

# **Growth and Development of Diversity in Slovakia – Slovakia as the New Destination Country of Migration**

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This batch of papers has been presented at the Fourth Conference “Diversity in cities: New models of governance”.

# **Growth and Development of Diversity in Slovakia – Slovakia as the New Destination Country of Migration**

## **Summary**

The objectives of this paper are studying a rising problem of diversity and its consequences in Slovak towns and cities using results of empirical anthropological research of Indians with temporary or permanent residence in Slovakia and the results of research aimed at integration of migrants into labour market and society. Slovakia belongs to the countries which only in the past few years have become the destination of immigration. Since the accession of Slovakia in the EU and participating in Schengen Agreement the concern over Slovakia as the target country by migrants from Asia, Africa and Europe has increased. Diversity is relatively new and a rising phenomenon in the Slovak society. The question is, if the Slovak society is prepared for growing diversity and open to all its faces. The total number of foreigners is very low compared to neighboring countries. The paper sets out to rethink the role of political relations in the migration process, the way of regulating the situation of newcomers and the situation of immigrants in Slovakia. The paper focuses in particular circumstances and motivations of immigration (why migrants leave their country of origin), their migration experience and their demands and problems. The author pays attention to the gradual growth and development of diversity in Slovakia, and to adequate strategies and ways of social integration of immigrant groups.

**Keywords:** Migrants, Diversity, Migration, Migration Policy, Multiculturalism, Slovakia

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## **“Growth and Development of Diversity in Slovakia – Slovakia as the New Destination Country of Migration”**

All the current major theories lead to the conclusion that migration is likely to grow and new countries of destination emerge within Europe. Political forces ultimately need to acknowledge that migration was and is a dynamic element of contemporary societal changes. New migrants will keep on coming, and many of them will stay.

New countries of destination have emerged within Europe. These include countries in Southern Europe as well as in Central Europe. The distinction between countries of origin and countries of destination within Europe has in this context become increasingly blurred, as traditional countries of emigration have become countries of immigration at the same time. (Koser, Lutz 1998, 2) The paper sets out to rethink the role of political relations in the migration process, the way of regulating the situation of newcomers and the situation of immigrants in Slovakia<sup>1</sup>. We can assume that gradually problems of diversity and multiculturalism will also affect places that until recently have had no experience with everyday „otherness“, such as Slovakia and the other countries of the former Communist Block. (Bitušíková 2007, 13)

### **Slovakia as a target country of migration**

The themes of foreign migration is a relatively new phenomenon for the Slovak society as Slovakia was traditionally more a country with emigration of people to abroad because of better job opportunities and living conditions. However since 1989 and especially in recent five years migration to and across Slovakia becomes gradually more intense. That’s why it is logical to assume – in regard of the geographical position of Slovakia, its continuous economic growth connected with political integration into the EU and participation in the Schengen system, an increased interest of migrants from Asia, Africa and (less) from Europe to Slovakia as a target country of their migration. On the other side Slovakia will need immigrants more than today. It will be necessary to substitute high-quality labour force leaving because of better earnings for Western Europe and to look for low-skilled and cheap

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<sup>1</sup> In the paper I use the results of research aimed at integration of migrants into labour market and society – Popper, M.; Bianchi, G.; Lukšik, I.; Szeghy, P.: Demands of migrants in Slovakia. Bratislava, 2006 and the results of my empirical anthropological research based on participant observations and in-depth interviewing (focused especially on Indians with *temporary* - for purpose of business, employment, study, and family reunion or *permanent residence* in Slovakia).

staff to work in places not interesting for natives anymore. (Andrášová, 2007) There is already now a lack of people of working age, leading to severe labour shortages, particularly in low-skilled jobs. In some sectors Slovak companies and organizations already miss suitable applicants for jobs despite the 7, 5% unemployment. This problem becomes topical for the whole Central Europe. Generally, Slovak companies prefer labour force from Bulgaria, Romania and Ukraine. However inhabitants of Bulgaria or Romania, nowadays already EU members, have other target countries, not Slovakia. (Karlubíková 2007) The demand of entry is not necessarily a demand for settlement. For most people, it is more likely a demand for temporary access to the labour market of a prosperous country. (Brubaker 1991, 949)

Nowadays when policies of migration and integration of foreigners are being prepared in Slovakia it is necessary to give more attention to question how migration functioned and functions in the world and how it affects countries of origin and target countries of immigrants including Europe and Slovakia. (Andrášová 2007) The question is how the state will seek to incorporate minorities and manage diversity. I find it necessary to pay attention to the gradual growth and development of this phenomenon in our country, and hence to contribute to the formation of adequate strategies of social integration of groups and people from other cultures, ethnicities and religions. (Bitušíková 2007, 13)

