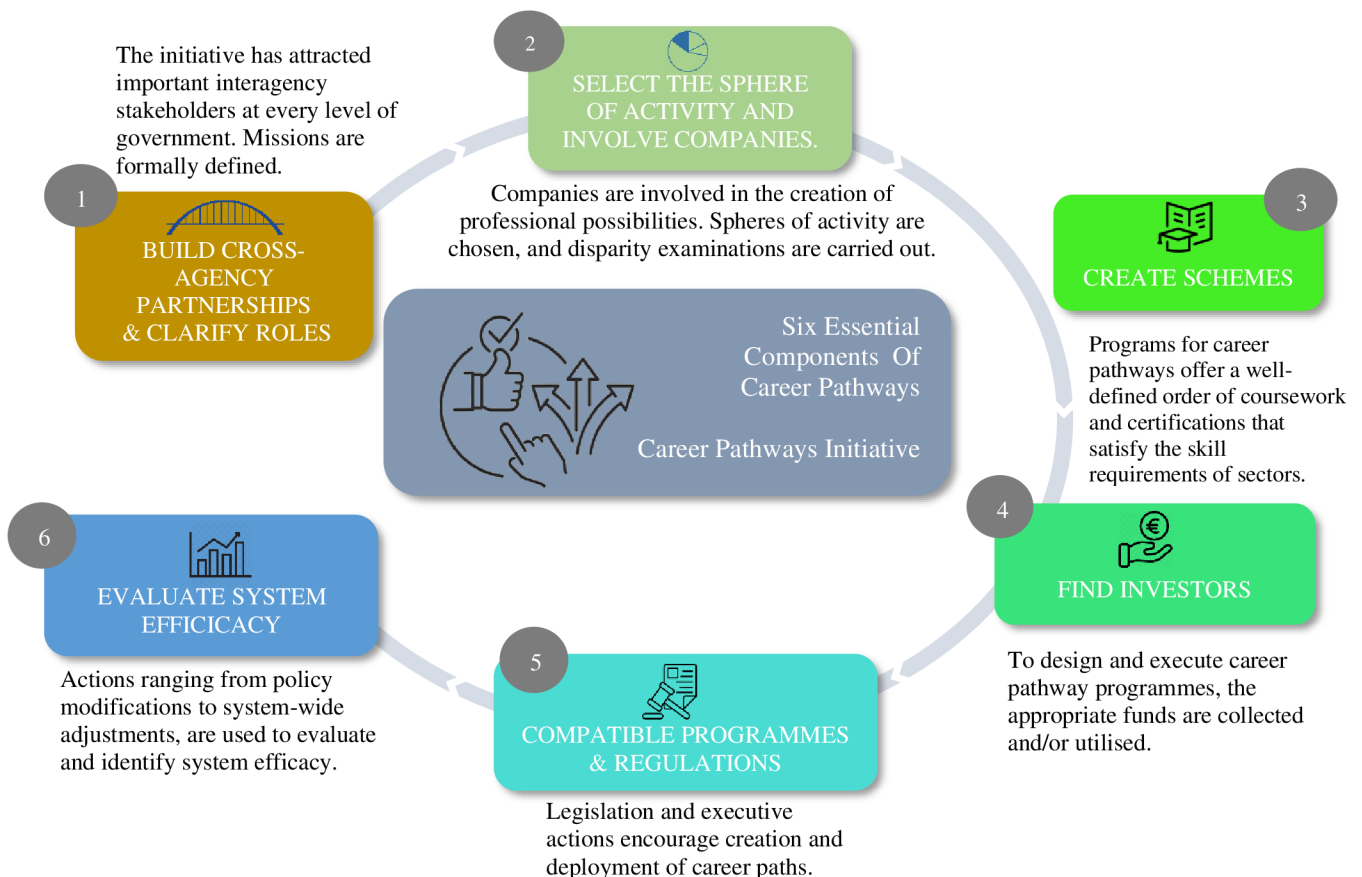
#### 4.2.1. Career Pathways Systems Initiative

The *career pathways system*, born out of necessity due to the impact of globalisation, has two definitions. The first describes it as a network of interconnected education and training programmes, as well as supportive services that enable people to earn a professional qualification relevant to finding employment and moving up the occupational ladder to higher levels of schooling (Dann-Messier et al. 2012). The second rationale views the concept of a career pathways system as a formal framework within

which workers can explore possible career routes and comprehend the prerequisites, promises, and possibilities required for professional development (Hedge & Gary 2020).

The topic has attracted growing interest among researchers in organisational psychology, partly due to its legal establishment in the United States (US) in 2014 (King & Prince 2015). The goal was to promote apprenticeships and educational opportunities for the American workforce (Hedge & Gary 2020) in response to the economic slump. Community colleges, local employers, and governmental systems collaborated to establish customised education and training through initiatives like the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) and the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) (US Department of Labor 2016).

The US Department of Labor and the Department of Education highlighted six key principles for successful career pathways, shown in Figure 2, namely inter-agency collaboration, employer involvement, development of adapted education and training programmes, funding plans, coordinating regulations, and tracking system performance.



**Figure 2. Principles for a Comprehensive Career Pathways System** (Source: Dann-Messier et al. 2012)

### 4.3. Leading Employment Search Channels

The Hinge Research Institute carried out a study in 2017 intending to answer concerns about the areas in which job seekers look for possibilities, the difficulties faced by professional services organisations, and employer branding. With the use of a thorough survey to which 801 experts replied, the researchers divided the audience into two groups:

- Talent-Evaluators (Employers): Experts that collaborate with their company's hiring and recruitment procedures. This group answered inquiries regarding the methods they use to find and assess possible hires.

- Candidates: Professionals who don't often participate in hiring. In response to inquiries regarding how they look for and assess possible employment prospects, this group provided information.

Employee candidates reported they often used four sources When looking for employment prospects. Although LinkedIn and networking with colleagues were the most popular resources used by job searchers, over two-thirds (63%) would go straight to a company's website. In the meantime, fewer than half (45%) of talent assessors said their website included a section devoted to hiring (Hinge Research Institute 2017).

