

**Miroslava Hlinčíková –
Martina Sekulová: *Integrácia
ľudí s medzinárodnou
ochranou na Slovensku:
Hľadanie východísk*
[*Integration of People with
International Protection in
Slovakia: Seeking Solutions*].**

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This new book, published by Inštitút pre verejné otázky (Institute For Public Affairs) and entitled *Integrácia ľudí s medzinárodnou ochranou na Slovensku: Hľadanie východísk* (Integration of People with International Protection in Slovakia: Seeking Solutions) explores the basic question of how to integrate people with international protection in such a way that it creates a win-win policy for both the refugees and the majority society. The book has several parts. The first consists of short fictional pieces by Slovak authors based on true stories taken from refugees' diaries. The second part has nine chapters covering various aspects of integration, followed by a summary, bibliography, glossary and annexes.

The first part of the book – short fictional pieces by Slovak authors – has an interesting effect, helping readers to understand the refugees' feelings. There are four stories. The first is about a family and their different views of the process of integration in Slovakia. The second is about a female refugee, Aisha, who becomes an essential impulse for one Slovak actor and his integration into Slovak society. The third is a rather cynical guide for refugees in Slovakia, while the last is the diary of a twelve-year-old boy.

The second, theoretical part contains analysis based on qualitative research into several different topics. The authors questioned various actors – refugees (or people granted supplementary protection), responsible public organizations, experts (in the fields of law, social work, psychology, social policy) and NGOs (also called service organizations). The qualitative research took place between September 2014 and June 2015 in Slovakia. Refugees were asked to write a diary, with eight families writing their own stories at least once a week. In October 2014 they all wrote about their arrival in Slovakia, in November 2014 everybody was asked to write about relations with other people in Slovakia. During the last four months they reflected reality using their own preferences. The diaries were then coded and analysed using an analytical program. The research was completed by participatory observation and unstructured interviews in the families (Ken Plummer: *Documents of Life 2: An Invitation to a Critical Humanism*. Sage, London 2001; Robert A. Fothergill: *Private Chronicles: A Study of English Diaries*. Oxford University Press, London 1974). The other group of actors consisted of experts – 12 people from the Migration Office of the Ministry of the Interior and from service organizations (NGOs). The research was based on semi-structured interviews. The text is completed with the actors' statements from the research.

At the end of each chapter there are several important suggestions regarding how to change, strengthen or complete a policy. This part is extremely useful and ought to be instructional for the responsible bodies and (not only) Slovak policy-makers.

The book is divided into 9 chapters. The first chapter covers research methods and the importance of the integration of refugees, accompanied by basic data. The second chapter describes the role of NGOs in the integration procedures (Zuzana Prouzová et al.: *Efektivita služeb poskytovaných nestátními neziskovými organizacemi v oblasti integrace cizinců*. CVNS, Brno 2008; Zdeněk Uherek et al.: *Analyza státního integračního programu pro azylanty*. Etnologický ústav AV ČR, Praha 2012). The third chapter covers the most problematic aspect of refugee integration policy in Slovakia – housing¹. As noted several times in the study, housing is a basic precondition for further integration (work, social and cultural integration, etc.) and one where Slovakia seems to fail². The Migration Office offers flats in areas with high unemployment, which means people are unable to find appropriate work. The fourth chapter analyses the issue of employment and its opportunities as well as problems. It is clear that the most

important factor of successful integration is employment³, followed by social security, health care⁴, Slovak language learning and education, cultural and social Integration as well as cross-cutting challenges. It is apparent that there are many common problems with the situation in the Czech Republic. Clients (refugees) often complain about the language difficulties, but language learning is also a very important precondition for successful integration. There are also several examples of good practice in Slovakia. The authors make especial mention of the psychological services, which seem to be of great help to people who come to Slovakia with different traumas from their home countries. However, service organizations do not have enough resources to provide appropriate social, psychological as well as legal services. The NGOs are reasonably professionalized, but if more asylum seekers enter the country, they will need more support from the state – capacity building, practice sharing, conferences and workshops.