In compare with the issue of illegal immigration or asylum our country paid at all levels insufficient attention to the phenomenon of legal immigration by now. At the same time the category of legal immigrants (that means foreigners owning a residential permit - permanent, temporary or tolerated) is the most – at the end of 2006 it amounted 32 153 persons that means 0,6 % of the total population of the Slovak Republic. (Divinský 2007) Legal immigrants in Slovakia face problems caused by their partial neglecting or lower interest in various aspects of their life unlike other EU countries with long-time immigratory traditions. Number of foreigners in Slovakia in period 1998-2003 more or less stagnated; only the entry of the country in the Union meant a development impulse. This brought along increase of foreigners especially from the European Economic Space who found jobs in Slovakia as high-skilled labour force (managers, advisors, experts, teachers, lectors, scientists, etc.) and have a privilege legal statute in the country.

Other groups of foreigners with a residential permit in Slovakia (that means especially from other European countries and Asia) stagnate in quantity and face some serious challenges. Among the most frequent problems the foreigners mention especially reluctance of involved competent bodies against granting more residential permits to foreigners particularly from less developed countries what is often contained in restrictive even

reportedly discriminatory arrangements and also artificial administrative obstacles in the process of permit obtaining (visa problems, medical certificates, invitations of family members a.o.), and finally language problems. As Castles (1992, 563) notes on the example of Australian model of immigration „the opening to Asian immigration has not lead to a breakdown of the social fabric, but rather to considerable economic benefits and an enrichment of society. The lesson for Europe is the need to remove any form of discrimination on the basis of race, ethnicity and national origin from immigration rules“.

In addition communities of foreigners resident here in the long term (e.g. Arabs, Afghanis, Vietnamese, Ukrainians, Africans) are not so numerous (only hundreds to thousands persons) and do not create migration networks yet and so they need support from the competent institutions.

### **Migration and Integration Policy of Slovakia**

The Slovak Republic adopted a lot of legislative regulations and measures. After declaration of an independent Republic in 1993 the Government adopted Principles of Migration Policy of the SR and in 1996 the „Complex Solution of the Integration Process of Foreigners with Acknowledged Refugee Status into the Society“. Only at the beginning of 2005, the Conception of State Migration Policy of Slovakia was approved by the Government as a relatively comprehensive document. Till then the state migration policy was not implemented in a pro-immigration way hence the SR had practically no normative system related to integration of foreigners. The public was not informed on migration policy and till beginning of 2005 there was neither thematical scope nor practical approach to foreigners. (Popper 2006, 11; Divinský 2005) Though in the very last years some ministries have started to develop particular integration documents (e.g. the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs and Family), the country still lacks a comprehensive integration policy. According to Castles (1992, 563) an active immigration policy would mean setting out levels of immigration which are realistic in view of internal and external pressures; striking a balance between various types of migration (economic, family and refugee); and setting up selection mechanism that are as fair as possible. Migration will take place whether government want it or not, as the current growth of illegal migration demonstrates. An active immigration policy will not solve this problem quickly or completely, but it is the only chance of maintaining some measure of control of movements.

On the basis of the study in which the British Council compared situation in policy on integration support of immigrants in 25 member states of the EU (except Bulgaria and Romania), and in Norway, Switzerland and Canada, Slovakia belongs to countries with the worst ranking<sup>2</sup>. As Divinský (2007) points out country notably misses particularly an independent concept of integration and naturalization policy of the SR, it is necessary to pay more attention to issues of work migration, articulate programs and schemes for support of targeted immigration being absent up to now, make Slovakia more attractive for preferred groups of migrants, increase informedness of the Slovak public on foreign migrants, more support associations of foreigners in the SR financially and in other forms, etc. In compare with the neighbouring states the Slovak Republic is behind in defining clear immigration and integration policy (not only behind Austria but also behind the Czech Republic or Hungaria) and there is missing any effort to attract selected categories of labour force from abroad.

### **Immigrants' frame of reference**

Individual migrants are coming to Slovakia for various reasons – to study, for economic, social, eventually other personal reasons. Students from various countries can study in Slovakia thanks to bilateral agreements between individual countries. This group of migrants as the only one must pass an obligatory course of Slovak language what makes them later communication and adaptation in Slovakia considerably easier.

