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Floods and migration in the Czech Republic

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Residents' strategies are generally aimed at either protection from or adaptation to flooding. Large-scale migration from the floodplains of rivers has not been seriously considered, even in high-risk zones.

The Czech Republic is of particular interest in the European context due to several recent flooding disasters which were national emergencies, including in 1997, 2002, 2006, 2010 and 2013. Weather extremes and climate variability are not the sole causes of floods in Central Europe. Other causal factors include housing, industrial buildings, transport and other infrastructure, river engineering, and agriculture in flood-prone zones near riverbeds.

Our research focused on households living in 22 smaller municipalities mainly in the Bečva River basin located in the north-eastern part of the Czech Republic. Our analyses based on data from households show an increasing intensity and frequency of the impacts of floods over the last two decades, often attributed (rightly or wrongly) to climate change. We found various household-level coping and adaptation strategies there, both inside and outside houses (such as terraces, elevated ground floor construction and water barriers).

After flood damage, insurance companies tended not to be willing to reimburse more than 50-60% of losses and some houses were not eligible for insurance compensation; this meant that many affected people had very limited opportunities for resettlement due to lack of funds, even if they wished to relocate. Furthermore, groups of people who moved away tended to consist of more active and more educated people and their departure (and abandonment of their houses) has been detrimental to community development.

One house is located at the confluence of two small streams. In recent years, almost every spring or summer the streams have overflowed and flooded the property; the

couple who live there state that when the house was built flooding did not occur so frequently. *"We would like to move from our house", the wife told us, "but the house is unsaleable and no insurance company will insure it. We have to stay here. We can't do anything else."*

Because the house is unsaleable and the owners are retired, they do not have sufficient income to repair it. They cannot get a bank loan to buy a new property elsewhere, while renting would be difficult to afford as well. The couple are left with no option but to remain and live with the floods. Their daughter lives with her family on the highest hill in the village, so the parents go there to shelter from the floods.

As another example, in 1997, two parents and their daughter with her husband lost their house by a creek when the biggest Czech floods so far damaged it beyond repair. The municipal government offered them social housing in small dwellings for a limited time. Within three years, partly with money from insurance, along with savings, loans and the help of their friends, they built a new house on a hill with less risk of flooding. This is an example of successful cooperation between the municipality and the local residents, where all parties are satisfied. The village did not lose its residents (and thus its taxes and state subsidies) while the family did not lose their friends or their base and remained part of the community.

Mainly because people are reluctant to move due to the costs and the loss of home, households have a tendency to repair damage rather than to implement costly adaptation measures. There is a range of migration responses, from those who gain by moving, using the flood as an impetus, to those who

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would wish to move but cannot leave. So far, there is no support (e.g. subsidies or tax breaks) in the Czech Republic for policies that would support these households. In the future, an increasing need will be seen for more comprehensive and integrated adaptation solutions along with communication and consultation with those affected.

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