THE OPINIONS OF THE SLOVAK POPULATION ON IMMIGRANTS BASED ON EUROBAROMETER DATA

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Abstract:
The aim of this paper is to analyze the opinions of the Slovak population on immigrants based on data available through Eurobarometer 88.2 (2017). We deal with the opinions on legal immigrants as part of our research. According to Eurobarometer 88.2 (2017), immigrants are people born outside of the European Union, who left their home country and currently legally reside in Slovakia. We are not concerned with EU citizens, immigrant children who have Slovak citizenship or about immigrants staying illegally. Official statistics show that most immigrants from outside the EU who are in Slovakia legally come from Ukraine, Russia, the United States of America, Vietnam and Serbia. Slovakia is not one of the traditional final destinations for immigrants. It is a culturally homogeneous country, which was not affected by the dramatic increase of migration during the twentieth century. Until recently, Slovakia was almost exclusively a country of emigrants, in other words, a country whose residents used to emigrate abroad for various reasons (IOM, 2019). According to the results of research on public attitudes towards migration (2019) of the International Organization for Migration, the Slovak population has relatively little personal experience and knowledge of immigrants. It typically forms its opinions based on media reports. The people in Slovakia are afraid that Slovakia has a high number of immigrants, who take jobs, spread diseases, and are an economic burden for the budget (Vašečka, 2009).

The research set consisted of 1,080 respondents (Eurobarometer 88.2, 2017) from the Slovak Republic – 43.1% men and 56.9% women, aged 15 – 93 (M=49.45, SD=16.83). 38.3% of the respondents stated that they live in a rural area/village; 45.1% small/medium town, and 15.8% in a large town/city. Data collection took place in October 2017 in face-to-face interviews as part of Eurobarometer 88.2 (2017) in the form of a multi-level probabilistic selection.

We have used items from Eurobarometer 88.2 (2017) to measure the opinions. The opinions of the immigrants were measured using seven items, where 1 equals strongly agree, and 4 equals strongly disagree (Cronbach’s Alpha = 0.861); we have reversed the polarity of the items for easier data interpretation - higher score = stronger approval with the statements. The items were subjected to principal axis factoring to assess the dimensionality of the data. A rotated factor matrix is shown in Table 1. We have named the first factor “Immigrants as help” and the second factor “Immigrants as a burden”. We have found that the Slovak respondents, most of all the countries of Central Europe (Germany - West, Germany - East, Austria, the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland and Slovenia) agree with the negative statements about immigrants and at the lowest rate (apart from Hungary) agree with the positive statements about immigrants. Furthermore, citizens of West Slovakia have more negative opinions on immigrants than citizens of Central and Eastern Slovakia. 54.5% of the respondents think that immigration is more of a problem. Only 6.9% of the Slovak respondents think of immigration as an opportunity. 50.74% of the respondents think immigrants have a more than 16% share of the population of Slovakia, whereby according to the Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic (2019), immigrants represent 2.2% of the Slovak population. 21.9% of the respondents feel they are very well and quite well informed about immigration-related matters. Up to 75.7% of the respondents feel they are not very well or not at all informed about this issue. We have found that, in their opinion, the Slovak respondents come less often or never in contact with immigrants, while it in people’s neighborhoods where the respondents interact with immigrants daily (6.1%), at least once a week (15.2%), and at least once a month (15.9%). The Slovak respondents in almost 80% of the cases do not have immigrants as friends or family members.
In contrast to Hungary, Slovakia has not in recent times had a negative experience with immigrants (for example, immigrants congregating at the Budapest Keleti Train Station in 2015). Despite this, the opinions on immigrants of the populations of these two states are similar. In terms of the regions of Slovakia, the Bratislava Region and West Slovakia have more negative opinions towards immigrants than Central and Eastern Slovakia. Future research should focus on examining the reasons for these differences in the territory of Slovakia. Lack of relevant information and the feeling that the respondents do not understand the topic of migration can cause fear of the unknown and the related negative opinions. Negative opinions towards immigrants in Slovakia can be explained using the contact theory; direct contact between groups improves relations because it makes difficult for a group to accept typical negative stereotypes (Pettigrew, Tropp, Wagner, & Christ, 2011; Himmelroos & Leino, 2016).

While the cross-sectional character of the available data limits the research, the contribution of this paper is as a representative sample of the opinions of Slovaks which is reflective of the mood in the country on what is always a topical subject. The paper offers space for reflections and research topics within the Slovak Republic (for example, what causes the differences in opinions between West and Eastern Slovakia).