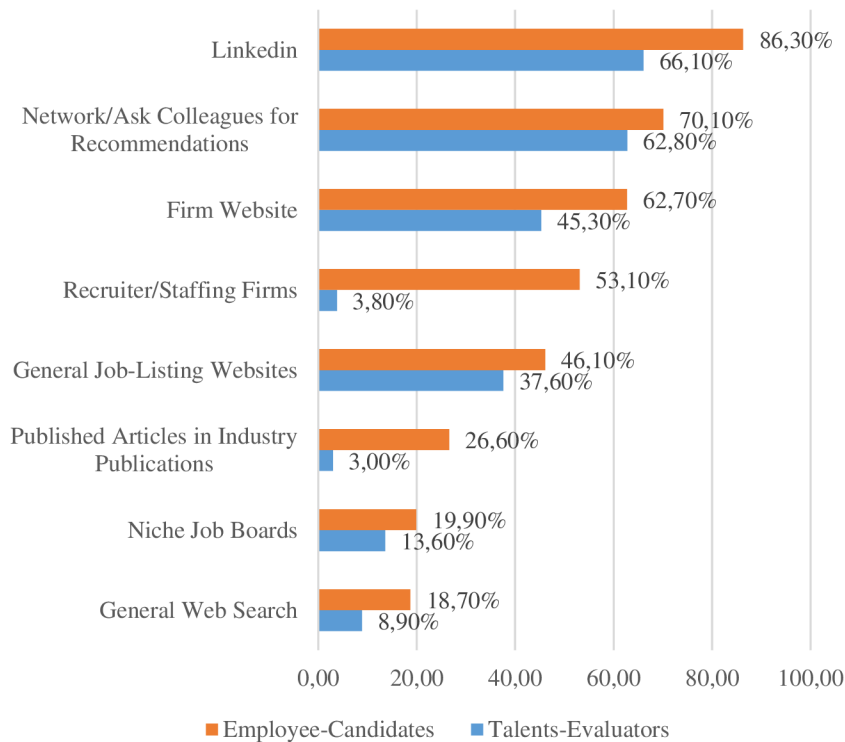


Figure 3. Job Search Channels (Source: Hinge Research Institute 2017)

The main conclusions, depicted in the chart above (see Figure 3), show that recruiters and employee candidates rely on different preferred job search channels.

#### **4.4. The Career Impacts of International Scholarship Programmes**

It is widely recognized that international education offers unique selling points in domestic labour markets (Sin 2009; Mellors-Bourne et al. 2015), particularly in cases where there is a serious scarcity of qualified workers and the national education system is still developing. The fact that scholarship recipients frequently occupy positions of responsibility has been amply demonstrated. As claimed by SIU (2015), between 60 and 75 percent of graduates from two Norwegian scholarship programmes were employed by ministries or at similar levels. According to Raetzell et al. (2013), 80% of Kazakh scholarship holders, stated that their employment prospects had improved as a result of their experience in Germany.

The use of the acquired skills while on scholarship in the workplace is the most readily available evidence of the organizational impacts of scholarships (Mawer 2017). As middle management employees, the work of DISPs' alumni is referred to as crucial by their employers as their scope of skills including a variety of both technical and interpersonal abilities, allows them to oversee departments, upkeep facilities, and generally supervise institutional operations (DAAD 2013). Unsurprisingly, they are often referred to as the institutional capacity of their organization, meaning they represent the entity's ability to carry out its declared objectives (Bhagavan & Virgin 2004). Besides, Furthermore, according to 77% of recipients of DAAD scholarships, there is an important connection between the subjects they studied and the employment they currently hold.

In addition, graduates of international schools benefit their employers by mentoring new hires (Campbell 2017), bringing innovative methods of operation and leadership (Abimbola et al. 2016), and putting contemporary procedures in place (Abeuova & Muratbekova-Touron 2019). They experience a high rate of job-to-job mobility, moving within the same organization, between employers, or between countries (Andreev 2023).

International scholarships provide great benefits. However, some scholarship holders can face some challenges regarding their status as public officials where remuneration growth is rigid. In such positions, the increase in salaries is the career



impact that is historically least felt (World Bank Institute 2010). Few Australian scholarship recipients in Cambodia live solely on their salaries; instead, they supplement their income with part-time jobs (Webb 2009). Additional career barriers can be the difficulty in applying the acquired knowledge in home organizations (Pol et al. 2005).

## **5. The Czech Government Scholarship Scheme**

### **5.1. Historical Timeline: 1950s-2010**

As part of its Foreign Development Assistance, the Czech Republic has awarded over 20,000 scholarships to Third World students for tertiary education since the 1950s (MEYS 2023a). At the time, Czechoslovakia rooted the scholarship in Marxist ideology and aimed to provide education as a form of non-capitalistic development to its Allies of the South (Němečková & Krylova 2014). As a result, scholarships were initially granted to students hailing from nations such as Cuba, Mongolia, North Korea, and Vietnam. The programme's effectiveness resulted in the creation of the University of 17 November, which is exclusively open to students from developing nations. Nevertheless, the austerity that ensued due to the Spring 1968 events led to the university's closure in 1974.

The 1980s saw a climb to 850 scholarship placements for students per year, lowered to 150 in the early 1990s because of post-Iron Curtain financial constraints (Jelínek et al. 2004). In 1995 however, the programme regained momentum after joining the OECD. From 1996 to 2001, the number of students enrolled increased to 250, and the list of eligible countries was expanded to 92 in 2003, including Egypt, Palestine, Ethiopia, Serbia, and Montenegro (Czech government 2001; as cited in Němečková & Krylova 2014). Budget restrictions prevented the Czech government from creating as many new places for scholarship recipients in 2007. Consequently, overall enrolment in the programme has slightly declined.

With so many targets, so few roles, and a goal so unclear, there were questions about how effective the cooperation was. The Czech Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) commissioned an external evaluation of the programme, conducted by Horký et al. (2011), which resulted in proposals for policy revisions that led to the programme's current structure. Horký et al.'s (2011) assessment uncovered inadequacies

concerning the types of study programmes provided, the number of countries targeted, the procedure for selecting the students, their return, the absence of student assistance, and the lack of interaction with graduates. Thanks to their suggestions, the administration established a five-year instrument aiming to simplify the procedure and bring transparency and effectiveness to the programme.

## **5.2. Salient Features of the Scheme in the Modern Days: 2012-2024**

On April 25, 2012, the government adopted Resolution N°301, which sets out the strategy for awarding public scholarships to students from developing countries from 2013-2018. At the end of this campaign, the evaluation highlighted the shortcomings of that strategy, which are to be remedied by Resolution N°77 of January 28, 2019 for the period 2019-2024. A comparative reading of these two documents allows us to summarize the characteristics of the Czech DISP in the following points: its objectives, target, and actors; the selection process, the benefits of the scholarship; and the termination of scholarship status, presented below.

