The Perception of the Integration Process and the Provision of Social Services by Immigrants

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Abstract: Migration is a phenomenon that is present in every country. Emigration is more typical for some countries and immigration for other countries. In the past, emigration was typical for our country.. Recently, however, more and more immigrants arrive in Slovakia, especially in terms of looking for work.

The aim of this article was to explore how migrants perceived their integration process and the provision of social services in Slovakia. We particularly focused on what social services they used during their integration process, how did they assess the approach of the staff of the institutions that provided social services.

The survey sample was composed from immigrants living in Slovakia for at least one year. We used a snowball technique to select the participants. The survey sample consisted of 25 people from different countries of origin.

Qualitative research strategy was used. A semi-structured interview scheme was designed to obtain information about integration process and provided social services during integration process. The data were analysed using the program Atlas.Ti.

Findings describe how immigrants perceive their integration process and how they perceive the provision of social services were mainly positive with a few of negative experiences.

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Introduction

The end of XXth century and beginning of XXIth century was a period of great changes. Numerous technical and technological innovations have been developed in almost all spheres of human existence. There has been a transition to a postmodern culture. The society has entered an era of total globalization. Postmodernists claim that national boundaries are a hindrance to human communication and they often propose internationalism and uniting separate countries so migration is typical (Kucirek, 2014). Immigration is also a phenomenon, which is connected with our country. We have mostly those foreigners who want to work in Slovakia such as we have companies, which need foreigners for their companies. These all types of foreigners are asylum seekers, refugees or migrants. For these people we will use a term immigrants.

An immigrant is a person who moved away from his country of origin and moved to another country for at least three months (IOM, n.d.). Immigrants can also be classified as disadvantages because they are often oppressed, exposed to social and cultural isolation and various forms of discrimination. They do not have sufficient access to information, labour market, culture or education (MKSR, 2010) and therefore need help according to their individual requirements, whether by the state or by different institutions, organizations or non-governmental organizations. It will help them improve the quality of their lives, their self-confidence, and last but not least, they will integrate more easily and successfully into the society of the recipient country. Also, immigrants must make efforts to participate in the acquisition of information important for their appropriate integration into society. We do not use a term inclusion because all our national documents use term integration but all our activities would be oriented on inclusion immigrants' not on integration because inclusion ensures satisfaction on both sides - on the side of the citizens of the receiving country and on the side of the coming foreigners.

1. Integration

Integration is a process when immigrants become citizens. It is a complex of interrelations between the social environment of the receiving country and individuals. These relationships influence the dynamics of this whole process together with the legal conditions, economic conditions and factors.

Integration can be understood by the state as a system of different social support for immigrants focused on housing, health care, education, and also cultural needs. The vast majority of immigrants are dependent on the state for a very long time because their integration into society of the receiving state is particularly hampered by high unemployment and language barrier (Divinsky, 2005). However, the language barrier does not make it difficult to integrate only into the labour market, but it also causes problems in integrating into society, especially in communicating with institutions, understanding rights and responsibilities, participating in social life. The immigrants, who have married or come to work in the country or have come to study in the country, and have been provided with documents through their employer, have relatively few problems with this barrier (Popper, Bianchi, Luksik, & Szeghy, 2006). The Common Basic Principles of Integration Policy for Immigrants in the European Union states that the basic knowledge of the language of the receiving country is important, indispensable and essential part of immigrant integration, and of course also a prerequisite for its successful integration.

It is important where integration takes place for the relevant operationalization of the integration of immigrants. Integration usually takes place at two levels; at the state level and at the local level. Successful integration is identified as the success gained by immigrants in their everyday life (Sekulova & Gyarfasova, 2009).

When integrating, it is also necessary to consider the various factors that, according to Vizin and Peris (Gajdosova, 2013), affect how the immigrant will feel in the new country, what will be his/her mental health, etc. These factors divide into pre-migration and post-migration. Pre-immigration factors include, for example, personality, age, health and loss. Post-immigration factors include absence of language knowledge, separation from the family, unemployment, etc. These factors greatly contribute to successful integration.