**Keywords:** Immigrants. Eurobarometer. Attitudes. Burden. Help.

**Introduction**

Slovakia is not one of the traditional final destinations for immigrants. It is a culturally homogeneous country, which was not affected by the dramatic increase of migration during the twentieth century. Until recently, Slovakia was almost exclusively a country of emigrants, in other words, a country whose residents emigrated abroad for various reasons (IOM, 2019).

Increased attention has been paid to migration in recent years due to the rapid increase in the migrant population of the world. The recent migration crisis is so serious that it resulted in political conflict and social tension throughout Europe. Murray and Marx (2013) believe the problem is a threat to the domestic population in terms of economics, cultural and social interests, which in the context of a struggle over “resources” leads to negative attitudes towards immigrants. According to the results of research on public attitudes towards migration of the International Organization for Migration (2019), the Slovak population has relatively little personal experience and knowledge of immigrants. It typically forms its opinions based on media reports. The Slovak public is afraid that Slovakia has a high number of immigrants who take jobs, spread diseases, and are an economic burden on the budget (Vaščeka, 2009). Scientists from different disciplines are keen to examine these anti-immigration attitudes. Chaloupková and Šalamounová (2006) report different public opinions in individual European countries on how welcome immigrants are in a given country. Orak and Solakoglu (2016) write about two basic directions of current research on attitudes towards immigrants, firstly economic factors, and secondly non-economic factors, such as personal, cultural, religious and political aspects. Research in this field demonstrates that attitudes towards immigrants are partially group-specific and dependent on the cultural similarity of the immigrants (Ford, 2011), educational level and work skills (Helbling & Kriesi, 2014), language and skin color (Hopkins, 2015), national origin (Hainmueller & Hangartner, 2013), religion, and economic contribution (Bansak, Hainmueller, & Hangartner, 2016). The nature of migration is also reflected in the willingness of the population to accept the immigrants. If migration is perceived as voluntary, it is associated with a lower level of support and more antipathy, whereas for involuntary migration it is the other way round (Verkuyten, Mepham, & Kros, 2018). It is also important to focus on the origin of the immigrants, as Hellwig and Sinno (2016) found out, Muslim immigrants evoke concern for security, while Eastern Europe immigrants are more of an economic threat. In examining attitudes towards immigrants, the most common explanatory socio-psychological constructs are the integrated threat theory (Stephan, Ybarra, Martinez, Schwarzwald, & Tur-Kaspa, 1998; Ward & Masogert, 2006; Nsom & Croucher, 2017), the theory of social dominance (Roccato & Ricolfi, 2005; Ho, Sidnianis, Kteily, Sheehy-
Skeffington, Pratto, Henkel & Stewart, 2015), social distance (Parillo & Donoghue, 2005; Weaver, 2008; Heath, Schmidt, Green, Ramos, Davidov, & Ford, 2014) and the contact theory (Pettigrew, Tropp, Wagner, & Christ, 2011; Himmelroos & Leino, 2016).

In addition to the above, psychological characteristics research features only marginally; focusing primarily on: personality (Gallego & Pardos-Prado, 2013), life satisfaction (Boelhouwer, Kraaykamp, & Stoop, 2016), perceived security (Kentoš, 2014; Wu, Klahm, & Atoui, 2016, Bozogáňová, 2018), and hostility (Giorgi & Vitale, 2017). Výrost and Dobeš (2019) found a strong relationship between trust in people and attitudes towards immigrants and immigration. This indicates that trusting people perceive immigrants more positively.

Since the migration issue has gained a lot of attention recently, it is instructive to analyze public opinions. With the increase of immigrants in Europe, there has been a rise in the popularity of political parties identifying themselves as “radical right” or “far right, with very strong anti-migration views. In the Slovak Republic this trend is visible as well, with a radical right party being in the government. The media and politicians perceive the migration issue as a very strong issue, therefore many newspapers and politicians use it to gain attention. The findings by Heath and Richards (2016) suggest some shift in society. They analyzed over 40,000 survey responses in the European Social Survey, which were obtained in 2002/2003 (ESS Round 1) and 2014/2015 (ESS Round 7). The results show that out of 19 countries that participated in the 2002/2003 survey, only citizens from the Czech Republic and Austria expressed the opinion that migration makes their country a worse place in which to live. In both rounds, Swedes, Danes and Finns expressed the most positive attitudes towards migration and immigrants, while the Czechs, Hungarians and Portuguese held the most negative attitudes on this issue.

