



International Labour Migration. A Present-Day Phenomenon Using the Example of Slovakia

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ABSTRACT

The term migration encompasses a dynamic and complex process affected by numerous components that at the same time creates numerous relationships and factors. Nowadays, migration is understood as a natural phenomenon that occurs in every state and as a source of cultural diversity or cultural contribution. Migration touches upon a great number of issues in the fields of demography, economy, language, religion, national security and politics.

This study describes international labour migration illustrated with the example of Slovakia as well as the theories that explain the beginnings and continuance of this type of migration. Contemporary migration trends shed light on which countries are presently the most attractive for labour migrants. The part devoted to migration policy attempts to generally define this term. The conclusion of the study is dedicated to the impact of labour migration on both the countries of origin and destination.

KEY WORDS: migration, international labour migration, migrant, migration theories, migration policy

Introduction

Migration is a natural process that has accompanied humanity throughout its whole history. Generally, migration can be seen as a movement of the population from one place to another. The reasons that trigger migration are numerous and they concern economic, religious and political conditions in the country where people leave. The decision to migrate becomes their only solution.

Migration problems are currently very topical, as is shown by the fact that migration is being studied in the fields of demography, history, politics, sociology, ethnology and culturology.

Work and bad living conditions have become the most frequent reasons behind migration and they can be identified in low income countries. However, migration can also be instigated by conflicts and natural disasters that are more and more becoming a part of our lives. Although the distribution of migration is not even across the world, we can claim that the concentration of migrants is higher in the developed countries.

The study is devoted to the above-mentioned important contemporary phenomenon, international labour migration (meaning economic) in the context of Slovakia. We aim to clarify its causes and continuance from a theoretical perspective and subsequently to apply theories to explain it. Later in the study, we describe the current migration trends, a general description of migration policy, the migration impacts on the countries of origin and destination. In our case, it concerns labour migration from Slovakia to Great Britain.

The aim of the study is to apply the theoretical starting points we find and use them in practice to study the current Slovak labour migration.

International Labour Migration Reasons

International migration is a homogenous phenomenon and in general, it consists of several components that are accepted by consensus in both foreign and domestic literature as well as in practice (e.g. foreign movement, the stay – legal migration in a wider sense, labour migration, education migration, family unity migration, asylum migration, illegal migration, naturalization of non-nationals, re-emigration, repatriation, resettlement, etc.) (MIHÁLY-DIVINSKÝ 2011:17).

There are lots of causes and consequences of the current massive movement. Generally and quite simply (excluding important but quantitatively less significant migration types), we can characterize international labour migration as a flow of population

from the poor “*South to the rich North*” on a global level. Transforming it from the metaphorical level to the geographical level, the countries that attract the labour immigrants include the rich countries especially Western European (along with Northern European) and the North American countries, together with other traditional immigration destinations across the world as well as some other rare poles of migration activity (such as Japan, the Persian Gulf countries etc.). What can be perceived as the main motive behind these movements is the deep discrepancy in wealth between individual regions, in the strength of their economy and the resulting standard of living of the given societies as well as the frequent contrasts in the level of democracy and political stability between the countries of both macro groups. What is important is that while the rich North is spreading its “liberal doctrine” and related values and culture successfully, the less developed South identifies with it and the socioeconomic (living) disparities of the two worlds become ever deeper. This development results in a permanent and continuously growing migration pressure, where the population of the South is driven to the North as the conditions in the South are incapable of ensuring the modernization of conditions in the same way as the North (ŠIŠKOVÁ 2001:19).

Most importantly, regarding Slovakia, migration was and still is caused predominantly by its economic situation. A person is forced to emigrate to improve his or her family’s financial situation. Migrants are driven to move to developed countries because of a lack of work opportunities. It was labour migration that became one of the most dynamically developing components during the period between 2004–2008. The fact that Slovakia entered the European Union affected the scope, structure and attributes of the workforce heading in and out of the country in a radical way and also brought about other changes (e.g. economic, registration-information, institutional, legal, and social). The use of the term “migration for labour” (labour migration, economic migration) and “a migrant for labour” (a labour migrant) is based on universally accepted definitions of international organizations (International Labour Organization, United Nations Organisation, International Organization for Migration and etc.). Generally, labour migrant means a person who engages in or intends to engage in a paid activity in a state where he/she is not a citizen (DIVINSKÝ 2009:39-40).