*“It was a bit so that I was not able to communicate well at the beginning, I haven't had it in my head that nearly nobody speaks English.. When somebody comes here he must learn the language – Slovak to be able to mingle with people to know how they think. It is not enough to speak English if I speak Slovak people take it completely differently, they are prepared to help me.. at the beginning I needed help as also printed matters are in Slovak..” (M, 1979)*

Slovakia often means for students but also for skilled labour force in international companies only a jumping-board for a better career in the West. Motivation of their migration was not connected exclusively with Slovakia. In many cases if they had an opportunity they would prefer more developed countries – most frequently England, the USA, Canada or Australia. Although after getting the Slovak language under control they don't exclude

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<sup>2</sup> <http://www.sme.sk/c/3537559/cast-slovakov-by-cudzincov-bez-prace-deportovala.html>

a possibility to continue to live in Slovakia, it is conditioned especially by good job opportunity or by establishing their own families here. Migrants from the so called third countries appreciate the forwardness of Slovakia in the area of infrastructure and better quality services. For migrants from the Western countries Slovakia is cheaper and they are attracted especially by less consuming way of life and interesting history.

*“I thought that it is better for my future if I work with Europeans, if I gain some experiences abroad.. Actually I have never ever heard about Slovakia before. I can’t earn much here anyway... I’m here only to get some good job in UK.” (M, 1984)*

*“..I have already been accustomed to living here I know the language and feel here at home.. If you speak the language and have friends it is no problem.. If there is something good – some opportunity I will stay if not I’ll leave.. I can imagine being here or there, I am well here and I am well there.” (M, 1980)*

*“At the beginning we suffered a lot. I have been living here since the year 2002 but at the beginning everything was for me strange – shops, food, people. But slowly I have accustomed to living here. I imagined Slovakia in some way better, different – according to movies, books from Europe you have some image of Europe. And my sister is living in England – but here it is totally different.” (F, 1977)*

Problems in contacts with institutions, processing of applications for permanent or temporary residential permits and especially language incompetency of staff in the Foreigner Office who don’t speak English are the most frequent problems mentioned by migrants. Low informedness not only of migrants but also employers on legislative terms and conditions, on their rights and duties, on work system and institutions which can be addressed to where appropriate is inter alia a consequence of the fact that printed matters and many legislative information are available only in Slovak. This informedness gap is partially filled up by the Migration Information Centre founded in Bratislava and Košice in 2006. The Migration Information Centre is a part of IOM (International Organization for Migration) and provides legal and social consultant service to foreigners who are interested to live or already live in Slovakia with a view to support their integration into the labour market and society.

Despite of conferring foreigners in Slovakia the same rights as citizens of the SR the foreigners often declare problems when trying to find a job what is related to deficiency of

jobs in certain locations (that's why most foreigners gather in Bratislava), and it also relates to the fact that they are not citizens of the SR in some cases even to discrimination due to flesh-colour. A negative role is played also by too complicated processing of necessary formalities and the above mentioned insufficient informedness of migrants and employers.

Another problem of Slovakia is a zero community involvement of immigrants. In Slovakia there are missing some kinds of consultative bodies established to create forms of liaison between government and immigrant/ethnic minority groups. This passivity of immigrants in the area of community involvement is connected with their lack of interest in public life on one hand and on the other hand it indicates insufficient integration. It also is caused by low number of foreigners in compare with neighbouring countries. (Popper 2006, 14)

Conflicts between majority population and migrants predominate more or less in all areas of social and cultural context. Numerous expressions of distrust to all "others", that look different or live in a different way, as well as tolerance towards intolerance is rather high in the society. In Slovakia there emerge public attitudes among the majority populations towards immigrants - a growing rejection of policies or public pressure calling for immigrant and ethnic minority assimilation – usually conceived as an expectation that migrants would discard their traditional values and practices and adopt those of the majority society. (Vertovec, Wessendorf 2004, 2) A wider public discussion about multiculturalism and foreigners as such and about attitude of the Slovak republic to be chosen for their integration is missing in Slovakia. In accordance with the results of the research focused on the demands of migrants within Slovakia, the migrants as well as the institutions are well aware of prevailing prejudice and high degree of intolerance towards otherness.

*"In every country are good and bad people, it's not different in Slovakia. Here are also people who don't like people with different flesh-colour. My friend was beaten, he hadn't done anything bad but he was beaten. I think it's not good in India I haven't had such an experience.... On Friday, Saturday and Sunday I don't go usually out I'm alone and I'm afraid... All my foreign friends have been already beaten. I don't know anyone who hasn't. Maybe only three – four – but they had problems.. I don't know what country is safe..." (M, 1982)*

*„Maybe Bratislava is prepared for arrival of foreigners but other towns of Slovakia are small.. There are not many foreigners and people are not used to meet them. It's for them new experience. I choose my friends...Once I was attacked.. but I don't like to talk about that.“*  
(M, 1979)