From this short theoretical overview it is clear that the opinions on immigrants are influenced by many factors. A comprehensive study of this issue is needed to understand the whole process. The goal of our paper is to analyze the opinions of Slovaks towards immigrants and offer an overview of basic information acquired from reliable data. In our research we focus on opinions regarding legal immigrants. According to Eurobarometer 88.2 (2017), immigrants are: people born outside of the European Union who left their home country and currently legally reside in Slovakia. We are not talking about either EU citizens or immigrant children who have Slovak citizenship, nor about immigrants staying illegally. Official statistics show that most immigrants from outside the EU who are in Slovakia legally come from Ukraine, Russia, the United States of America, Vietnam and Serbia.

Goal

The aim of this paper is to analyze the opinions of the Slovak population towards immigrants based on data available through Eurobarometer 88.2 (2017).

Methods

Research Sample

The research sample consisted of 1,080 respondents (Eurobarometer 88.2, 2017) from the Slovak Republic – 43.1% men and 56.9% women, aged 15 – 93 (M=49.45, SD=16.83). 38.3% of the respondents stated that they live in a rural area/village; 45.1% small/medium town, and 15.8% stated a large city/town. In terms of regions, 12.9% were from the Bratislava region, 34.3% from West Slovakia, 20.4% from the Central Slovakia, and 32.5% from Eastern Slovakia. Data collection took place in October 2017 using a face-to-face interview as part of Eurobarometer 88.2 (2017) in the form of a multi-level probabilistic selection.
Methodology

We have used items from Eurobarometer 88.2 (2017) to measure the opinions. The opinions on the migrants were measured using a 7 item scale, where 1 equaled *strongly agree* and 4 equaled *strongly disagree* (Cronbach’s Alpha = 0.861), we have reversed the polarity of the items for easier data interpretation - higher score = stronger approval with the statements. The items were related to economic factors (for example, in general, immigrants have a positive impact on Slovak economy) as well as non-economic factors (for example they enrich the Slovak cultural life (e.g. in art, music, and food). The items were subjected to principal axis factoring to assess the dimensionality of the data. (Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin = .726; Bartlett's Test of Sphericity $X^2 = 11511.467; df = 21; p < .01$). Rotated factor matrix is shown in Table 1. We have named the first factor as “Immigrants as help” and the second factor as “Immigrants as a burden“ (Cronbach’s Alpha = .804).

Table 1: Rotated Factor Matrix

| Items                                                                 | Factor 1 | Factor 2 |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------|----------|----------|
| Impact of immigrants on society - enrich (national) cultural life  | .705     |          |
| Impact of immigrants on society - new ideas and innovation in (country) | .702     |          |
| Impact of immigrants on society - positive for national economy    | .666     |          |
| Impact of immigrants on society - help filling jobs                | .530     |          |
| Impact of immigrants on society - burden on the welfare system     | .738     |          |
| Impact of immigrants on society - worsen crime problems in (country) | .714     |          |
| Impact of immigrants on society - take jobs away from local workers | .517     |          |

Extraction Method: Principal Axis Factoring.
Rotation Method: Varimax with Kaiser Normalization.

We have used items from the Integration of Immigrants module of the Eurobarometer 88.2 European Union Survey (2017), which are listed in the results section. The full text of the module is freely available on the pages of said survey.
Statistical Analysis
We have used descriptive analyses, factor analysis and one-way ANOVA analysis to process the data. When using individual tests, we have respected the conditions of use (Pallant, 2016; Field, 2017).

Results
First of all we would like to focus on the opinions towards immigrants of the Slovak Republic in the comparison with the Central Europe countries: Germany - West, Germany - East, Austria, the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland and Slovenia. In the “Immigrants as help” factor, the respondents could achieve the highest score of 16, and in the ”Immigrants as a burden” factor the highest score was 12. We have used weighted data to compare the countries.

Chart 1: The Opinions on Immigrants - Central Europe
In Chart 1 we can see that in the Central Europe group, Slovakia agrees the most with the statement denoting immigrants as a burden (M = 8.78; SD = 2.37). Germany - West has the lowest approval rate in this factor (M = 7.62; SD = 1.99) among the Central Europe countries. The one-way ANOVA analysis shows that there are statistically significant differences among the countries in their opinions on immigrants. For “immigrants as a burden” there was a significant effect for a country on the negative opinions on immigrants at the p < .01 level for eight countries (F (7; 7,623) = 41.007; p < .01). Post hoc comparisons using the Tukey HSD test indicated that the mean scores were significantly different in opinions on immigrants (“immigrants as a burden“) between Germany - West and other countries (except Slovenia); Germany - West and Germany - East, Poland; Poland and Czech Republic, Hungary, Slovakia; Slovenia, and Slovakia.