### **5.2.1. Objectives, Targets and Actors**

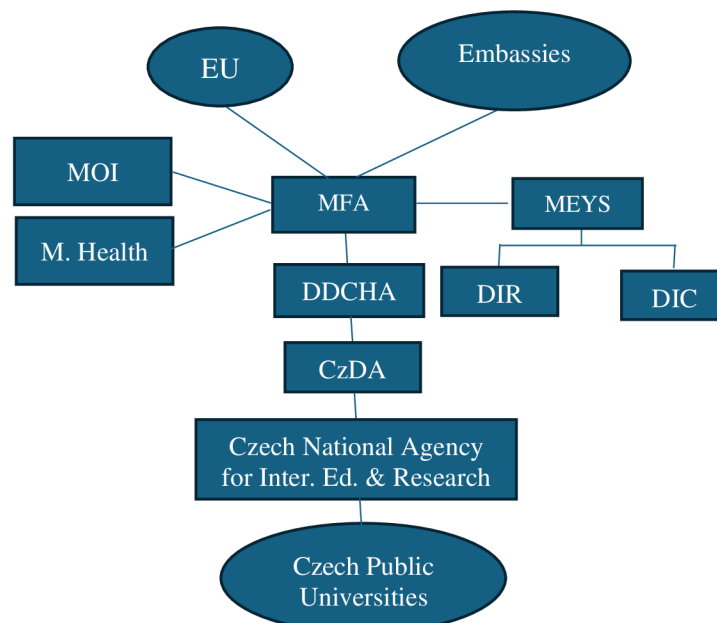
The Czech support for higher education has three main objectives (MFA 2019):

- To contribute to socio-economic development by strengthening human capital and thus to the security and stabilization of migration in developing countries.
- To contribute to developing the Czech Republic's bilateral relations with the target nations and enable the country to fulfil its international obligations arising from its membership in the European Union.
- To encourage the participation of public universities in international cooperation.

In the period 2013-2018, the programme was addressed to students with difficulty in 67 different developing countries while offering at least 130 places annually (Feřtrová et al. 2018). However, the 2018-2030 strategy for international development cooperation reduced the number to the following eight countries (MEYS 2023a):

- Europe: Belarus, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Georgia, Moldova, Ukraine
- Asia: Cambodia
- Africa: Ethiopia, Zambia.

The principal parties involved are the MFA, MEYS, the Ministries of Interior and, Health (Figure 4).



**Figure 4. Key Stakeholders in the Czech Scholarship Programme** (MFA 2012, 2019)s

The MFA's Development Cooperation and Humanitarian Aid (DDCHA) is in charge of making sure the programme's goals are met. As of 2019, the DDCHA is solely in charge of choosing target countries and keeping track of scholarship recipients.

Before granting residency permits to the successful candidates, Czech embassies promote the scholarships in countries of action. They receive, process, and transmit the applications to the DDCHA. The Czech National Agency for International Education and Research provides funding for the chosen students' education.

As for the MEYS, it manages the educational activities through the public universities of the Republic, whereas its Department of International Relations (DIR), and the Department of International Cooperation (DIC) handle managerial matters.

### 5.2.2. Selection and Tenor and Cessation of the Scholarship

Today's study options encompass areas like agriculture, economics, international trade, chemical engineering, and medicine (Němečková & Krylova 2014). To be admitted, applicants must comply with the guidelines and terms set forth by the MEYS (MEYS 2023b). Formal admission to a degree programme is determined by the successful completion of a and subsequent prior education.

The admissions are carried out between October and January each year, with the chosen applicants being announced in May. The arrival in the Czech Republic entitles scholarship holders to free health care and insurance, which amounted to approximately CZK 3 million between 2013 and 2017 (Feřtrová et al. 2018). In addition to covering tuition costs, the programme stakeholders provide beneficiaries with monthly stipends of up to 12,000 for undergraduate students and CZK 13,000 for master and doctoral programme students (MEYS 2024). The payment ends either upon successful completion of the studies, failure to complete the studies during the validity period of the scholarship, or absence from Czechia of more than 30 calendar days for non-academic purposes. Other reasons for the extraordinary termination of the scholarship are the acquisition of the permanent residence permit and the termination or expulsion of the scholarship holder.

An innovation of the scholarship programme, introduced in 2012, is the secondment of Czech lecturers to universities in developing countries, where they can identify talented students who can apply for the Czech DISP.

### 5.2.3. Monitoring and Evaluation of the Programme

The DDCHA coordinates the monitoring and evaluation of the programme’s overall implementation. In the evaluation of the programme for the period 2013-2018, Feřtrová et al. (2018) stated that the programme had an annual budget of 110 million Czech crowns since 2015 and supported around 130 new scholarship holders each year with an average annual direct cost of 184 thousand Czech crowns per scholarship holder. Furthermore, an average of 550 scholarship holders studied in the Czech Republic each year from 2013 to 2017 in various academic years and levels with a total amount of CZK 570 million disbursed by the Czech Republic Government (Table 2).

**Table 2. Expenditures of the Czech Programme Scholarship**

	<b>Month (in CZK)</b>	<b>Year (in CZK)</b>	<b>2013-2017 (in CZK)</b>
<b>Allowance</b>	12,000 – 13,000	144,000 – 156,000	720,000 – 780,000
<b>All Direct Costs</b>	≈ 15,333	184,000	920,000
<b>Health Care</b>	-	≈ 1,000,000	≈ 3,000,000
<b>Budget</b>	-	110,000,000	570,000,000

Source: (Feřtrová et al. 2018)

## **6. Aims of the Thesis**

With the ultimate goal of providing insight into the effectiveness of the Czech government scholarship programme, the main objective is to explore the career pathways and employment strategies of graduates of Czech governmental agricultural university scholarships from Georgia, Zambia, and Ethiopia. To achieve this, the main objective is operationalized into four specific goals articulated as:

- I. To examine the graduates' motivation for applying for Czech Government scholarship

The objective aims to determine if the graduates counted on the capability benefits, human capital benefits, or the soft power aspect of the scholarship.

