Integration of Refugees in Slovakia

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The Slovak Republic is developing her asylum system in response to increasing numbers of asylum-seekers and in order to ensure full implementation of international obligations as a member state of the European Union (EU), which the Slovak Republic recently joined in May 2004.

Asylum-Seekers in Slovakia

Between 1 January 1992 and 31 December 2004, 44,767 asylum-seekers were admitted into the Refugee Status Determination (RSD) procedure, of whom 563 were recognized as refugees.

Another 2,747 had their applications for refugee status rejected, and 38,310 abandoned the Refugee Status Determination (RSD) procedure and left the country. The large number of asylum-seekers abandoning the procedure indicates that for many, Slovakia is still a transit country.

Out of the 563 refugees recognized by Slovakia by the end of December 2004, however, at least 300–330 are known to have remained in the country, 159 of whom have been granted Slovak citizenship.

From January 2004 to December 2004, a total of 11,391 asylum-seekers were admitted into the Refugee Status Determination (RSD) procedure, which represents a 35 percent increase over the same period in 2003.

From this number, only 15 asylum-seekers were granted refugee status, which represents the lowest recognition rate in Europe during 2004. In 2003, only 11 asylum-seekers were granted refugee status, and in year 2002 it was 20 refugees.

Generally, the number of asylum-seekers admitted into the Refugee Status Determination (RSD) procedure is not comparable with the number of recognized refugees. This could point out one significant factor: the integration policy is not working, is not effective, and with numbers higher than 50–100, it could easily collapse.

The composition of asylum-seekers has changed in the past two years, which have seen a large increase of asylum-seekers from Chechnya in the Russian Federation, especially since 2004. The main countries of origin in the process as a whole were India, Russian Federation—Chechnya, Georgia, Pakistan, China, Moldova and Bangladesh, between the months of January and September 2004.

Eighty-six percent of the asylum-seekers are male, and only 14 percent are female, which leads to a slow but sure decrease of the female representation in the group composition of the asylum-seekers. Female asylum seekers are for the most part Chechens, who come in families with children or as single-headed households.

Refugee Status Determination (RSD) Procedure

An application for refugee status should be lodged with the Alien and Border Police (ABP), who should then forward the application to the Migration Office (MO); or, it can be submitted at designated Reception Centres of the Migration Office, where the Alien and Border Police is present to process the applications.

The Migration Office is responsible for determining refugee status in the primary instance. Asylum-seekers who are rejected by the Migration Office may appeal to an independent Judiciary Appeal Committee (JAC, with courts in Bratislava and Košice).

This court determines refugee status in the secondary instance. Those asylum-seekers who are rejected at this instance may apply to the Supreme Court for judicial review of the Appeal Committee’s decision.

Once admitted into the Refugee Status Determination (RSD) procedure, asylum-seekers are accommodated for approximately thirty days under medical quarantine in a reception centre at Adamov-Gbely (with a 200-bed capacity), in Rohovce (140-bed capacity) in western Slovakia, or in Liptovské Vlachy (100-bed capacity) or Opatovská Nová Ves (180-bed capacity) in central Slovakia.
integration process of recognized refugees, and according to
which the Ministry of Interior Affairs should cooperate with other
ministries, municipalities, the United Nations High Commissioner
for Refugees (UNHCR) and non-governmental organisations
(NGOs) to help refugees.

This help may include *inter alia* to learn the Slovak language, to
attend vocational training courses, to obtain accommodation in
social housing, to be accepted by the local community, or to
obtain employment.

This document is based on the principles of the migration policy
of the Slovak Republic. The desired effect should be that a refugee
(asylum-seeker) would become self-sufficient and able to exist
without assistance from the state.

The term ‘successful integration’ mainly comprises knowledge of
the official language, having a job and a permanent residence.

Responsibility for the process of integration from the point of view
of the state administration lies with the Migration Office of the
Slovak Ministry of Interior Affairs.

The Slovak government officially declares its fulfilment of
European Union standards in asylum policy and agrees with the
Council Decision of 28 September 2000 establishing a European
Refugee Fund (2000/596/EC):

> “The integration of refugees into the society of the country in
which they are established in is one of the objectives of the
Geneva Convention, and, to this end, there should be support for
action by the Member States, intended to promote their social and
economic integration, in so far as it contributes to economic and
social cohesion, the maintenance and strengthening of which is
one of the Community’s fundamental objectives.”

In the same decision we also read: “It is in the interest of both
the Member States and the persons concerned, that refugees and
displaced persons who are allowed to stay in the territory of the
Member States are given the opportunity to provide for
themselves by working.” But in a practical way, integration is not
a priority for Slovak official authorities.

Since 1996 Slovak integration policy has not been changed,
despite the fact that asylum legislation has been harmonized with
the *acquis communautaire*. The attitude of state entities to the
integration of refugees has not been changed, and it is considered

### Recognized Refugees

Recognized refugees are granted permanent residence in
Slovakia and enjoy *de jure* the same rights as citizens, subject to
certain exceptions, such as the right to vote and to perform
military service.

In particular, refugees do not require a work permit and *de iure*
they have the same access as citizens to public relief, social
security and state healthcare, as well as to primary, secondary and
tertiary education.

In order to facilitate refugee integration, the Slovak Government
issued Decision No. 105 of February 1996, adopting the “Complex
Solution for the Process of Integration of Foreigners Granted
Refugee Status into Society,” which is a basic framework for the
The non-governmental sector covers the providing of social assistance, psychological and legal counselling, language training, vocational training, support in education, material support, and the raising of public awareness.

Taking into account the status of recognized refugees as people with special needs (language, cultural and social barriers), the state does not create any special integration programmes focusing on facilitating the integration process. From the beginning, recognized refugees are considered by the relevant state authorities as people with the same rights and obligations as Slovak citizens, and with the same options for improving their living situations.

Development of Systematic Solutions

For Slovak official authorities, refugee integration is not a priority and NGOs have to substitute for the role of the state. Because an official state integration policy is missing, the focus of NGOs is not only to provide "social assistance," but also to develop systematic solutions and recommendations to the various state authorities.

These can include: the creation of systematic solutions in language and professional training of recognized refugees and asylum seekers; and the creation of training programmes focused...
There Are Many Gifts, but the Same Spirit

“There are different kinds of gifts, but the same Spirit.
“There are different kinds of service, but the same Lord.
“There are different kinds of working, but the same God works all of them in everyone.”

(1Cor 12,4–6)

In 1Corinthians 12,4–6 we receive the key to open the mystery of unity in diversity. We are strangers yet neighbours, different yet joined by a common mysterious strength. Different languages, different cultures, different personality types, different traditions and denominations and yet one huge spiritual wave which soars in our different personalities, like an oratorio. What is difference and what is unity?

I. The Same Spirit

The Spirit is one. What Spirit? Why one? Jesus said to the Samaritan woman: “God is spirit, and God’s worshipers must worship in spirit and in truth.” (John 4,24) God is Spirit, Consciousness, which is invisible and penetrating everything. It is in you and around you.

It is the source of being of all things. From it springs the light of your consciousness. The atoms and quarks, which weave the beautiful Gobelin tapestry of the cosmos in timespace, are dancing their complicated dance according to the law of the omnipresent Spirit.

In the Spirit the whole universe has its hidden unity. “We were all baptized in one Spirit” (1Cor 12,13). The sacrament of baptism shows us the spring of our unity. The Greek word ‘baptismo’ means to be immersed and to soak up.

This word signifies our internal initiation into God’s Spirit. The human being by baptism in the Spirit is immersed like a sponge in