INTEGRATION OF FOREIGNERS IN LOCAL COMMUNITIES

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Abstract. The submitted study focuses on the approach to the issue of the integration of foreigners from third world countries outside the EU living in Central Bohemia. The project aims to clarify the conditions for the integration of foreigners from third world countries at the local level. The integration of foreigners is a long-term process taking place in resettlement areas and through work activities - namely in municipalities. Municipalities are also an important intermediary in providing feedback to the central authorities on its effectiveness. The situation and position of foreigners and the problems that arise during the integration process can be best identified by the lowest level of public administration – however, the alignment of these processes is the responsibility of central state administration. In terms of effectiveness of the integration process, the involvement of municipalities in the creation and implementation of integration policies is necessary. Municipal governments are increasingly faced with an ever faster growth in the number of foreigners in their territories, and the situation in some smaller towns and villages is close to critical. The emergence of closed communities of foreigners and the growing tensions between them and indigenous people can be considered the result of ineffective integration policies. The guideline for the selection of medium-sized cities was expected to facilitate the participation of the community of new citizens from third world countries into socio-economic events in the municipality. Some of the main indicators monitored in this study include the approach of the citizens of third-world countries to the job market (the possibility of entering into and asserting oneself on the job market) and the degree of active civic participation in local community. The paper is based on the results of two projects financed by the ESF and implemented by the Organization for Aid to Refugees, which took place from 2010 in the Central Bohemian region, and which is trying to put them in the context of European research MIPEX 2011 - Migrant Integration Policy Index (2007-2010). The sources of data for the investigative research are: statistics, information from the employment offices and the testimony of selected foreigners living in the CB region.

Keywords: foreigners, integration, municipalities, local community.

Introduction

The increasing number of foreigners not only poses a major challenge for the government and public authorities of the Czech Republic, but also for local governments of municipalities in which migrants seek to integrate into society. Starting in the 1990s, migration processes began to be fully developed in the Czech Republic – these processes had already been developing in Western European countries for several decades, and they now place the Czech Republic in the position of a so-called new immigration country. [Gabal, I. et al.: 1999] Many current issues relating to this position are present in many European countries. One of them is the question of the concept of full integration including conditions of entry and movement in the job market and the related issue of

the political participation of foreigners² from Third World countries permanently residing in the Czech Republic. This theme relates to the increasing number of these permanently-residing foreigners³ and their increasing efforts to participate in public life through voluntary initiatives, open associations or business groups. The integration of foreigners is a two-way process which is not only dependent on the degree of accountability and degree of identification of foreigners with a new environment, but also the responsibility of the accepting society in the matter of cultural socialization, comprehensive help in the integration process (systemic measures), and tolerance and respect of the majority society. The main points observed in the submitted study include the approach of permanently residing foreigners from Third World countries to the job market (possibility of entry and assertion) and the degree of active civic participation in the local community.

From the 1990s, the Czech Republic has recorded ever increasing numbers of applications for asylum, which spread across all levels of life - education, labour, human rights, etc. Cohabitation can become stressful for minorities and majorities, especially if there are differences in lifestyle, culture and fundamental rights. Maria Hendriks talks about a so-called "fear of the unknown," which may cause problems in dialogue in initial contact with representatives of foreign cultures [Hendriks 1994:14]. These issues may also pertain to foreigners who desire to find a new home and are ready to fully assimilate to the new environment.

Research methods

The aim of the research was to look deeper into the integration of foreigners from Third World countries in the monitored areas – job market and political participation and analysis of situations to which these people are usually exposed, and it tries to show the likely sources and reasons for their occurrence and consequences that affect the ways and the process of integration in the host society: how they apply their qualification potential, how they adapt to the language, whether and how they fully respect the Czech legal system (or whether their experiences lead rather

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to learning how to circumvent it and transgress valid norms). For the research process in this study, we choose the method of secondary data analysis from a quantitative survey and qualitative survey.