Ensuring that integration is successful requires a balanced partnership between the receiving country and the immigrants. This, on the one hand, means that the host society takes responsibility for securing the rights of the immigrants so that they have the opportunity to engage in cultural, economic, civic and social life. On the other hand, it is important for immigrants to respect the values and standards of the receiving society and actively engage in the integration process. In doing so, they should use their own individual approach and active participation (Divinsky, 2005).

We agree with Bargerova, Fajnorova, and Chudzikova (2011) that it is important to recognize that the integration process is not just formal,

administrative and socio - economic. This process involves people with life stories, problems, and experiences coming from their environment into a new environment. Therefore, it would be advisable to promote diversity in Slovakia in order not to exert pressure on immigrants to accept our culture. If they are allowed to recognize their original cultures, they will feel better and will also support their integration.

The integration process itself is implemented through a number of actors, such as NGOs, ministries, municipalities, schools, trade unions, health care providers and employers (“Priятие veľkorysym hostitelom”, n.d.).

The success and level of integration of immigrants implemented by national governments in the countries of the European Union makes it possible to compare MIPEX - the "Migrant Integration Policy Index". This is the most comprehensive study in which 140 integration indicators were developed. As a result, there is an opportunity for immigrants to participate in the development of European societies. The MIPEX project maps and compares integration policies in the 25 EU Member States as well as in Norway, Switzerland and Canada. MIPEX indicates where the country is compared to others because integration policies are similar (Vasecka, 2009).

2. Integration policy and social services

The Government of the Slovak Republic on 29 January 2014 approved the Integration Policy of the Slovak Republic. It represents the basic document and the basis for building a targeted Slovak policy in the area of integration of immigrants (“Akčný plan Integračnej”, 2014). Integration policy is based on the principles of justice, equality, and respect for human dignity. It is a basic programming document on the integration of immigrants.

The aim of integration policy is to improve the quality of integration of immigrants, especially in the field of protection of their physical and mental health (MPSRSR, 2014). Another of its goals is to design and implement integration measures to prevent the society from being socially, economically and culturally unrelated, and to avoid creating closed communities of immigrants.

During the second half of the twentieth century, three concepts of integration of immigrants were created: assimilation, ethnic-exclusion (segregation) and pluralistic (intercultural). The intercultural model is used as a synonym for the harmonious coexistence of different cultures and legitimizes the diversity of immigrant cultures (Stefancik, 2010). Slovakia is particularly interested in an integration model based on two-way adaptation

in the integration process. Slovakia respects and supports the society of immigrants and they themselves contribute to the formation of a common culture (MPSRSR, 2009).

Thomas Huddleston (Sekulova & Gyarfasova, 2009), based on the results of the MIPEX project, pointed out the weaknesses and strengths of Slovakia's integration policy. He also mentioned which changes would be effective in improving integration. Similarly, Bargerova and Divinsky (2008) pointed out that Slovakia has a weak position among the evaluated countries, which only confirms the negative conclusions about the lagging behind of the integration process.

Vasecka (2009) points out that Slovakia is in the success of integration at the end of the ranking because it does not have good prerequisites for success in the integration process of immigrants. The integration policy of the Slovak Republic should primarily focus on legal aliens, in two respects. The first point is the purpose of the immigrants' stay for the purposes of family reunification, work, study, and persons with recognized refugee status and subsidiary protection. From the second point of view, depending on the type of stay, there are people with permanent, temporary residence or tolerated residence. Bagnerova and Divinsky (2008) further suggest that it would be advisable to propose missing schemes to promote targeted migration that are aimed at making Slovakia more attractive for immigrants. It is necessary to adopt programs and develop projects for effective, comprehensive, planned and feasible integration of selected immigrants into society. In the first place, strategies for labour migration to the Slovak Republic should be started under the leadership of the Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs and the Family of the Slovak Republic. Labour migration strategy should reflect the current state and the expected state of the labour market. It should also include tools to make the Slovak Republic more visible. At the same time, it would be necessary to include those articles of the labour market, profession, economic sectors and regions of the country where labour immigration would bring maximum benefit. Integration of the National Integration Dialogue (2011) is also linked to the area of labour integration, according to which it is important for the integration policies of the Member States to be linked and coordinated with other relevant areas such as employment, education and social inclusion. The key to successful integration is access to employment.