- II. To explore the transitional period between the alumni's graduation and their first employment

This objective aims to answer the question: How do graduates operate on their return to their home country?

H0: Scholarship holders return to their home country immediately after graduation.

Another assimilated aspect of this goal is to find out the employment strategies used by the graduates.

- III. To describe the professional occupations of the graduates of Czech government agricultural university scholarships

H0: Graduates have a decent job upon their return and contribute to the development of their home countries.

We also aim to figure out the determinants of their career choices.

- IV. To assess the graduates' perceived transformative effects of the attained education and mobility experience.

The purpose of this objective is to capture graduates' perspectives on the socioeconomic and cultural impacts of the scholarship program on their lives.

## **7. Methodology**

### **7.1. Secondary Data Collection**

To collect the secondary data from literature sources, the Boolean operator was employed to identify five keywords: Czech Republic, Governmental Scholarship, Scholarship Impact, Career Pathways, and Employment strategies. The literature review resulted from a cross-reading of articles published in scientific journals and available in databases such as Science Direct, Ebsco, Web of Science, Sage publications, Google Scholar, and Wiley Online. Other general reports on education came from institutional databases such as the UN, UNESCO, and CONCORD. To gather information about the history and structure of the Czech scholarship programme, we used certain administrative documents published by the MFA and the MEYS. Those that were only available in Czech were translated into English with the DEEPL software for efficient use.

### **7.2. Primary Data Sources**

To counter the difficulty of finding alumni, we opted for a qualitative approach as it offers the advantage of delving deeply into the personal narratives and viewpoints of scholarship recipients.

#### **7.2.1. Target and Sampling**

To take part in the study, graduates had to cumulatively meet the following conditions:

- Be from Georgia, Ethiopia, and Zambia: The choice of these three countries represented an interesting basis for comparing the results of the same education system for students from different countries, specifically in terms of their economy, human development and cultural heritages. Georgia is a middle-income country with a very high HDI of 0.802. Zambia and Ethiopia have respectively a medium HDI of 0.565 and a low one of 0.498 (UNDP 2022), but both belong to the group of the least developed countries (UN 2024). Cultural disposition is, however, the most important factor as the study focuses on people's views about their activities which according to Campbell (2017) are subject to context-based variations. Because these nations are geographically dispersed,

the study seeks to gather a diverse range of viewpoints and experiences, enhancing the analysis with subtle insights into the program's effects in different cultural settings.

- Have been awarded a Czech government grant for university education.
- Have attended one of the following agricultural universities: the Mendel University (MU) in Brno, the University of South Bohemia in České Budějovice (USB), or the Czech University of Life Sciences Prague (CULS).
- To have graduated under Czech state funding no later than 2018: This condition was highly important because the effects of international studies on the career and background of scholarship holders are fully measurable at least 5 years after the scholarship programme expires (Mawer 2017).

We were hoping for 10 alumni per country of origin to take part in the study, for a total of 30 participants. So, we contacted the International Relations Offices of the above-mentioned universities. Respecting the General Data Protection Regulation, they directed some graduates to us. Other alumni were recruited using the snowball method and on the recommendation of a classmate who was a former Czech government scholarship holder. An initial communication via email, WhatsApp, and Facebook with the targeted individuals took place to ensure that they met the conditions for participation in the study. On that basis, and after some people withdrew, the study selected 7 participants per country, as presented in Table 3.

**Table 3. Participants in the Research**

Universities Countries	Czech University of Life Sciences Prague	Mendel University	University of South Bohemia in České Budějovice	Total
Georgia	7	-	-	7
Ethiopia	5	1	1	7
Zambia	4	2	1	7

### 7.2.2. Tools for Primary Data Collection

The primary tool was one-to-one semi-structured interviews that took place during February-March 2024 for a duration of 40-60 minutes per interview on the basis of an initial interview guide of 12 questions. On many occasions in our attempts to gain a comprehensive understanding of certain participants' paths, the number of questions asked increased to 18. In that context, the open questions were 14 plus 3 closed questions, and one semi-open question. They fell into six categories:

- Presentation of the participant: a closed question was asked to find out and confirm with the former scholarship holder his/her country of origin, the university attended, the programme of study, and the year in which he/she obtained his/her degree.
- Objective 1: An open question was used to find out the motivation for applying for the Czech Government scholarship.
- Objective 2: Six questions (2 closed and one semi-open) were used to gather information on the period between graduation and entry into the labour market.
- Objective 3: Four open questions were used to describe the employment situation of former students.
- Objective 4: Former scholarship holders gave their opinions on the changes generated by the scholarship in their lives based on three open questions.
- Overall appreciation of the scholarship programme: Participants were asked to share the most memorable moments of their life as a Czech government scholarship holder using three open questions.

Microsoft Teams and its automatic transcriber were the main tools used for the interviews. WhatsApp came in handy, as two Zambian returnee graduates had difficulty logging into Microsoft Teams. In those cases, the mobile application Speechnotes helped to transcribe the interview.

### **7.3. Data Analysis**

As part of a methodological approach, the Atlas.ti qualitative analysis tool in conjunction with comparative framework analysis was used. After transcribing the interviews with Microsoft Teams, every transcript was reviewed in detail to ensure an extensive understanding of the material. Then, the data was imported into Atlas.ti to start the analysis. A focus was put on recurrent themes, motifs, and patterns in the speeches of the participants to find similarities and contrasts using comparative framework analysis. We divided the data into analytical units and labelled pertinent portions with coding techniques to establish a comparative analytical framework.

This procedure was made possible in large part by Atlas.ti, which allowed us to methodically organise, code, and examine the data. The visualisation tools in Atlas.ti were



then utilised to investigate and display the findings of the comparative framework analysis, emphasising the similarities and differences between the various narratives.

For the treatment of the fourth goal, the study also incorporated the theory of social phenomenology, in which the subjective experiences of individuals are used to create meaning.

## 8. Results

### 8.1. Graduates' Motivations and Aspirations for Applying to the Czech Scholarship

The findings show that all the alumni applied for the Czech DISP because they were looking for *better opportunities* in terms of *personal development* and *cultural immersion*. For all the interviewees, pursuing their education was also a fantastic opportunity. They were driven by a shared desire to learn more, particularly in the area of agriculture given its prominence in each of their home nations. This requirement is related to the fact that the ultimate objective of all graduates was to be able to influence positive social change in their communities and home countries in the future. A participant from Georgia said: "[...] *a great opportunity to be independent because I didn't want to be a burden anymore. [...] If you want better opportunities, you have to get a master's degree, you have to go to the Czech Republic*". Meanwhile, an Ethiopian shared: "*It is good to have an overseas experience. Otherwise, I would just be an Ethiopian from Africa [...]*".