The secondary data analysis (quantitative survey) and qualitative survey related to statistics obtained from the projects of the Organization for Aid to Refugees implemented in the Central Bohemian Region in 10/09 - 06/11 were chosen as the research procedures. The addressed respondents are participants of two projects supported by the European Social Fund. (Apply Yourself!, Support of Men and Women in the Central Bohemian Region). Both projects focus on support of citizens of Third World countries legally residing in the Czech Republic with focus on their work assertion and activation in the local community. Both projects are implemented in the Central Bohemian Region. The total number of clients is 124. The quantitative survey questionnaire and subsequent statistical processing took place from 04/2010 to 06/2011. The questionnaire was designed to cover the most important aspects relating to the monitored indicators. Questions and answers in the questionnaire were structured and clearly written (within the pilot survey, a test was conducted in terms of the clarity of the given questions with a positive evaluation). The questionnaire was distributed in written form. Within the quantitative survey, all respondents filledin a questionnaire focusing on the monitored indicators in the project - job market - entry, movement, access and participation in the local community (options, limits). The rate of return of questionnaires was approximately 97.13%. Four survey respondents did not participate for reasons of disinterest.

The statistical data analysis relates to the overall group of 124 respondents divided into nationality groups (Mongolia /15/, Vietnam /15/, China /15/, Russia /15/, Ukraine /15/, Belarus /9/, Kirgizstan /8/, African countries /11/, Moldova /5/, Romania /16/) living in the Czech Republic with permanent residence longer than five years. Men /74/; women/50/; the age range 18 – 56. The quantitative survey took place from 04/2010 – 06/2011.

The Central Bohemian Region was selected as the place for the implementation of the survey with focus on medium-sized cities from 11 thousand - 100 thousand inhabitants. The Central Bohemian Region is specific by its fragmentation of local public administration in the sense of different sizes of municipalities. The local government in the Central Bohemian Region is presented primarily as small municipalities and smaller towns, where according to established theories of communal democracy, citizen participation in political life is seen as a basic element. [Čmejrek, J.:2008]

The qualitative survey was based on elements of an established theory to which also related the follow-up analysis of the data according to Corbin and Strauss 1999. Furthermore, the research focused on the views and experiences of representatives of nongovernmental and non-profit organizations in the integration of foreigners from Third World countries - 6 representatives of selected NNO (Organization for the Aid of Refugees/3/, Association for Integration and Migration/3/) promoting the interests of these target groups. All of the statistics and analyses are compared at the end of the study with the results of European MIPEX 2011⁴ survey.

For the qualitative survey, we chose to use a data collection technique - semi-structured interview with open questions. The semi-structured interview with open questions served as a basic outline which respondents could continue to expand at their own discretion. Also related to the qualitative survey was the data triangulation requirement, i.e. that the research was continuously supplemented with an analysis of documents (bulletins, annual reports, web reports), professional literature, (Czech and foreign)[Denzin 1989 In. Hendl: 2005: 149], thereby also increasing theoretical sensitivity.

Conclusion

The research has shown the following results, which are divided into sections. They are divided into two main categories, based on whether the respondent was a foreigner from a third country or an expert from an NGO working with refugees.

Respondent – foreigners from Third World countries with permanent residence (124 persons)

1. Employment of foreigners from Third World countries is generally considered a key factor of integration, as it is the basis of economic self-sufficiency in the recipient country. The research survey found that respondents are not able to acquire many legal jobs (61%). This area is currently conditioned by these objective facts. The economic crisis and its effects impacted the job market in 2010 to such an extent that the authorities of the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs decided to reduce the announcing of vacant employment positions for foreigners from Third World countries and gave preferences to Czech citizens. This decision was supplemented by the state stopping the issuing of visas for employment.⁵

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MIPEX 2011 – Thomas Huddleston et al, Migrant Integration Policy index (2011), second publication MIPEX study, available at: http://www.mipex.eu/ British Council and Migration Policy Group.

This decision also meant the threat of deportation from the country and existence of the uncertainty of foreigners from Third World countries with long term/transitional residence for the purpose of employment.