It is obvious that there are two different approaches towards two different groups: refugees (people granted international protection) and people with subsidiary protection. The authors find that people with subsidiary protection are in a much

¹ Housing for asylum seekers/ refugees is a Europe-wide problem, e.g.: How to guarantee adequate reception conditions of asylum seekers? A homeless service providers' perspective. http://www.feantsa.org/spip.php?action=acceder_document&arg=2916&cle=03ed6df750e552ecb30acad1c22e9251f87ab987&file=pdf%2Fhow_to_guarantee_adequate_reception_conditions_of_asylum_seekers.pdf) or: http://www.feantsa.org/spip.php?action=acceder_document&arg=1639&cle=fa8ee83e4700d1f20d1dbecde0984b53dcf3b70&file=pdf%2Fhomelessness_amongst_immigrants_in_the_eu_a_homeless_service_providers_perspective-3.pdf

² e.g.: http://www.unhcr-centraleurope.org/assets/files/content/where_we_work/_pdf_en/slovakia/UNHCR-Homelessness-SVK-EN.pdf

³ e.g. Good Practice Guide on Integration of Refugees in the European Union: <http://www.ecre.org/component/downloads/downloads/190.html>

⁴ Migrant Access to Social Security and Healthcare in the Slovak Republic: Policies and Practice: http://ec.europa.eu/dgs/home-affairs/what-we-do/networks/european_migration_network/reports/docs/emn-studies/illegally-resident/23a.slovak_republic_un_report_social_security_en_version_feb_2014.pdf

worse situation than refugees. The problem derives from the temporary nature of their residence period of 1 year. They have worse access to housing, work, insurance as well as schooling for their children (e. g., places in kindergartens or scholarships at universities). Moreover, the difference between the initial situations of the two group is fairly small, and the reasons why some obtain refugee status but others subsidiary protection remain unclear.

The work seeks to contribute to the discussion of integration procedure in Slovakia. The integration should be seen from the actors' own viewpoints, always keeping the people with international protection at the centre of interest. We should always bear in mind the crucial difference between migrants and refugees. Refugees are often struggling with psychological problems, family separation and traumatic experiences. The receiving country should therefore have appropriate mechanisms for offering a complex and corresponding integration policy. Unfortunately, Slovak institutions show a fairly low level of interest in refugees' integration issues. There is much bureaucracy, and inter-sectoral struggle between ministries is also a problem. The period for which the state provides aid is too short. A period of 6 months is too short for people to orient themselves in the new society, learn a new language and become independent. They

often remain dependent on aid, unable to find work or private rental accommodation. The biggest problems are discontinuity of integration measures and lack of professionalism in the provided services. The project approach means there is also discontinuity in the organizations providing services.

In 2015 the "refugee crisis" became a general topic in Slovakia⁵. As the authors say, it is quite predictable that the numbers of asylum seekers in Slovakia will grow. This should also bring the agenda to the centre of policy-makers' interest.

The research in *Integrácia ľudí s medzinárodnou ochranou na Slovensku: Hľadanie východísk* offers deep insights into the integration of people with international protection in Slovakia. It has an original methodological approach combining qualitative research based on interviews and diaries, primary and secondary sources (e.g. Slovak legislation, strategies and conceptions, books and research studies) and original production – four stories from four Slovak writers, with the objective of drawing the reader into the situation of a person with international protection living in Slovakia. The research is well composed and offers an interesting and useful view on Slovak integration policies for a wide range of readers – experts, academics and the public.

Anna Dumont

⁵ e.g. <http://blogs.lse.ac.uk/europpblog/2016/01/21/slovakias-general-election-the-impact-of-the-refugee-crisis-is-likely-to-push-robert-fico-back-to-power/>