From a holistic viewpoint, predictions of the developments in labour emigration are very important as this phenomenon significantly determines or is determined by several other components of foreign emigration or population and economic components. Labour emigration from a country is strongly affected by the situation in the domestic labour market (employment rate, unemployment rate even more significantly, demographic-economic structure of the population, demand for foreign labour, regional disparities in the

labour market, structural characteristics of the economy etc.), the migration potential of the inhabitants, and predominantly the workforce (the share of inhabitants of the age most appropriate for migration, the historical traditions and customs, and the willingness to migrate due to work, the support of domestic communities for emigration to work abroad, language skills, etc.), the administrative legal barriers for labour emigration (especially the level of protection of the labour market against labour immigrants in the target country, and vice-versa, the possible restrictions on labour emigration in the country of origin for economic or political reasons), the lower demand for a foreign workforce during the current economic crisis, etc. (MIHÁLY-DIVINSKÝ 2011:66-67).

Theories on the Beginning and Continuance of International Labour Migration

In this part, we will present the theories that can be applied directly to labour migrants from Slovakia. In our opinion, these theories best explain the beginning and continuance of international labour migration.

Neoclassical economic macro theory is the oldest and the most famous, it was originally developed as an attempt to explain labour migration in the process of economic development. According to this theory, based on the concept of migration within modernization theories, international and regional migration is caused by geographic disparities in the offer and demand of the workforce. Within countries with a high ratio of work to capital the market value pay is low, while a characteristic feature of countries with a limited ratio of work to capital is high pay. The resulting difference in income is the strongest reason for the inflow of workers from low income countries to high income countries. This movement results in a restriction in the availability of the workforce and pay growth in low pay countries, and vice versa, an increase in the workforce availability and pay reduction in countries with higher capital. Balance is achieved when the international income disparities reflect only the financial and psychological costs connected with international movement. According to this theory, the flow of capital mirrors the movement of persons and manifests itself in the flow of investments from countries rich in capital into countries poor in capital where the investments make higher profits. The flow of capital is accompanied by the flow of human capital represented by managers, technicians and other qualified employees.

The neoclassical economic micro theory is a microeconomic paradigm of the macroeconomic migration model. In line with this model, individuals make a rational evaluation and decide to migrate only if the benefits of migration exceed potential

migration costs. International migration is explained as a form of investment including e.g. travel expenses, the expense of staying in a new country, the acquisition of a new culture and language, adapting to a new labour market, the psychological costs connected with leaving social relations and creating new ones. Potential migrants evaluate costs and potential benefits and migrate to where the expected benefits are the greatest at a certain point in time. In their evaluation, they take into account parameters such as the expected income in a relevant post, the probability of getting a job, the probability of deportation (in the case of illegal migration) etc.

The dual labour market theory assumes that international migration is caused by a permanent demand for migrants' labour that directly arises from the economic structure of developed societies. Massey et al. summarized five characteristics of industrially developed countries that generate the demand for migrants' labour, according to the dual labour market theory. The first characteristic refers to structural inflation when employers seek workers for jobs in the lower level of the labour hierarchy that do not require education and without the possibility of pay rises as that would cause strong pressure from other hierarchical levels. It is difficult to motivate employees at the bottom of the labour hierarchy, thus the motivation of people becomes a problem, as people do not work only for money but also to acquire and keep a certain social status. For these jobs, employers need employees who consider their job only as a means of receiving income. This requirement is met by emigrants. Economic dualism is another characteristic and says that developed economics produce two types of posts - the posts in the so-called primary sector that are stable, well-paid and require good education and posts in the secondary sector that are unstable, dependant on the economic cycle, not well-paid and that do not require education. This leads to the emergence of high concentrations of migrants (the so-called pioneers), the ethnic enclaves. The enclaves can encourage the emergence of a third sector that connects the characteristics of primary and secondary sectors and makes a specific demand for a new workforce willing to exchange low starting pay for a promise of future mobility. The demography of the labour offer constitutes the final characteristic and it shows that posts in the secondary labour market are held by women and teenagers. Both sources are drying up in developed economics. The increased participation of women in the labour market and the high divorce rate cause women as well as men to begin to consider work not only as a source of an income but also a source of status. At the same time, decreasing birth rates lead to a lack of young people entering the labour market (BAHNA 2011:20-23.).

The social capital theory is another significant theory. People have access to social capital via their membership of networks or organizations and then, they change it into other forms of capital. Migration networks are the connections (blood, friends, social, etc.)

that connect migrants and former migrants in regions of origin and destination. Their existence increases the probability of international migration because it reduces risk and costs related to migration. These networks function as a certain form of social capital that people can use to gain access to employment abroad. Migration networks start to develop as soon as the migrants in the migration destination increase in number. Then, their existence reduces migration costs and contributes to a further development of these networks and thus migration. This imbalance and the barriers built by developed countries create an interesting opportunity for various mediators and migration black market to make money. However, non-profit and humanitarian organizations focused on assistance for migrants emerge at the same time. Over time, all these institutions will begin to create a form of social capital on which migrants can rely when entering the labour market of another country (Ibid, p. 25).