- 2. Other observed problems that were shown in the qualitative survey and which were also recorded in the analysis of the quantitative survey were the layoffs of foreigners as agency employees (mainly in larger companies in the Central Bohemian Region meat plants, chocolate factories, auto parts factories, etc.); ever increasing control of foreign police; increasing reluctance to employ foreigners in employment contracts; not paying advances in health and social insurance, etc. This approach meant for the majority of respondents a fall into illegality (41%). Many have begun dealing with the problem of access to the job market through a transition to working on the basis of business licenses (31%), which did not exactly mean a happy outcome in some cases.
- 3. The question of housing, access to health care, a real fall to the very bottom of the subsistence minimum, risk to the education of children, seniors and the life of single mothers is closely related with the loss or absence of finding a new job (according to survey results). The social system is trying to capture these cases in relation to crime prevention. On the other hand, (according to statements of respondents), although the worker foreigner contributes to social insurance, they are in some cases not entitled to social security. The main problems appear in the issue of payment of pensions, parental and unemployment benefits.
- 4. As for qualifying potential, most of the respondents fell in qualifying to the level of industrial workers. (51%) are university educated people, (91%) of whom, even after validation proceedings, are not involved in the field in which they studied. The reason is the reduction or complete inability to speak the Czech language as a means to find suitable employment. Some companies and government institutions insist on mastery of written and spoken Czech. Even the A1 language test (introduced in 2009) under the European Reference Framework is not enough for granting permanent residence. The lack of knowledge of the Czech language also means less opportunity to understand the Czech legal system, which (42%) of respondents do not know, and 21% do not understand it. According to (34%) of respondents, transcending the applicable standards is only due to ignorance or low availability of legal or social services.
- 5. In terms of participation in local communities, (18%) of respondents are formally involved in the activities of trade unions, initiatives and political groups (with the exception of voting and being elected to a municipal council). This mainly relates to the initiative to bring together different ethnic groups (e.g. Vietnamese Society, Friends of Mongolia, Ukrainian, Russian and Belarusian initiative, etc.) Overall, however, respondents are missing real information on this participation due to the unavailability of the information or lack of interest arising from fear of radically oriented groups or their pursuit of full assimilation and breaking ties with the community.

Views and experiences of representatives of nongovernmental and non-profit organizations in integrating foreigners from Third World countries (3 persons)

1. According to the testimony of NGO representatives, the problem in terms of work integration into the job market in the Central Bohemian Region is less controllable, perhaps even confusing. Most jobs are concentrated in a central location - Prague. In its fragmentation, the Central Bohemian Region is rather centralized in larger cities, and the manufacturing industry is what is mainly to be found here. According to respondents, it is typical for so-called "factories around the corner" to have a low level of social control that allows for the implementation of strategies that skirt and do not respect legal norms more easily than other types of localities. In particular, this is a strategy of employing workers through employment agencies. For employers, it is administratively easier to hire their workers through agencies who consistently calculate the higher potential administrative burden into the final price for the work unit. In recent years (according to respondents), employment agencies which focus primarily on hiring unskilled labourers began to lose their customers due to the amendment of the Employment Act, where agencies now have to increase the costs for their labourers and radically decrease the offer of payment for the work unit to employers. In general, the movement of staff across agencies in better guarded today than in past years, but there are still problems with the payment of wages and insurance for foreign workers.

Another aspect that respondents are monitoring are the increasing demands of employers (especially foreign companies) who are willing to employ foreigners from Third World countries in better positions but with greater requirements - qualified and specialized professionals must be able to manage language skills, especially in the following combination: native language, Czech, and one additional foreign language - usually English.

2. On the issue of political participation of immigrants from Third World Countries with permanent residence in the Czech Republic, pursuant to Act No. 491/2001 Coll., on Elections to Representative Bodies of Municipalities and on Amendments to Certain Other Laws - these foreigners cannot vote or be elected to local municipal councils. They can be elected only if they acquire Czech citizenship, but the path to achieve this is often arduous, and results are not always guaranteed. On the contrary, according to the respondents, public participation can be understood as a set task of the general protection of foreigners, where we can gradually put in the idea of indirect political participation, which gradually (within the principles of integration) attempts to approach mainstream society. Therefore, actual nongovernment non-profit organizations support in their ranks foreigners from Third World countries and try to defend their interests – e.g. through various

social events: Marches for rights of migrants, theatrical performances with the theme of refugees, the One World Film Festival, etc.).

3. Respondents also agreed on the issue of non-conceptual migration policy, which the Czech Republic has been unable to fully implement into valid legislation even twenty years after the revolution. This is mainly the Asylum Act, which tries in vain to absorb common European values. According to respondents, the asylum policy is very lengthy, non-transparent and hard on arriving foreigners. In many cases, asylum proceedings drag on for several years and condemn applicants to live in fear and anxiety. Another current problem is the EU criticized controversial method of phallometry in which officials determine whether the claim that the applicant is homosexually oriented is legitimate in order to grant asylum (this applies in particular in Nigeria and Iran, where people proven to be homosexual are harshly persecuted).