Alumni from Georgia show an interest in advancing their careers as a driving force behind applying for the scholarship in the Czech Republic. In contrast, some beneficiaries from Ethiopia were influenced by particular drivers such as the cost-effectiveness of the schooling, the quality of the curriculum, and the availability of the study programme conducted in English.

Conversely, Zambian participants remembered the role of their interactions with Czech teachers and fellow students who sometimes worked in Zambia. The alumni's motivations and aspirations are summarised in Table 4.

**Table 4. Graduates' Motivations and Aspirations**

<b>Countries</b>	<b>Particularities</b>	<b>Similarities</b>
<b>Georgia</b>	▪ Career Advancement	▪ Better Opportunities:
<b>Zambia</b>	▪ Interactions with teachers and students from Czechia	• Personal development
<b>Ethiopia</b>	▪ Cost-effectiveness of the Education	• Cultural immersion
	▪ Study programme in English.	• Education
	▪ Curriculum quality	▪ Positive societal change

## 8.2. Graduates' Migration Patterns and Factors

All the Georgian along with some Zambian and Ethiopian graduates interviewed, said no when asked if they had gone back to their home countries right away after graduating. For the Georgian participants in particular, many push factors caused their unreadiness to return: a hostile work environment, an unstable political climate, and the fear of starting life anew. Other pull factors cited by the Georgians were shared by the group of Zambians and Ethiopians who also delayed their return. These factors include the numerous opportunities that the Czech Republic offers, the potential for career advancement, the need to further their education, and the desire to develop personally.

The opinion of an alumnus from Georgia, for instance, contains all these factors: "[...] *I had the impression that I had more to learn, a bachelor's degree didn't mean anything anymore. Even after the Master's, I wasn't ready [...] I thought to myself that I would have it easier here in the Czech Republic. [...] the work environment [in Georgia] can be very aggressive [...]. They say it pushes you down, tries to break you, and does not help you to move forward. I wasn't feeling strong enough to push back. I wanted to get strong enough [...] prepare and build my own project and not just go because I had to.*" While some Ethiopians emigrated to a third country after living in the Czech Republic for a brief time, the majority of Zambians and Ethiopians interviewed returned immediately to have a meaningful impact. Specifically, the Zambian returnees had a strong connection with their communities and needed to resume their work. Other Ethiopians cited climatic reasons. The migration patterns found are outlined in Table 5.

**Table 5. Graduates' Migration Patterns and Factors**

Countries	Delayed return		Return	Migration to a third country (after a long stay in Czechia)
	Common factors	Specificities		
<b>Georgia</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Education</li> <li>▪ Opportunities in Czechia (Career prospects/ International work experience)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Hostile work environment</li> <li>▪ Political instability</li> <li>▪ Fear of starting over</li> <li>▪ Personal project</li> </ul>		
<b>Zambia</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Professional Networking</li> </ul>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Work commitment</li> <li>▪ Community Connection</li> <li>▪ Meaningful impact</li> </ul>	
<b>Ethiopia</b>			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Climate</li> <li>▪ Community service</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Partner's Job opportunity</li> </ul>

### 8.3. Alumni's Professional Occupations

The findings are gathered in three groups (Table 6): the field of employment, the factors of happiness, and the challenges faced at work.

- Field of employment:

The Georgian alumni interviewed are all working in the middle management of multinational businesses in Czechia, and a few are combining their corporate work with a PhD study. Since graduating, they have changed jobs up to three times due to economic restraints, resulting in new interests and opportunities. This was significantly reflected in the testimony of a participant from Georgia who stated that: “[...] *I was working as an accountant [...] It was annoying from one point [...] I became a happiness ambassador in another company. [...] It was challenging and complex enough. [...], I took on a new position and then COVID started and there was this internal freeze in the company, [...] they fired over 1,000 people, no promotion for one year, and there was a reorganization which brought new vacancies [...] So my current occupation [...] is innovation facilitator. I facilitate the introduction of sustainable solutions; I elaborate workshops and I train my colleagues. It's been great because it's my topic of interest. This is where my journey brought me, and we'll see from now on.*”

The Zambian and Ethiopian populations of our study, on the other hand, work across diverse fields comprising multinational businesses abroad, international non-governmental organizations, UN institutions, national private sectors, and educational, and governmental services in their home countries. It was not uncommon for the African graduates' returnees to obtain a promotion in the job they had before going overseas. Some also combine a part-time job with full-time government employment: “*I am working part-time as a research consultant and I am a full-time lecturer at a university where I teach agricultural economics. I collaborate with a private firm as a consultant. We work with different organizations that are implementing different projects to solve the problems we are facing here.*”

- Factors of happiness:

Georgian participants find job satisfaction in the multicultural environment and collaborative teamwork that their organizations provide, which opens room for growth opportunities. Ethiopians and Zambians, on the other hand, derive their contentment from

the harmonious work-life balance and the utilization of various technical skills that their work procures. The returnees from this group underlined that satisfactory remuneration is a factor of happiness, which associated with the above-mentioned drivers, brings the alumni a sense of self-fulfilment.

- Challenges:

The Georgian alumni interviewed face challenges from their field's ultra-dynamic nature, particularly those involved in supply chain management. The difficulty often emanates from the variation in regional policies and the subtleties of legal jargon which together constitute an obstacle to a work-balanced life as they are frequently on the lookout for the latest news on global trade. Zambian and Ethiopian returnees, for their part, are confronted with a certain administrative slowness resulting from the weight of bureaucracy and the rigidity of certain laws. Expatriate Ethiopians and Zambians linked their difficulties to poor communication with their colleagues.