We cannot forget other important migration factors, particularly the pull factors that affect migrants arriving in the target country, e.g. better work opportunities, better pay for the job done as well as a higher standard of living. The push factors are the factors that affect migrants in the country of origin, e.g. existential problems, unemployment, social insecurity or a bad financial situation.

There are several migration theories that explain the beginning and continuance of international labour migration. However, the theories that we have presented can be applied to the majority of the mentioned examples.

Contemporary Migration Trends in Slovakia

Recently, the international migration phenomenon has been defined as one of the characteristic and growing features of globalisation. Almost two hundred sovereign states across the world are a source, transit or target territory of migrants who have established themselves on the international scene as a notable factor. At the same time, the nature of numerous migration phenomena and processes change with the increasing migration volume; migration routes and canals are modified; heterogeneity and the complexity of migration flows grow. There is an urge to improve migration management (defining it simply as the organized and human regulation of foreign migration processes) (DIVINSKÝ 2009:12-13).

Nowadays, the countries that migrants find attractive are predominantly countries offering a high standard of living and economic development.

A majority of immigrants plan to settle permanently in countries like Australia, Canada or the United States of America. Temporary migration occurs especially in countries where free movement is possible, for instance in the European Union (KEELEY 2009:3). Even though Europe is only one of the seven continents, however, with respect to international migration, it is currently one of the most attractive macro regions across the world.

In 2003, the migration balance¹ (net migration) in Europe reached almost 2 million people, which is the highest number in history. From the perspective of migration, France, the Netherlands and other West European countries are the most lucrative. On the other hand, the Baltic States and Poland are the least attractive, as regards migration (TOUŠEK 2008:89).

Naturally, Slovak citizens formed a majority of those who emigrated and, in contrast to the immigrants, their share decreased only to a minimal extent in 2004-2008. The growth in the number of foreigners who de-registered their permanent residence was caused by the movement across and from the Slovak Republic. The motives behind emigration from Slovakia that outweighed other explicit reasons were family reasons, although their share decreased from 50% to 33% over 5 years. In contrary, the share of labour emigrants increased from 7.5% to almost 13%. We assume that a significant part of them were formed by labour emigrants (people looking for a job, or people who already have a job abroad). In the European context, the majority of those who ceased to reside in Slovakia moved to the Czech Republic (oscillating around 40% over the period 2004-2008). The number of people moving into the "old" member states of the European Union was constantly growing from 37% of all migrants in 2004 to 42% in 2008 of all emigrants. Great Britain, Germany and Austria were the most popular destinations. Over the period monitored: 2004-2008, at least 15,000 people moved away from the Slovak Republic each year. Finally, the official positive migration balance is only of a virtual nature but in fact, it was (and still is) highly negative (DIVINSKÝ 2009:24-25).

Concerning migration, Slovakia is still growing slightly; however, it is gradually ceasing to be one of the countries that people collectively leave. The opposite trend is

¹ *Migration Balance (Net Migration)*: It concerns the migration result calculated as a difference between the number of immigrants and emigrants per year. It is usually expressed per thousand. (http://www.infostat.sk/vdc/pdf/slovnik_2verdd.pdf).

emerging and Slovakia is gradually becoming a target country for labour migrants from poorer world regions.

Migration policy

Migration has become much easier, quicker and available thanks to the improvement of transport and transport networks. Perhaps, this is one of the reasons why migration has grown to such a huge extent. Migration policy plays the role of a migration regulator trying to solve the problems of illegal migration but it also imposes measures for legal migration. Generally, migration policy refers to the collection of such tools and measures of migration that aim to restrict, control, instigate, direct migration or to take care of settled immigrants (protection, social care, education).

Migration policy is considered to be a set of laws and measures applicable to the movement of international migrants across state borders and their movement into the territory of the target country (DRBOHLAV 2010:69).

Migration policy includes several different policies, namely: promotion of desired emigration, restriction of undesired emigration, promotion of desired immigration, restriction of undesired immigration (Ibid, p. 69).