3. Methodology

The aim of our survey was to find out how immigrants perceive the integration process and the provision of social services. We particularly focused on answers to some of these questions:

- What social services have been used during the integration process?
- How did foreigners feel the cooperation of the institutions that have an impact on their integration?
- How are they integrated into society?

3.1. Participants

The survey sample was composed of immigrants living in Slovakia for at least one year. Other criteria have not been set forward. We used a snowball technique to select the participants. The survey sample consisted of 25 people from different countries of origin (e.g. Egypt, the Republic of Korea, Vietnam, Syria, Afghanistan, etc.). We used Slovak or English language for interviewing our participants.

3.2. Procedure

A semi-structured interview scheme was designed to obtain information about integration process and provided social services during integration process. Open-ended question focused on their perception of their integration process. We wanted to know what they met during their integration process, what type of social services they used, how they perceive the provision of social services, how they describe a cooperation with social service providers and how the approach of social service providers was). We also wanted to know something about their integration into our society so we asked them how do they feel in Slovakia, how they spent their leisure time, how they perceive Slovakia and what their participation in social is and community life.

All interviews were taped and then transcribed. Open coding was used to code data; all coding was done in the software Atlas.Ti. Then we used axial and selective coding, aim at establishing the predominant semantic categories in the interviewees' speech, respectively the relations between these categories, possibly revised, and the construction of the interpretative model (Sandu, 2018). We chose the choice of cards as an analytical technique, so, based on existing categories, we have compiled the text that was the redistribution of the content of each category. We have selected only

some categories in the resulting analysis. Their essence is that these selected categories are linked (Svaricek et al., 2007).

Interviews with immigrants who agreed to participate in the study were conducted either in the office of researcher or in the offices of immigrants, depending on the time possibilities of each part.

4. Results

Realized research through in-depth interviews has provided us with a lot of information about migrants' lives. We processed this information into seven categories and one subcategory. Each of these categories and subcategories is related and linked to each other.

The most important determinant of the perception of the integration process is interpersonal relationships. We have put ours into the subcategory of our research, but the gradual processing of the data we have obtained revealed that interpersonal relationships affect all our categories and play an important role. The most visible were family relationships. According to the testimonials of our participants, what we have come to on the basis of positive and, in some cases, direct and very sensitive statements. Also, when describing how to spend leisure time, participants rely on interpersonal relationships, albeit indirectly.

Each participant is different; some prefer nature, other social events. Even in this category, we have seen significant family routing. Also, in describing traditions and customs, participants focused on family-related memories in the form of mainly daytime celebrations. Participants will retreat to the family when they look into their future.

In the last category, the participants expressed their gratitude for the negatives they had encountered during their integration. Their statements were also based on relations with people. Formal relationships include interpersonal relationships encountered by participants in different institutions and organizations. In our case, these are institutions aimed at supporting the integration of aliens and providing social services or employment services. Also, in contact with workers in these institutions, participants do not give a significant negative.

Formal relationships affect relationships informally. Not only from our research, but also from the theoretical part, it is clear that state aid and employment assistance have a significant impact on how to integrate participants. These formal relationships therefore affect relationships informally. We have now included a category of attitude to inclusion, because the participants' responses focused on past or present.

Findings are described as answers to the research questions:

4.1 Attitudes to integration

This category includes respondents' answers to describe what kind of negatives they encountered during their integration. Participants' responses were different. Some responded to this in a positive way. Participant R4 said:

"I did not mess with anything bad."

In a similar way, participant R5 responded, saying:

"When I think so, it probably did not happen."