**Table 6. Alumni's Professional Occupations**

	<b>Field of Employment</b>	<b>Particularities</b>	<b>Factors of Happiness</b>	<b>Challenges</b>
<b>Georgia</b>	▪ Multinational business	▪ Changed jobs up to 3x in 5 years. ▪ Combining school and work	▪ Teamwork ▪ Growth opportunities	▪ Legal jargon ▪ Variation in trade policies ▪ Personal time
<b>Ethiopia and Zambia</b>	▪ Diverse (International NGO & UN System, multinational businesses, national private sector, governmental services)	▪ (Used to or are) combining school and work. ▪ Combining 2 jobs	▪ Sense of fulfilment ▪ Work-life balance. ▪ Use of technical skills ▪ Remuneration (returnees)	▪ Expatriates: uncommunicative colleagues ▪ Returnees: Slowness, Bureaucracy, Rigid policies

#### **8.4. Graduates' Employment Strategies**

According to the graduates' answers on how they found employment, it appears that they did not receive any support from the DISP. On the contrary, it was their personal efforts that enabled them to enter the job market. This is particularly striking for graduates from Georgia. To find their first job, they went about it in the traditional way, using:

- The websites of companies present on the market
- Job boards.

After preparing their CVs, they applied for the vacancies that interested them and matched their current objectives. The situation was much the same for the Zambian and Ethiopian alumni. Despite receiving no support from the scholarship programme in their job search, some interviewees were successful thanks to:

- LinkedIn
- Recommendations from contacts made during and outside their studies.

One participant in the study, a native of Ethiopia, said: *“I was a teacher before moving to the Czech Republic. Those same people I was working with contacted me after my graduation [...]. For the consultancy position, I was recommended by a former recipient of the scholarship, who is Ghanaian. He knew that I had finished my studies; he put me in contact [...] of course, I had to apply and pass the interviews and test [...]”*.

Although they did not receive any referrals from the programme, the Zambian graduates, who were already employed by the Zambian government, were promoted on their return.

## **8.5. Graduates’ Perceptions of Transformative Change**

### **8.5.1. Cultural Changes**

- Similarities: All graduates, regardless of their country of origin, have experienced comparable cultural shifts that are reflected in their participation in social activities like sports and networking. They have also adopted new gastronomic tastes and become more sensitive to cultural differences; they have particularly taken to Czech fundamentals like sausage and beer.

- Specific shifts related to Georgians: Graduates from Georgia have distinctive cultural adaptations; for example, many have obtained Czech citizenship, demonstrating a deep understanding and assimilation of the features of Czech society. Additionally, gardening has become an important aspect of their lifestyle. However, they recognize in themselves more individualistic traits than they would imagine.

- Ethiopians and Zambians: On the other hand, graduates from these two countries have perceived cultural transformations that are marked by improved work ethics, improved time management abilities, and increased discipline. Additionally, some

participants have a strong commitment to lifelong learning, which suggests a larger societal shift towards ongoing personal and professional improvement.

On the cultural changes, a respondent from Zambia said: *“In terms of sports, I learned volleyball in the Czech Republic, and now it has turned into a passion; we are trying to spread it here. Besides that, [...] the issue of discipline in what you are doing [...] They mean what they say; they don’t play around with education [...] and work. Also, if it is time to enjoy themselves, they enjoy it to the maximum [...] Another difference [...] is time management. With the Czechs, whenever you are late on whatever you must do, it’s like you are disregarding them or disrespecting them. [...] my supervisor, when I was late by only 5 or 10 minutes to the consultations with him, he would seriously be high on me, and rebuke me like an older brother [...]. It is reflecting in my life now in Zambia. Anytime I have a meeting, I instantly remember the teachers’ reactions in class. [...] Their sausage was so nice; I wasn’t a fan of sausage before going there but now I cannot spend two days without it eating [laughter]”*.

### **8.5.2. Micro-level Socio-Economic Impact**

- Similarities: Graduates from all nationalities reported feeling a deep sense of personal validation and self-fulfilment as a result of their professional and educational experiences in the Czech Republic. As major programme results, they also highlighted being proud of the social networks they built and the improved professional skills they acquired, putting them in charge of new responsibilities. A participant from Zambia said: *“I’m seeing things differently now. I’m analysing things from a higher educational background, I see mistakes in people’s presentations during meetings; I can guide other colleagues; and I became overnight a sort of resource person. Since I have come back, I am usually in charge of researchers who do their internships here [in the Ministry of Agriculture where I am working], I assist them in formulating their questionnaires, data analysis, and presentations [...] The feedback from people is always good. People appreciate it.”*

- Ethiopians and Zambians: Graduates from these two countries specifically pointed out the game-changing effect that their education in the Czech Republic has on their own and their families’ financial well-being. They have reached financial security, and this outcome makes their parents proud.

### 8.5.3. Societal Impacts

- Georgians: Georgians: Notably, former Georgian scholarship holders founded the Union of Georgian Students in the Czech Republic, an association dedicated to building community bonds and offering assistance to other Georgian students studying in the Czech Republic. Drawing from their own experience, they wanted to organize meetings to support Georgian students' cultural identity preservation and help them in their process of integration into the academic and social fabric of Czech society.

- Ethiopian & Zambian Returnees: As a result of their professional occupations, they interact directly with local communities, using their newfound knowledge and experiences to solve societal issues and bring about constructive change. They assist other expatriates with familial and administrative situations they have locally. Whether they are teachers or not, some alumni disseminate their knowledge through knowledge transmission programmes at universities and high schools, using those stages to promote the Czech DISP. From Ethiopia, one respondent shared: *“I delivered some short courses for university students just to motivate them by telling them about my career path and everything. I think I had some impact on them as well and some of them applied for the scholarship”*.

- Expatriate Ethiopians & Zambians: They assessed their positive societal impact through the remittances addressed to their families and communities.

**Table 7. Perceived Transformative Change**

	Cultural changes		Micro-level socio-economic impact		Societal impact
	Common features	Specificities	Common features	Specificities	
<b>Georgia</b>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Czech citizenship</li> <li>▪ Gardening,</li> <li>▪ Individualism</li> </ul>			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Foundation of Union of Georgian Students in the Czech Republic</li> </ul>
<b>Zambia and Ethiopia</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Social activities (sport...),</li> <li>▪ Cultural sensitivity, new food habits (Beer, <i>sausage...</i>)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Discipline, time management</li> <li>▪ Work ethics</li> <li>▪ lifelong learning</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Self-fulfilment/valorisation,</li> <li>▪ Social network</li> <li>▪ Professional skills</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Making parents proud,</li> <li>▪ Financial security</li> </ul>	Returnees: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Direct work with local communities</li> <li>• Knowledge/experience transmission</li> <li>• Youth Education</li> <li>• Helping expatriates</li> <li>• Scholarship promotion</li> </ul> Expatriate: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Remittances</li> </ul>



## **8.6. Insights from Alumni: Highlights, Challenges, and Recommendations**

The semi-structured interviews with Czech Scholarship programme alumni provided valuable insights into their overall experiences as scholarship holders in the Czech Republic, including both positive and negative aspects, as well as recommendations for programme improvement.