Furthermore, we have found that there are statistically significant differences among countries in their opinions on immigrants. For “immigrants as help“ there was a significant effect for a country on the positive opinions on immigrants at the p < .01 level for eight countries (F (7; 7,063) = 123.048; p < .01). Post hoc comparisons using the Tukey HSD test indicated that the mean score was not significantly different (p > .05) between Slovenia and Germany (West and East), Austria, and Poland. There was also no difference between Slovakia and the Czech Republic.
Republic; Poland, and Austria. In other countries, there were significant differences (p < .05) in opinions on immigrants ("immigrants as help"). The Slovak respondents agree most from all countries with the negative statements on immigrants, and to the lowest extent (except Hungary) agree with the positive statements on immigrants.

We have compared the opinions on immigrants in individual regions of Slovakia (Bratislava Region, West Slovakia, Central Slovakia and Eastern Slovakia). We have used the one-way ANOVA test. For "immigrants as a burden" there was a significant effect for a region on the negative opinions on immigrants at the p < .01 level for all four regions (F (3; 4,594.408) = 26.618; p < .01). Post hoc comparisons using the Tukey HSD test indicated that the mean scores were not significantly different in opinions on immigrants ("immigrants as a burden") between the Bratislava Region and West Slovakia; Central Slovakia and Eastern Slovakia. In the "immigrants as help" factor – there was a significant effect for a region on the positive opinions on immigrants at the p < .01 level for all four regions (F (3; 7,448.814) = 21.813; p < .01). Post hoc comparisons using the Tukey HSD test indicated that the mean scores were not significantly different in opinions on immigrants ("immigrants as help") between the Bratislava Region and West Slovakia; Central Slovakia and Eastern Slovakia. In other regions, there were significant differences (p < .05) in opinions on immigrants. The results are shown in Chart 2.

**Chart 2: Opinions on Immigrants (Regions of Slovakia)**

In Chart 2 we can see that the respondents in the Bratislava Region (M = 9.91; SD = 1.97) and West Slovakia (M=9.40; SD = 1.85) have the most negative opinion of immigrants ("immigrants as a burden"). Respondents in Eastern (M = 9.86; SD = 3.20) and Central Slovakia (M = 9.82; SD = 2.81) agree with the statements of the factor "immigrants as help" more than respondents from the West. Based on these results we can conclude that citizens in West Slovakia have more negative opinions towards immigrants than citizens in Central and Eastern Slovakia.

Eurobarometer 88.2 (2017) contains different items on the opinions towards immigrants. In the following text we will introduce the answers of Slovak respondents to these items. The respondents were answering the question whether they think that there are more legal or more illegal immigrants in Slovakia. The results are in Chart 3.
36.2% of the respondents think that there are more immigrants who are staying legally, 16.4% think that more immigrants are staying illegally and 14.3% cannot tell if they are staying legally or illegally. Based on the answers to the following item (Chart 4), 54.5% of the respondents think that immigration is more of a problem. Only 6.9% of the Slovak respondents see immigration as an opportunity.

The item: “Based on your information, what is the immigrant share of the population of Slovakia?” showed that 50.74% of the respondents believe that immigrants have more than a 16% share of the population of Slovakia, whereby according to the Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic (2019), they represent only 2.2% of the Slovak population. 21.9% of the
respondents feel they are very well and quite well informed about immigration-related matters. Up to 75.7% of the respondents feel they are not very well or not at all informed about this area. Additionally, we have analyzed items related to social contact (from small talk to participating in activities) of the respondents with immigrants in different areas (workplace, childcare/school/university, public services, neighborhood, sport/voluntary service/cultural activities, household services). The results are shown in Table 2.

Table 2: Interaction with Immigrants (%)

| Area                      | Daily | At least once a week | At least once a month | At least once a year | Less often or never | Do not know |
|---------------------------|-------|----------------------|-----------------------|----------------------|---------------------|-------------|
| Neighborhood              | 6.1   | 15.2                 | 15.9                  | 8.5                  | 49.0                | 2.8         |
| Workplace                 | 4.2   | 5.9                  | 9.6                   | 5.5                  | 62.7                | 4.5         |
| Public services           | 3.1   | 9.0                  | 15.0                  | 17.1                 | 49.7                | 3.8         |
| Childcare / school / university | 2.0   | 3.5                  | 6.0                   | 4.6                  | 70.8                | 5.9         |
| Sport / Voluntary service / Cultural Activities | 0.6   | 5.1                  | 10.0                  | 10.3                 | 65.8                | 5.0         |
| Household Services        | 0.2   | 2.5                  | 5.5                   | 5.4                  | 77.0                | 4.1         |

Based on the results we can see that the Slovak respondents seldom or never come into contact with immigrants. The less often or never option was most often used in the field of childcare/school/university (70.8%) and in household services (77.0%). Less than 50% marked this option in public services (49.7%) and in neighborhood (49.0%). Neighborhood is a place where the respondents come most often in contact with immigrants – daily (6.1%), at least once a week (15.2%) and at least once a month (15.9%) from the options.

