

Boris Divinský: Labour Market – Migration Nexus in Slovakia: Time to Act in a Comprehensive Way

Bratislava 2007, International Organization for Migration, 229 pages.

If someone interested in labour migration would look for texts published on this topic in Slovakia within the last 15 years, he or she would discover that there are surprisingly few of them, despite the topicality of the issue. Even though government representatives acknowledge the importance of the migration topic, their practical decisions don't reflect this. Migration has certainly not been examined in Slovak literature as it has been in the surrounding countries. In any case, Boris Divinský's book represents the first publication that thoroughly deals with the topic.

The book is the newest item in a long list of Divinský's writings on migration, for which he utilises his professional experience in the International Organisation for Migration. It is partially connected to his previous study on the international migration of Slovaks. Dealing with labour migration requires an interdisciplinary approach and demography and geography are the most prominent fields in migration studies. The author is a geographer and geographic imprints are discernible in his writing. On the other hand, he didn't omit economic, sociological, and psychological perspectives.

The author's comprehensive grasp is reflected in the aims and structure of the work, which is divided into six chapters. The second and the third chapter can be considered summaries. The second chapter summarizes the existing developments in population growth and labour market in Slovakia. The description of the demographic development is very detailed, perhaps too extensive considering the scope of his analysis. As it is written in English however, this publication is meant for scholars from other countries, and they may find the information new and useful. The demographic predictions and the evaluation and forecast of labour market developments are the most important parts of the second chapter. In his demographic predictions, the author clearly points to the relationship between age structure and levels of economic activity and employment. He considers this to be one of the primary sources of future challenges for labour market as well as international migration policies. This chapter provides only a brief guide to the topic of migration. Even though it doesn't deal with the issue very deeply, it still offers a lot of useful information for readers unfamiliar with the topic. I appreciate the author's temporal and spatial comparative evaluations.

The third chapter provides basic information about economic development in Slovakia. To its detriment, the author presents only short-term forecasts which had become reality by the time the book was published. In the case of some other forecasts, it is not clear which time period the author was referring to. Besides a treatment of the shadow economy, an outline of how economy is connected with migration, labour market demand, wage rise, and emigration is also missing. The findings are presented in many detailed tables, but, unfortunately, graphs and maps are infrequent.

The fourth chapter is one of two chapters that explicitly talk about migration. It deals with migration with Slovakia as the destination. The author doesn't only describe labour migration, but aptly analyses and categorises migrants according to their status, country of origin, or reasons for migration. He reveals the complexity of reasons for migration and emphasises the work-related reasons that play an ever-increasing role – especially after the accession of Slovakia into the EU. His treatment of the evidence for migration might seem too extensive at the first glance. However, difficulties regarding evidence represent one of the fundamental problems of migration together with the lack of a quality conception of migration as such. The Europe-wide problem with the evidence of migration stems from inconsistencies between national statistics. Heterogeneity, intricacies, and incoherence both in statistics and formal processes (visa, registration, etc.) are at the core of the difficulties with evidence of migration in Slovakia. This is the chapter that should definitely be read by people working at the responsible ministries. The author attempts to estimate the number of foreigners working in Slovakia, pointing to the inconsistencies and shortcomings of the registration process. He estimates much higher numbers than those offered by the official statistics. At least 20.000 foreigners officially working in Slovakia is not an insignificant number. Moreover, there are also some illegal workers whose employment has certain economic and social impacts as well. However, in this chapter, the author is not discussing the potential fiscal and social impacts which were already outlined in his previous book in 2005. Partial quantifications of these impacts are provided in chapter six, in a section on the brain gain. In the conclusion of chapter four, the author discusses the forecast of immigration, naming the chief factors that will determine future development in this area and the primary migration flows, mainly within Europe. He also gives an overview of the existing forecasts of a migration balance. However, it is hard to agree with the claim that a quantitative forecast can be provided "only regarding the migration balance". From a methodological point of view, it is always important to divide the migration balance into its two constituent parts and give a forecast for each of them separately.

The fifth chapter discusses the emigration of Slovaks, emphasizing work-related reasons. The author points out that the problem of the evidence of emigration is even more critical than it is with the immigration. His estimation of 20,000 people every year looks alarming and even almost unimaginable, but he supports this number with convincing evidence and arguments. Even if it was only half of the estimated number, if the severalfold lower number of immigrants with a Slovak citizenship or permanent residence is taken into account, Slovakia is losing a significant part of its (especially economically active) inhabitants each year. In subchapter 5.2, using many different sources, the author summarizes the potential to emigrate which he defines as very high (in comparison to other V4 countries), especially among young people. Work-related reasons are the most dominant. The amount, structure and geographic distribution of the labour emigrants are documented by using probably the most reliable source – labour force surveys. I would like to emphasize that it is very

important to distinguish between daily commuting people and migrants as defined by the UN or IOM. There is a big difference between those who, for instance, have been in Great Britain for several months and fully comply with the definition of a temporary migrant, those who commute weekly to the Czech Republic, and those who commute daily to Hungary. It is related to a broader problem of definition and typology of migration. I personally support the idea that daily commuters should be separated from other types of migrants and should not be included in the data on labour migration since they represent quite a different category. I appreciate the fact that the author discusses the impact of emigration on the country of origin, including a detailed analysis of the remittances issue and the brain drain. The brain drain, especially, has been a particular concern of Slovak sociologists, who have also ascribed the problem of regional differences to the brain drain effect. Economic studies estimate that it slowed the GDP increase from 4.8 to 4.2% (between 1994 and 2002). The author presents several interpretations of the brain drain phenomenon, including some that are rather nihilistic. His emigration forecast doesn't provide any exact predictions but only an outline of future trends.

The sixth chapter guides the reader through the complexity of legislation concerning international migration. Divinský critically examines the Slovak conception of migration policy and summarises some crucial issues that deserve both academic and public debate. He points out the fact that the labour dimension of migration is not discussed in that document. I agree with the author that the ministry of labour, social affairs and family should be responsible for dealing with issues related to labour migration. The author also puts forward the main objectives which he feels should be addressed in the conception of labour migration. The author also evaluates access to the Slovak labour market, bilateral agreements and immigrants' associations and organisations. One of the last two subsections of this chapter offers the findings of a survey on the perception of migration in Slovak society and the other offers the results gained through the Delphi method. There were only 12 returned questionnaires (25%) which is (in case of this method) right at the border of acceptability. Emigration and a failure to adequately select the foreign labour force, as well as a lack of quality within the Slovak labour force, represent the chief causes of difficulties which were identified by the experts. The problems of Slovak (both high school and university) education are far too complex. In any case, the experts' call for a radical reform is definitely valid. I would like to note that, at the present time, for economic reasons, universities accept unprecedented numbers of students. Therefore, the ability and usefulness of graduates has decreased and at the same time, the number of students graduating at specialised high schools has dropped significantly.

To conclude, the book provides the first exhaustive treatment of labour migration in Slovakia. The author has utilised almost all accessible sources and, as an informed scholar, evaluates and systemizes knowledge on different aspects of labour migration. He includes descriptions, analyses, forecasts and estimations and manages to connect all three levels: theoretical, empirical and applied. The seventh chapter provides an

excellent synthesis of all findings as well as recommendations for the government. The book should become "compulsory reading," (not only) for the creators of a new much-needed conception of (mainly labour) migration.

Branislav Bleha