### **8.6.1. Most Pleasurable Experiences**

The alumni's most common and similar most pleasant experiences are:

- Good course materials and teaching methods
- Efficient communication with thesis supervisors
- Enriching cross-cultural interactions
- The scholarship coordination team's helpful and understanding attitudes.

The participants from Ethiopia and Georgia expressed special gratitude for receiving a respectable monthly stipend, which enhanced their general level of comfort and well-being while in the Czech Republic.

### **8.6.2. Difficulties**

As scholarship holders, alumni frequently faced problems:

- Feelings of cultural isolation and loneliness
- Linguistic barriers,
- Trouble finding work in the Czech labour market.

Participants from Zambia also brought attention to incidents of racism against Africans, which harmed their sense of integration and belonging in Czech society. Graduates from Zambia and Ethiopia agreed that the weather was a major challenge, especially getting used to the cooler climates than back home.

### **8.6.3. Recommendations**

To continue ensuring the success of the Czech DISP and the future recipients' satisfaction, interviewed alumni made the following recommendations:

- A Programme-alumni social network: The role of such a programme, according to the alumni, would be to arrange during their studies some social events like trips and experience-sharing sessions with former grantees to avoid cultural isolation. It was also suggested that the network include job search support or career guidance for the graduates who intend to prolong their stay. The participants also agreed that communication between graduates and the DISP coordinators would help gather some feedback to improve the newcomers' experience.

- Extension of the language course duration specifically for Czech language study programme candidates

- More courtesy from immigration officials
- Shorten the application treatment process
- Increase the scholarship allowance
- Increase the quantity of scholarship benefits for African countries.

## 9. Discussion

Graduates applied to the scholarship hoping to improve their opportunities, education and career prospects. The similarity of views among the Georgian, Zambian and Ethiopian students suggests that cultural background or place of origin is irrelevant in terms of personal growth. All people, regardless of background, want to become better versions of themselves. Even better, some study participants have been urged to apply for the scholarship because it grants free access to a high-quality education. It is possible that if students had to pay to study, they would not have applied for the Czech government scholarship. Put differently, some people's needs have been perfectly met by this scholarship; otherwise, as Campbell & Mawer (2019) point out, they would not have been able to afford a high-quality education. This demonstrates the veracity of the right-based, human capital and capability theories (see Table 1) that contend that scholarships protect individuals' rights to an education, enable them to develop new abilities and effect change.

According to our results, more African graduates returned. This happened generally, when, before going abroad, they had begun their professional journeys in their countries and more importantly as public officers, and teachers. It is likely because they had the opportunity to see the impact of their work, resulting in strong ties with their communities. This analysis confirms the observations Hejkrlik et al. (2018) made when they assessed students' ties with their homes as an important pull factor.

In contrast, many Georgian graduates postponed their return due to poor work conditions. The reason for this pattern can be found in the socio-professional characteristics of millennials suggested by generational theory. According to that theory, Millennials are people, like the study participants born between 1982 and 1999, whose commitment to their career goals is determined by a balance between meaningful work, work-life harmony, and growth opportunities (Nguyen 2023). In that regard, they cannot return home without implementing any significant initiatives or ease up on structural challenges that are by no means insurmountable. Consequently, as Campbell (2017) observed, their countries lose an important asset for social and economic change that could have been initiated on the national territory.

For others, returning home was undermined by a hostile political environment. This indicates that despite goodwill, the absence of a positive work culture and good governance in the home country alters alumni's decision to return to their countries. Moreover, their decision is only temporary. Waiting for the situation in Georgia to improve, they chose to enhance their capacities through better education and complex professions abroad and get mentally prepared before going back. Concretely, alumni from Georgia are working in the middle management of multinational companies, or doing parallel PhD studies in the Czech Republic. Meanwhile, they contribute to their communities, for instance, by creating and participating in the activities of an association of Georgian students living in the Czech Republic. Although culturally, they perceive the development of individualism in themselves, their larger-scale action implies that their aspiration for socio-economic impact remains intact. It means that working in favour of one's community development does not always entail relocating to the country at issue, and this finding is in line with Campbell's (2017).

In comparison, Zambian and Ethiopian alumni are invested in public-interest work in their home countries, but also in the same field as their fellow Georgians. It is plausible to say that for graduates from Georgia, personal growth precedes and is a step to societal development whereas community engagement, family support and self-fulfilment are equally important or codependent to the African alumni.

However, the decent employment of the alumni first suggests that international education offers unique selling points in not only domestic labour markets as mentioned by Mellors-Bourne et al. (2015) but also at the international level. Second, scholarship recipients believe that employment is capital in the process of social and economic advancement, which confirms Campbell's (2017) results. Graduates from Zambia and Ethiopia place a high value on aspects like using technical skills and maintaining a work-life balance. They also place a high value on receiving compensation that meets their needs and makes them feel fulfilled as a whole. These results highlight how crucial it is to match the corporate culture and individual preferences in order to support worker happiness and job satisfaction (Alkhodary 2023). Third, scholarship programmes provide notable human capital development for middle-income and least-developed countries but with variations depending on the cultural context. Lastly, it is possible to consider the expatriate alumni's choice as selflessly serving their society as a whole. A major barrier

to development in emerging countries is widespread corruption, which results from the underpayment of public workers, their desire for wealth, and a low level of education (Kaffenberger 2012). On the other hand, it is hypothesised that the longer graduates stay abroad, the more resilient they become to corrupt incentives because they have accumulated significant savings from their successful transnational positions. Being exposed to different work conditions for a long period of time often leads to the adoption of new values such as work ethics.