### **Multiculturalism or Integration?**

Active approach of the state policy may contribute to the reduction of xenophobia, racism and openness of the majority society towards the foreigners in Slovakia. Numerous consider multiculturalism policy the groundwork for this situation. The mentioned term *multiculturalism* occurs in different forms in various political documents dealing with integration of foreigners in Slovakia however without clear definition of multiculturalism policy. ‘Multiculturalism’ is not a homogeneous entity. If we examine the many multicultural initiatives across Europe and beyond we may observe that they fall along a spectrum from ‘weak’, where cultural diversity is recognized and accepted in the private sphere, but there is a high degree of assimilation to the local population in employment, housing, education, health and welfare, with acculturation in many areas of life, to ‘strong’ where there is institutional recognition for cultural difference in the public sphere, with special provision in language, education, health care, welfare etc, and the organization of representation on ethnic/cultural lines. (Grillo 2005, 6) In the effort to ensure real integration of immigrants into city life the policy of multiculturalism is being rethought, also in the countries in which it has been endorsed, such as Great Britain, the Netherlands and Sweden. It seems that it is not enough to verbally celebrate diversity and give people the possibility to cultivate their culture on the basis of their ethnic or religious (or other) differences, but on the other hand is the task to create opportunities for people to meet and cooperate on common goals not defined just in terms of ethnicity and religion. (Bitušiková 2007, 21) Equality requires a common yardstick, or measure of judgment, not a plurality of meanings. (Malik). Multiculturalism became a sort of system which prized racial and ethnic difference above all other values and there lies the problem. The policy of multiculturalism was based on the assumption of equality of cultures and the right of each citizen and group to their own culture. That is also part of the problem of multiculturalism – a constant slippage in multicultural talk between the idea of humans as culture-bearing creatures and the idea that humans have to bear a particular culture. (Malik, Easton 2006) According to Vertovec (1999) “particularly through the corporate groups identified in many models of state multiculturalism, there emerges’ a picture of society as a

“mosaic” of several bounded nameable, individually homogenous and unmeltable minority uni-cultures which are pinned on to the backdrop of a similarly characterized majority uni-culture.” There is still persisting the notion of collectivity, a community of some kind which has certain characteristics which make it unique and special, ideally its own language, its own religion. (Kuper 2002) This phenomenon is not exception in Slovakia. As Khalid Koser and Helma Lutz (1998) point out the new racist nationalism, which is gathering force in contemporary Europe, is centrally concerned with notions of defending home, space and territory against ‘the other’, a category which has come to include immigrants, asylum seekers and ethnic minorities.

What is required is sense of identity that overarches creed, culture or ethnic background. (Easton 2006) There are different views how this might be achieved. In order to effectively deliver services to, and ensure the smooth integration of immigrants we shall to seek for the best solution based on the experiences of other countries.

## **Conclusion**

Slovakia is still at the beginning of developing an active immigration policy. We should learn from the countries with long-time immigratory tradition. As to the acceptance of migrants‘cultures by the Slovak population, a great potential exists in the country to improve cultural and social relations between migrants and the native population as well as to develop cultural and social diversity. In European countries and cities in which multiculturalism was the most celebrated, the rhetoric and politics of diversity and interculturalism took over.

In the effort to reduce the level of xenophobia and intolerance within Slovak society the educational programs should be created, concentrated on sensitisation of majority population in terms of multicultural tolerance. This should be mainly concentrated on the work with children and youth at schools alongside with whole population. Important part by reducing the prejudice of whatever character play media which nowadays present migrants and migration process rather in a bad account. Likewise the discussion on definition of migration policy should not be the object of discussion only within university community or political circles but it should be extended to the public debate and thereby find a collective answer to the question to what extent should the state recognize and support cultural pluralism and in what manner they should define the elements of immigrant cultures that are within certain limits in accordance with the law and together with it are also socially acceptable.

Public policy should try to prevent segregation and help to create a greater sense of mutual respect, support and belonging. It continues to be necessary to pay sufficient attention to the phenomenon of legal immigration. There should be created a common public sphere of shared norms and values with equal opportunity in employment, housing, education and health/welfare systems; equality before the law and protection from racism, but distinctive beliefs, values, practices, religion, language, in private. (Grillo 2005, 5)

In the socio-economic domain should be established structures and institutions supporting the gaining of 'tools of integration' – language classes, special advice and employment agencies, vocational courses, and the 'opening up of insufficiently accessible institutions'. Grillo (2005, 32) in his paper stresses the importance of language for integration of immigrants. Therefore it is necessary to provide accessible language courses for immigrants and so enable them the access to equal opportunities. People need some level of Slovak for the crucial matter of basic employment as well as for everyday life.

I consider it necessary to pay more attention to the gradual growth and development of cultural and social diversity in our country, and hence to contribute to the formation of adequate strategies of social integration of groups and people from other cultures, ethnicities and religions.

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