Participant R8 also answered positively:

"Basically, not. There are quite a lot of black people out there, so I'm somewhat out of the crowd. "

This participant's response follows the response of participant R1, who is also a black man. In his statement, however, we meet with negatives and directly towards his appearance:

"I have used myself in the course of time, but it was also strange at first. Sometimes people laughed at me and laughed at me that I was a black sponge and a monkey. "

Similarly, R6 participant, who said:

"Inclusion in society was not easy ... With the elements of racism I a couple of times he met word by word on my person. "

When we notice the appearance, we still have a participant R2. But it was no longer negative for him:

"I'm not a typical Egyptian, I'm such a mix. So people do not register me extra ... But what they notice is my palms. They are noticeably pale from the skin."

Participant R7, who described himself as the one who faces other non-trustworthy people, as if he was protecting himself, gave a different answer:

"Everyone was and still is nice to me. I'm rather metered and I keep away from people.."

4.2. Help from institutions and organizations

Immigrants are just those who need help from state institutions or organizations in various forms at the beginning of their integration. It is extremely important to them, as they do not know how this is happening in our country in the institutions. An important role here is the offer of social services that we asked our participants about. Their views on this are discussed in this category.

Participants rated the approach and all of it is positively related. Participant R4 is exceedingly satisfied with the accommodation assistance provided. From his testimony, he feels fear of ending up on the street:

"I am grateful for help. I do not know where I would end up if my help was not given ... People are really willing to help."

Also, participant R2 is also positive in this respect. His answers were focused on the services of the interpreter:

"From the beginning, I used the interpreter until I learned the language ... Not the interpreter, I would probably have followed the office yet."

A similar experience with the authorities is also participant R7:

"I would she did not know where to put it ... I was happy. Even though I did not communicate personally, I could see the willingness on their part."

Participant R1 did not use the social services offer but was helpful in knowing:

"I did not need them. But I helped my comrade friend and he praised."

Helping Slovak language teaching and, of course, the satisfaction of R5 participant:

"They have a lot of patience, especially with me. I do not learn my language at all."

Participant R6 did not personally take part in dealing with social services, so expressing their attitude to their quality, said:

"I personally rate I do not know. But my wife was not very happy. She always commented something."

Immigrants are not easy to apply to the labour market because many employers do not want to take on the employment of immigrants. It is a lot of work and it is easier for them to accept Slovaks. The category name Employment support we deduced from codes and from the fact that foreigners offer different employment services to jobseekers. They serve to facilitate access to the labour market. It was on these employment services that we were interviewed by our participants.

Participant R1 has a job, but there is no satisfaction for a number of reasons. Therefore, he is looking for new work and social services to use and continue to use the moment he finds the most advantageous offer:

"At the Labour Office I received 3 months of financial support. They also helped me find a job. They gave me some offer. But I found nothing interesting about it. But I've even heard about some job agencies. So I'll go and try it there because I do not like robots anymore. I have badly here. And I want to be closer to the home."

Participant R2, who is also looking for the best job, had a similar experience:

"At the Labour Office I was like at home. I was still looking for a new job. I have been looking for myself."

Participant R5 was unsure:

"I do not know if it is an Labour Office, but job vacancies have been offered to me at the job office."

Stability in work and the need to stay in it is borne by participant R4. Since his arrival in Slovakia, he has been employed and the same job he still has today:

"I have worked right now and have it so far."

4.3. Traditions in country of origin and in Slovakia

This category concerned the cultural features in the participant's home country and the Slovak Republic. The hierarchical system prevails over different conception of Christmas traditions. Participant R14 expresses this:

"Only the father has a tree star."

In the African States Christmas holidays are held in the form of multigenerational celebrations, as stated by participant R1:

"We have Ramadan, which is similar to Christmas. Meet the whole family, brothers, sisters, mom, this, grandmothers, grandparents, but all of them. Everybody gives presents to each other."

Also, participant R2 in his statement confirms this tradition:

"The family meets, we make picnics."

Participant R8 also comes from the African states, but her departure to the Slovak Republic helped her to break free from her cultural traditions, which she is not identified and her consent states as follows:

"The husband chooses woman when she is very young. And they are also making a circumcision. I am happy that if I have a daughter, I live in Slovakia and I will not make the circumcision. Even though I have, but I disagree with this habit."

Participant R3 feels in Slovakia as at home. It comes from a country where the holidays are not different:

"We have basically all the same, so there are some differences."

