



Immigrant Integration into the Welfare State in Slovenia: Analysis of Statistical Indicators, Policies, Public Attitudes, and Media Reporting

Extended abstract

In recent decades, in some European immigration countries discussions and assumptions have emerged about the welfare state being threatened by the growing number of immigrants. Although research shows that the number of immigrants generally and over the long term does not affect the state's ability to maintain the welfare state, part of the public tends to restrict immigrants' rights in social security. Some authors speak of racism/chauvinism/nationalism in social policies, which creates inequality between immigrants and the non-immigrant population and consequently co-creates circumstances that hinder successful integration and contribute to marginalization of immigrants. Racism/chauvinism/nationalism in the domain of the welfare state has intensified in Europe in the last two decades along with the general tightening of migration policies and the increasing negative attitude of the majority population towards immigrants.

Given that migration is a social reality and that, based on current circumstances and future projections, economically developed western countries will continue to face increasing immigration and thus cultural diversity, the question arises of how to ensure solidarity and cohesion in culturally diverse societies. As a potential tool for building or strengthening national solidarity in ethnically diverse societies, multiculturalism policies emerge. By recognizing cultural diversity in society and destigmatizing minority groups, these should contribute to reducing antipathies that prevent solidarity among different ethnic groups. It is important that the destigmatizing components of multiculturalism policies are complemented by integration policies that strengthen the national community and build national identity in a way that transcends ethnic divisions and emphasizes common elements and interests of members of the national community. There is a fear in the public that multiculturalism policies pose too great a burden on the welfare state, but research does not confirm a negative correlation between the state's commitment to multiculturalism policies and its ability to sustain social welfare expenditure.

When defining the research problem we focus on the situation in Slovenia at the intersection of four areas: immigration, the welfare state, and multiculturalism and integration policies. We start from two facts. The first is that in Slovenia, due to various factors (not necessarily related to immigration), the need to increase expenditures for services and benefits within the welfare state is rising. The second fact is that there is ethnic/cultural heterogeneity in Slovenia, which will likely increase in the future due to the need for immigration (also because of population



ageing and labour shortages). For social stability, cohesion and solidarity it is important that immigrants are successfully integrated into the broader society. In theory, successful integration presupposes equal rights and equal inclusion of all members of society in all spheres of social life. This also means the inclusion of immigrants in the social security system and the existence of possibilities for the free preservation of immigrants' culture and ethnic identity without being discriminated against and excluded from the majority society. In practice, however, there are often deviations from this theoretical ideal. The increasing need for social security expenditure may lead to tightening of eligibility conditions for social benefits, and the majority population often regards immigrants as a group less entitled to such benefits. Because of this, tendencies may arise to exclude immigrants from the social security system or to limit their rights in this area, which can trigger a chain reaction in other areas. Thus, the mentioned problem, which primarily comes from social security, can become a multidimensional problem with broader social consequences (for example, in the economy or employment, social cohesion, migration policy).

In the research we ask what the position of immigrants in social security is in Slovenia. We want to address this question from different perspectives: from the point of view of legislation and policies (formal legal status), from the point of view of the actual position of immigrants in terms of social transfers (number of recipients, types and amounts of social transfers), and from the point of view of the attitude of the population towards including immigrants in the social security system. Special attention will be devoted to researching the possible existence of racism/chauvinism/nationalism in this area (at the level of policies, institutions, attitudes, media reporting) and the consequences these phenomena bring from the viewpoint of integration of immigrants and maintaining social cohesion. On the other hand, we will study multiculturalism and integration policies in Slovenia and the attitude of the population towards these policies and the connection or alignment between policies and public opinion. Based on theory and some previous research indicating the potential of multiculturalism in connection with integration policies to reduce the hostility of the majority society towards immigrants and to promote interethnic social solidarity, we want to verify what is the relationship between the population's attitude towards multiculturalism and integration policies on the one hand and the inclusion of immigrants in the social security system on the other.

The main emphasis in examining the attitude of the population towards multiculturalism policies, integration policies and the inclusion of immigrants in the social security system will be on identifying factors that influence the formation of the attitudes of the inhabitants of Slovenia. Knowledge of these factors will provide a basis for addressing and correcting elements through which it would be possible to guide and (re)shape the public attitude and



thus contribute to creating more supportive circumstances for the successful integration of immigrants and maintaining a supportive and cohesive society.

Main objectives of the project are to investigate the following research questions:

(1) What is the position of immigrants in the area of social security in Slovenia from the perspective of legislation and policies (formal legal status) and to what extent are immigrants recipients of social transfers (number of recipients, types and amounts of social transfers)?

- What rights do immigrants have in Slovenia in the field of social security and how has their access to these rights changed in the period since Slovenia joined the EU to today?
- Do immigrants in Slovenia receive more social transfers and higher amounts than residents born in Slovenia? If so, what is the reason?

(2) Which multiculturalism policies intended for immigrants exist in Slovenia? In what ways are elements of multiculturalism included in specific sectoral policies/legislation?

(3) Which integration policies that encourage a sense of belonging, solidarity and shared citizenship are implemented in Slovenia?

- How do legal and political documents in the field of integration address issues related to belonging, solidarity and shared citizenship?
- Are there policies/measures that encourage inter-ethnic contacts and mutual cooperation between immigrants and the majority society?
- Do integration policies and programs in Slovenia offer different possibilities and demands to different groups of immigrants? If yes, what are the consequences of these different treatments?

(4) What is the attitude of the population of Slovenia towards multiculturalism policies, integration policies and the inclusion of immigrants in the social security system?

- What role do multiculturalism and integration policies have in the eyes of the Slovene population in promoting the successful integration of immigrants and creating social cohesion and interethnic solidarity?
- Is there a connection (and what kind) between the attitude of the inhabitants of Slovenia towards integration policies and multiculturalism policies on the one hand and the attitude towards including immigrants in the social security system on the other?



(5) Which factors shape public opinion about integration and multiculturalism policies and about including immigrants in the social security system?

(6) Are there elements of racism/chauvinism/nationalism present in Slovenia with regard to including immigrants in the social security system? If yes, in which areas (for example in legislation, policies, public attitudes, media reporting) and how do they manifest?

To study the multidimensional and complex topic of the project we will use a combination of different research methods and approaches, from literature review and desk research to other qualitative (analysis of media reporting) and quantitative methods (survey, statistical analyses), which will enable more comprehensive answers to the research questions.

The organisational structure of the project envisages nine work packages (WP), one (WP1) devoted to management and coordination of the project, one (WP9) to dissemination of the project's findings and results, and seven work packages with research content. WP2 covers the review of existing literature and research in the fields we will address in the project (welfare state and the position of immigrants in it, multiculturalism and integration policies and the attitude of the population towards these policies). The results of WP2 will serve as a basis for planning empirical research (a survey on a representative sample of the population of Slovenia) within WP7. In addition, the results of work within WP2 will also serve as a basis for the analysis of Slovenian social security policy within WP3, integration policies within WP4 and multiculturalism policies within WP5 and for the analysis of media reporting within WP8. WP6 will be devoted to the analysis of the actual position of immigrants in the field of social security in Slovenia, as shown through statistical data on the socio-economic position of individuals and the use of social transfers.