Another focus when looking at the post-study period was the tools and employment strategies implemented by graduates. The absence of support and communication between alumni and the Czech scholarship programme comes in opposition to the German and United Kingdom DISPs which engage students, graduands, and graduates in a global network consisting, among others, of professional tip-sharing (CSCUK 2023; DAAD 2023). The lack of communication on the Czech side may be caused by a change in alumni's data after graduation. Universities usually communicate with their students via the school emails or their websites. However, following graduation and especially after starting their professional lives, people gain new email addresses and, in some cases, corporate mobile phones. Thereby, their academic accounts turn inactive, and communication between them and the faculties becomes impossible. The same is true for scholarship programmes in case the personal contact information has not been collected or has not been stored properly. It follows that alumni are scattered here and there, each on their own path, and their development efforts are not at all federated. This lack of critical mass, or associations of people cooperating in order to reach larger societal influence (Raetzell et al. 2013), reinforces the feeling of loneliness among alumni, as highlighted by Dassin et al. (2018).

According to the study's findings, graduates had significant cultural shifts. Graduates from Eastern Europe speak Czech fluently, obtained Czech citizenship and developed more individualistic traits whereas African alumni improved in discipline, time management, and work ethics. As the latter accepted Czech gastronomy (bangers and beer), it highlights the impact of food experiences on cultural integration (Shah 2018). All respondents' feedback emphasises the influence of these adjustments in culture on their interpersonal as well as professional conduct. It shows how social norms and standards are convertible between cultural settings (Cotterill et al. 2019) and how

participants' dedication to lifelong learning is indicative of larger cultural trends toward ongoing improvement in oneself (Laal 2011). Overall, regardless of their country of birth, all graduates experienced comparable cultural shifts marked by engagement in social activities like networking and sports. This is consistent with previous studies showing how foreign education promotes social integration and cross-cultural involvement (Marginson 2013).

The study is limited by the small size of the population interviewed, a consequence of the lack of an alumni database at the faculties, compliance with the General Data Protection Regulation, and the withdrawal of consent by some graduates to participate in the study. The semi-structured one-to-one interviews helped to mitigate these limitations by allowing individual graduates' experiences to be explored in depth. In addition, the responses collected under the fourth objective are based solely on the graduates' personal views, without the input of employers or entourage, which creates room for biased judgments or distortions of the truth. Another limitation of the study is that only graduates from Georgia who extended their stay in the Czech Republic participated. To counteract this, the researcher asked the interviewees to invite returnees that they knew would participate in the study. However, they reported that all the former scholarship recipients they knew were also living in the Czech Republic but did not want to take part in the study.

## 10. Conclusion and Recommendations

The study's main objective was to analyse the career paths and employment strategies of Czech state agricultural university scholarship graduates. The results show that all graduates have decent jobs in multinational companies, international public interest organisations, and local government agencies, which confirms the hypothesis of the third objective.

Their professional activities give them a sense of self-fulfilment and make a difference on a larger scale although not all have returned after graduation, half confirming the first hypothesis of the study. The Georgian participants have founded the Association of Georgian Students in the Czech Republic, while some Zambians and Ethiopians are directly involved in the welfare of their local communities. In addition, the stay in the Czech Republic has improved the time management skills of the African graduates and enabled some Georgians to obtain Czech citizenship.

Furthermore, the alumni emphasised that their loneliness as students and graduates has caused their difficulties in finding jobs. Consequently, some adjustments are necessary to improve the Czech scholarship management. Some, which have been made by the alumni, are included below:

- The update of the alumni database: Upon students' selection, embassies should communicate personal contact information like emails to the scholarship coordination team which must save them using modern technologies. To make sure it does not get forgotten, the database, in the form of a contact list, can be used as addressees of a newsletter edited monthly and share news from the students to the students. The update of this contact list should be done annually with the help of embassies.

- The creation of a LinkedIn and a Facebook Network: Recipients should be added to these groups upon their admission into the programme in order to feel supported from the start.

- A department of social affairs should be established. It will be in charge of social animations such as suggesting and organising trips inside and outside the Czech Republic, and the administration of the online networks. The introduction of an exchange of experiences between graduates and recipients can be the responsibility of the department. Additionally, this department can assist scholarship holders in extending their residence

permits. Prior to the recipients' graduation, career orientation sessions can be held with the cooperation of universities' career centres.

- The establishment of a career pathway initiative: Designed to help not only the alumni, such an initiative (see Figure 2) would be profitable for all students and workers of the Czech Republic to find employment, and apprenticeship for example.

All this would contribute to better interaction between the programme coordinators, students and graduates, as well as it would be an important contribution to the success of the Czech scholarship. Communication is needed to address particular challenges facing modern universities as well as to guarantee the continuity of the programme, develop secure networks of friends, and establish direct communication between educational organisations and corporations, the public, and the government. which has positively impacted the career pathways of its alumni over the years.

Researchers might compare career paths by focusing on gender as a future step to this study, as gender was not considered in this study. Furthermore, generational theories are highly popular nowadays. Analysing the factors that influence Generation Z's decision to pursue a career in agriculture or study it as a subject of study would be instructive.



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## **Appendix: Interview guide**

### **Sampling**

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1. Can you introduce yourself, please? - Country of origin (Zambia/Ethiopia/Georgia) – Sex – university (CZU/Mendel University/University of České Budějovice) – Faculty- study program – the year of graduation.

### **Objective 1: Motivation for applying to the Czech Government Scholarship**

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2. What motivated you to apply for the Czech Government Scholarship Program?

### **Objective 2: Transitional period between graduation and first employment**

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3. Did you return home immediately after your graduation?
4. What factors influenced that decision?
5. Did you pursue your education after graduating under the scholarship and why?
6. What channels did you use to get employment? LinkedIn, Network,
7. What challenges did you face at the time?
8. How supportive were the networks/contacts built in the ČR in finding employment? (any assistance from the scholarship programme?)

### **Objective 3: Graduates' professional occupations**

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9. What is your current occupation?
10. How does it relate to your studies in the Czech Republic?
11. What are the factors that make you happy in your work?
12. What challenges are you facing in your work?

### **Objective 4: Self-perception of the transformative effects of the scholarship scheme?**

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13. In your eyes, what socio-economic change do you observe at your personal level is the result of the scholarship?
14. What cultural effects/changes do you recognize/see in yourself after your stay in the ČR?
15. Has the Czech scholarship helped you to make any developmental changes in your home country? If so, can you describe it?

### **Overall appreciation of the scholarship program in the ČR**

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16. Name the three most difficult things you encountered during your experience as a scholarship holder in the ČR.
17. Name the three most pleasant/interesting things you encountered during your experience as a scholarship holder in the ČR.
18. Overall, what would you recommend improving the system of the scholarship?