The respondents answered the question if they would be comfortable or if it would bother them if an immigrant would be their manager, work colleague, neighbor, doctor, family member or partner and friend. The respondents answered using a four-point scale, where 1 is not bothered at all and 4 is very bothered. We have calculated the average score and the results are shown in Chart 5. Based on these results we can see that the respondents are more comfortable with immigrants as work colleagues (M = 2.19; SD = .98) and doctors (M = 2.21; SD = 1.02) than immigrants as managers (M = 2.43; SD = 1.03) and family members or partners (M = 2.50; SD = 1.03).
The respondents were choosing which statement (listed in Chart 6) fits them best from the available opinions.

**Chart 5:** Comfortable with Immigrant as ...(mean)

**Chart 6:** Immigrants as Friends and Family Members (%)
In almost 80% of the cases, respondents from the Slovak population do not have immigrants as friends or family members. 14.2% have friends, who immigrants are living in Slovakia. Less than 3% have family members, who are immigrants and 2.2% have both – family members and friends – who are immigrants.

Discussion

The aim of this paper was to analyze the opinions of the Slovak respondents on immigration. Slovaks have a rather negative opinion towards immigration in comparison with other countries of Central Europe. Similar to the findings of Heath and Richards (2016) based on data from the first and seventh round of the European Social Survey, Hungary and the Czech Republic are also among the countries with rather negative opinions on immigration. In our research we have discovered that these countries agree the most with the item “immigrants as a burden” of all the countries of Central Europe, along with Slovakia (Chart 1). We consider this result as interesting, as compared to the other countries of the European Union, the Slovak Republic has low levels of foreigners in its population (IOM, 2019). Unlike Hungary, Slovakia does not have a negative experience with immigrants (for example, immigrants at the Budapest Keleti Train Station in 2015). Despite this, the opinions on immigrants of the populations of these two states are similar. In terms of regions of Slovakia, the Bratislava Region and West Slovakia have more negative opinions towards immigrants than Central and Eastern Slovakia. Future research should focus on examining the reasons for these differences in the territory of Slovakia.

Negative opinions towards immigrants can be influenced also by a lack of information and knowledge of the Slovak population about immigration. Three quarters of the research set feels they have little or no information on the issue. More than a half of the respondents think the share of immigrants in Slovakia is more than 16% – despite, according to the Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic (2019), the share of immigrants in Slovak population being 2.2%. This disinformation may influence the belief of 16.4% of the respondents who think there are more illegal than legal immigrants in Slovakia, and also that more than 54% of the respondents see immigration as a problem. Lack of relevant information and the feeling that the respondents do not understand the topic of migration can cause fear of the unknown and the related negative opinions.

Negative opinions on immigrants in Slovakia can be explained using the contact theory - direct contact between groups improves relations because it makes difficult for a group to accept typical negative stereotypes (Pettigrew, Tropp, Wagner, & Christ, 2011; Himmelroos & Leino, 2016). The Eurobarometer 88.2 data shows that 0.2 – 6.1% of the respondents encounter legal immigrants on a daily basis, and 2.5 – 15.2% on a weekly basis, which can be considered as low contact frequency for the individuals to adopt typically negative stereotypes. 79.8% of the respondents have immigrants currently living in Slovakia as friends or family members. The discomfort from the presence of immigrants to the respondents is greatest in the idea that the immigrants would be their family members, partners or managers; whereas an immigrant work colleague, doctor or a friend is considered more acceptable. This could be explained by the voluntary nature of the relationship - we can seldom choose our family members or superiors, but we have the freedom of choice with our friends and doctors, just as we can limit our interaction with our work colleagues to only what is necessary.

The cross-sectional character of the available data limits the research. However, the contribution of the paper is as an overview of the opinions of a representative Slovak sample, allowing a good understanding of the mood in the country on this always topical topic. The paper offers space for reflections and research topics within the Slovak Republic (for example, what causes the differences in opinions between West and Eastern Slovakia).
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