The aim of this research study was to look deeper into the integration of immigrants from Third World countries in the monitored areas – the job market and political participation in the monitored Central Bohemia Region using a sample of 124 respondents. In addition we looked into the principle of full integration, which includes the aforementioned participation in political activity. The research has shown lots of interesting information about the employment of foreigners from third countries as a key factor of integration and participation in local communities. According to the findings, it is important to focus on the legislative changes in the employment of foreigners and open a public debate about the possibility of political participation of foreigners from third countries in public life.

According to the research findings the concept of full integration plays a basic and important role for arriving citizens, i.e. the acceptance of all cultural, social and economic elements of the normal life of the majority society. The entire integration process is essentially controlled by the interference of state bodies that seek to systematically treat the arrival, movement and departure of foreigners from the country. The entire process is monitored independently by nongovernment non-profit organizations, which on a practical and conceptual level affect the integration system of foreigners in the Czech Republic (mainly incoming from Third World countries). Among the basic documents in which we find the basic embedding of the universal principles of integration are the Common Basic Principles for Immigrant Integration in Europe adopted by the European Commission in 2004. This document serves as the primary guide for creating integration policies of individual EU Member States. Unfortunately, the Czech legislation has not yet fully implemented

this document, what resulted in a number of problems and justified criticism from the EU, and furthermore it negatively affects the lives of migrants arriving from third countries.

Comparison of MIPEX study's findings

If we take a look at the results of the presented research in connection to the present study MIPEX⁶ and consequently with the situation on the labour market, it is obvious that the main drawback is the lack of targeted support. Public authorities are rarely able to help migrants with specific needs, which particularly relates to productive migrants. Once migrants find work, they should have access to the same working conditions and trade union organizations as citizens. These workers contribute to social insurance but are excluded from part of the social security system. According to MIPEX, the Czech Republic is one of the new countries that dependent on people migrating for work. Often, however, we see that it neglects the specific problems of foreigners, which it marginalizes in terms of real numbers of migrants to the territory. An immigrant cannot fully participate in economic life until he is given a valid residency. In reality, this takes several years – the immigrants wait for the opportunity to acquire the same rights to work and education as citizens of the country. Even then, however, problems arise in terms of finding a job identical to the qualifications the emigrant had in his native country. Immigrants are told to assert themselves on their own without any general support. Those temporarily employed cannot achieve unemployment benefits or public employment counselling. Also, employers are not obligated to guarantee a worker the same working conditions and social security as his co-workers.

The situation in the Czech Republic concerning participation in politics is the second worst of all 31 countries in the MIPEX study. In 2001, the government failed to complete the arrangements that would ensure "reciprocal" voting rights for residents with permanent residence from countries outside the EU. This is caused by the absence of being able to vote and to be elected if a potential voter has long-term or permanent residence. Foreigners from Third World countries cannot in a given region contribute to political decisions that fundamentally affect their lives. Other limitations include the possibility of establishing a political association (if there are not at least two Czech citizens on the administration board), or become a member of a political party. Generally in Europe, most immigrants have little opportunity to contribute to policies that affect their lives and help them improve it. Positive examples of open access to immigrants include Greece, which with

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⁶ MIPEX 2011 – Thomas Huddleston et al, Migrant Integration Policy index (2011), second publication MIPEX study, available at: http://www.mipex.eu/ British Council and Migration Policy Group.

its reform of the citizenship law also significantly opened up political opportunities to immigrants living in the territory. In other countries, electoral laws are replaced by advisory bodies which propose their conceptual design and activities promote the rights of immigrants. In 2009, regional integration centres were established in the Czech Republic that substitute the activities of non-profit organizations, and whose aim is to provide services to foreigners, but the foreigners themselves are unable to use the financial support that would enable them to organize, meet their needs and represent the interests of their community. In conclusion, the goods news may be that the Czech Republic has undertaken in the next five years to address the voting rights of foreigners from Third World countries who have permanent residence and are fully integrating themselves in the Czech Republic, and to protect their interests.

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