We will stay at participant R5 at the holidays, which does not describe the exact holiday habits, but expresses the unusual freedom of holidays during holidays:

"Also, it was different for me. I am accustomed to having a job off from Thursday to Monday. And in the habit we should get out of the whole week. And there is only Friday and Monday free."

During the holidays there is a time of generosity and this is also held in the original country of participant R7, who remarks:

"... Christmas is celebrated until 25 December and for the next day, a financial collection is made in shops and companies for less fortunate."

4.4. Level of integration

The way of spending leisure time is an indispensable part of the integration level of every person. As people are different, they also spend leisure time in different ways. We can see this also on the answers of our participants.

For a man who has been out of work for many years, his time spent with his family is rare. This is the case of participant R4:

"I spend my leisure time with all my family. As I am still on the road with a truck, we do not see much..."

There are plenty of fun and constant environs to be enjoyed by participant R2 who really enjoys the day off:

"I'm going to different events like concerts and festivals. I travel a lot, especially to Dubai."

Participant R7 does not look for fun at social events:

"I try to walk among people, I like to go for walks, but I do not feel good at social events."

Similarly, R5 participant, who loves nature and art:

"I'm taking a picture, mainly old buildings and countryside. I spend all the spare time by this way. I also rarely attend social events."

Likewise, participant R3 spends his spare time in the circle of few friends:

"I do not really go to public events. It does not bother me."

Participant R1 currently experiences the feeling of loneliness and frustration. Work has a home away from home. Therefore, he is not satisfied and is trying to change:

"I work in Bratislava and I live in Zilina. I have 5 days off in the month and I go to Zilina because of my family and friends, we go out for beer or for coffee, or for trips, we make barbecues ... I do not go to Bratislava anywhere. I do not have a good team of people at work, so I do not have to go out with whom."

This expression connects me a bit with the R6 participant. Although he has a wife and a child in Slovakia, he still remains a true friend of his own origin:

"I spend my spare time with my family and with my Korean friends, as I understand them the best."

Participant R8 is, due to his age, a study devoted to all the time except holidays:

"All the time, I'm studying. I'm a full-time student so I'm still in the books. Only during the holidays do I travel for either a rest or a brigade."

5. Conclusion

Our participants' responses to integration were largely interpreted in a positive way. Participants did not meet with nothing negative in their past during integration. Even race discrimination, they did not feel negative from other people, as there are several nationalities and ethnicities in Slovakia today. However this does not apply to two participants. One of them had some problems with his race, but over time the attacks on him have disappeared. The same feeling was experienced by participant, who also met with elements of racism (verbal attacks) at the beginning of his integration process. Nowadays, as we say, it is more common than in the time of socialism that people of different nationalities and races live with each other. The way in which immigrants integrate into our society depends also on their nature and the way to adapt and to accept new ones that are waiting for them in Slovakia, but also from the active participation of the state. A non-discriminatory approach can complicate integration and bring various obstacles. This attitude was taken by one of the participants by taking a distance from people.

Integration is inherent in customs and traditions. The more distant the state from the Slovak Republic, the differences is greater. For immigrants living near the receiving state, it is easier to accept its traditions because they have several common features. What cannot be said of immigrants from distant countries, where the differences in traditions are really big. We wanted to find out how different the immigrants met or how they dealt with them. In responding to the question of customs and traditions, the participants' answers were mainly focused on the area of holidays, especially Christmas. Participants said that Slovak holidays are completely different from their holidays in the country of origin. Participants also said that Slovakia is even a country of liberation from their original habits, which they are not yet established. The other participants express themselves in terms of the similarity of the Christmas experience with minor variations. Participants' testimonies show their adaptation and acceptance of Slovakia from this site as well. In addition to holidays, the habits of behaviour, people's attitudes, and compromise elements were also mentioned. Authors Bargerova et al. (2011) and authors Gallova Kriglerova and Vytilitova (2007) state that it would be appropriate to recognize the original features of cultures because if it is a successful integration, it is necessary to give the immigrants space what they are used to and respect. In this view, we are still following the realization of our survey. As a result,

immigrants would feel at least somewhat "homogeneous" in the receiving country.