In every country, the form of the migration policy depends on several factors. The most important factor is the possibility of naturalization that is the possibility to be granted national citizenship. Within the migration policy of states, there are two systems under which it is possible to be given national citizenship of other country. These systems are based on the principles *jus sanguinis* (right of blood) or *jus soli* (right of territory). The first concerns the citizenship acquired based on family relations. In the latter case, citizenship is granted based on the place of birth without respect to parents' citizenship (KOTVANOVÁ-SZÉP 2002:19).

Thanks to naturalization, there is a gradual integration of immigrants in the receiving country. Immigrants often perceive their integration as a mutual process. It follows that certain individuals expect the target country to ensure all formal immigrant rights and at the same time, they respect the standards and values of the majority of society and actively participate in the integration process (FILADEFIOVÁ et al. 2010:12).

Migration Impacts on the Country of Origin and the Target Country

Migration policy and migration affect all the aspects of life in society in both positive and negative ways. Migration has an impact not only on the economic, political and social character of the country but it also affects the cultural processes connected with the integration of migrants into society.

Firstly, we wish to clarify two important terms: country of *origin* and *target* country. In our case, country of origin (or emigration country) refers to the country where the migrant was born, that is Slovakia. Target country means the receiving country (or a host country), that is Great Britain.

Migration Impacts on the Country of Origin

From the economic viewpoint, what is important for the country of origin is the flow of the so-called remittances that is a part of the migrants' income that they send home. However, there is an outflow of the workforce (of a productive age in most cases) that leads to a lack of workforce in the home country and slows down the total economic growth (<http://www.infoweby.sk/spolocnost/migracia/311-dopady-na-zdrojove-krajiny>).

Migrants arriving back to the country of origin have a unique opportunity to find better jobs based on the language and occupational skills they have acquired. In addition to financial and social remittances, it is necessary to consider also the negative effects on the country of origin. One of them is the decrease of marriage or birth rates and the growth of the mortality rate. Socially, emigration leads to the distortion of family relationships and the deterioration of communication among families (generations).

Emigration can also reduce ethnical, religious or political unrest. Or on the contrary, it can instigate political instability or disturbances (ibid.).

Migration Impacts on the Target Country

Labour migration brings numerous benefits to the target country, for instance, non-inflationary economic growth, job creation, an exchange of technologies and benefits arising from competence. On the other hand, this migration may cause growth in the unemployment rate, the take-over of the jobs of home inhabitants and a reduction in pay in the receiving country (<http://www.employment.gov.sk/index.php?SMC=1&id=1869>).

Labour migrants are beneficial for the receiving country, they are a cheap workforce who participate in the economy and hold unskilled jobs which the local residents do not want. Immigrants are willing to hold an unskilled job for pay that is lower than that which the locals would be willing to work for. Regarding demographic impacts, to the receiving country immigration means, for instance, a potential growth in inhabitants and the increase of fertility rates, as migrants usually come from countries with higher population growth. The structure of inhabitants is changing and there is both cultural contact (enrichment of culture) and conflict (expressions of racism, political extremism and xenophobia).

Owing to the arrival of a diverse population, the host country has to build new facilities, institutions and schools. Simultaneously, it might be very difficult for an immigrant to adapt psychologically to the foreign country. There is a real danger of depression that may increase depending on the differences between the culture of the origin and the culture of the destination (<http://www.ippr.sk/sk/sociologia/16-vplyvy-migracie-na-demograficky-vyvoj-slovenska>).

It is positive that a stay in another country helps a migrant to establish new social relationships and contacts with which he can settle into the majority society.

Conclusion

Nowadays, the topic of “*migration*” and especially “*labour migration*” is indeed an active topic and not only in Europe. We can perceive it in a negative sense that predominantly relates to worldwide migration problems and the European concerns about migration. The present-day interest raises questions relating to migration in Europe and into Europe.

In 2010, the number of foreign migrants in Europe reached 70 million, which was the highest worldwide, half formed by economic immigrants (MIHÁLY-DIVINSKÝ 2011:70).

Focusing on the motives of Slovaks when they migrated into other countries, the reasons mainly included income as they had few opportunities to improve their living conditions in their home country. These motives are also current today and therefore, a great number of Slovaks have decided to migrate for work. After the accession of Slovakia to the European Union, the migration trends changed. In the European context, the greatest migration flow of this period headed for and still heads for the Czech Republic. However, the study especially points out that more and more migration flows have been heading for the “*old*” member states of the Union. Today, the European destinations that Slovaks prefer are Great Britain, Austria, Germany, the Netherlands and France.

To sum it up, we can state that the phenomenon of international labour migration has a specific impact on the social and in a wider sense, the cultural situation in both the country of origin and the receiving country.

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