Leisure time also affects integration. It helps immigrants to better know the countryside, culture, find new friends. In this, the answers of multiple participants are the same at the point where they prefer time spent in the circle of closest friends, those they trust. They reject big social events. One participant completes this fact even for walks in nature. Nature is also associated with the hobbies of the other participant, who pictures the nature of photography. Another participant who spends relatively little time with them because of workload also supports the familiar circle. He would like to make a change to be closer to both friends and family. Another participant who spends his leisure time with his family also supports the family. Another participant shares his spare time between wife and child and their Korean friends with whom they understand best, have common interests. A lot of fun and constant surroundings of people like to enjoy the last participant in the form of concerts and festivals and travel. In this way, only one of our participants spends their time. We do not catch him with the others. Also, in the response of the last participant we see the difference. It's associated with her age. She is still a student and she spends all time studying. Even in the case of a walk, her company is also a fellow student in the summer brigades, where they take pride in studying. In this area, we have tried to find out what participation of the participants in social life is. Because we believe that this participation is important in establishing contacts in the form of inter-human relations with the citizens of the receiving state and the immigrants become easier to integrate. What we consider to be important is that interpersonal relationships primarily affect the psyche of immigrants, and also bring many new ideas and opinions that will later be able to use immigrants in their lives. These views are confirmed by the fact that the integration process means uniting with one another and at the same time with other people to whom one is a part. Another feature of good mental health is the ability to build close relationships with other people.

Experience with provided social services was different. Participants used and also did not use any employment services. These participants who came to Slovakia because of job they were a clear answer: "I did not use" or "none". Another participant also said that he did not use any labour office service but he found the job right after he arrived in Slovakia and still has it. He had a lot of experience and acquaintance, because he did the same job in his country of origin and he often went to the Slovak Republic. The same response was also with another participant. The reason is understandable to him because he is still a student. For the remaining participants, the

responses were focused on the use of unemployment support. Interestingly, participant who decided to try out looking for a job used services of job agency.

We came to the conclusion that our participants had a job shortly after arriving in Slovakia. For those looking for, searching for or choosing to change it, we have noticed that they do not have enough insight into the employment services they offer, not even their contributions. From this we find that there is a low awareness of the public about the possibility of using social services and their contributions, even if the fact of the institutions says another: Important activities include informing the public about the statistical findings of labour market developments in relation to unemployment and activities related to its mitigation, as well as up-to-date information on services provided in the area of social affairs and family and employment services ("Kompetencie ustredia prace", n.d.). This is also supplemented by the fact that the employees of UPSVaR provide in particular information about vacancies in the region and in the whole Slovak Republic ("Zamestnavanie cudzincov", n.d.).

Participants' attitudes towards social services were not negative. Even though social services have not been used by all of them. This included assistance with office services, interpreting services, and Slovak language teaching and accommodation assistance. Everyone who commits to providing social services praises. They also positively perceive staff in institutions. The other social service participants did not use it. Our participant assisted his friend to an institution, which provides social services. His experience is positive. Certain social services provided by the state are provided free of charge. There were these services that occurred in the answers of our respondents except one. That is why we think that immigrants prefer services provided free of charge (Law no. 448/2008), than they should pay for them. Complex services are provided to immigrants, for example, in the non-governmental organization Residence in Slovakia, which offers a comprehensive package of assistance in the form of social services ("Pobyt na Slovensku", n.d.).

In order to make it easier for immigrants to integrate in the recipient country, cooperation between different institutions and organizations is needed because many factors result in a person becoming accustomed to a new environment. Integration policy helps them integrate well into society and improve the quality of their lives. It is precisely in order to facilitate integration that immigrants need sufficient information about the recipient country. This information relates in more detail to the culture of the recipient country, the composition of its population, the possibility of using

social services, etc. It is very important that the state, organizations and institutions provide all this information. Better would then know all available sources of help for their future integration. We consider it necessary to make all available choices to help the migrant successfully integrate into the society of the recipient country, as we can avoid many negative phenomena such as terrorism.

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