

ECONOMIC INTEGRATION OF IRAQI REFUGEES IN SLOVAKIA

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Abstract: This paper deals with the analysis of a level of quantitative and qualitative indicators in the area of economic integration of the Iraqi refugees in the conditions of the Slovak Republic. The aim of this article is to better identify the integration process and to analyze the current results achieved in the area of economic integration of refugees.

The research method is a semi-structured interview with the management of the organization and with the staff responsible for the integration of Iraqi refugees in Nitra and its surroundings. Data collection was based on the Structure of indicators of integration of immigrants into society, from the perspective of the selected indicators of economic integration. The data obtained reflects the objective and subjective perspective of the monitoring. They provide data on the number of economically active refugees in the labor market, on the possibility of recognizing their original qualification, the unemployment rate as well as the most common problems related to the employment of Iraqis.

The results point to the importance of successful economic integration in relation to the overall success of the integration process. Financial security and job opportunities can be a motivation for Iraqi refugees to continue their efforts to successfully integrate into our society.

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Introduction

In recent years, the issue of refugees and the refugee crisis has been met all over the world. In 2015 the Slovak Republic, based on the political resolution on relocation, accepted a group of 149 refugees from Iraq. After the Iraqi Christians' stay in the Reception Camp in Humenné, they came to the town of Nitra in 2016 after being granted asylum. Here, the immigration process itself started; its implementer is the civic association Pokoj a dobro – pomoc utečencom (Peace and Good – Assistance for Refugees; translated by the study's authors). Multiple entities participate in the integration project; besides the civic association, there is the Migration Office as a subject and professional supervisor and the Diocese of Nitra as an integration guarantor.

In the paper, we focused on the integration process – specifically the area of economic integration and attainment in relation to the integrated Iraqi Christians by the organization Pokoj a dobro.

Related to the integration, Janák (2017), the project manager of the organization Pokoj a dobro, stated that more than half of the families from the original community returned back to Iraq while still in the original phase of the project. The reasons for their return varied from language to economic reasons. They included a sense of greater financial security in their home country, or a dream about moving somewhere else. Furthermore, the author states that their departures relate mostly to the lack of fulfilment of their unrealistic expectations that were raised in the refugees before their arrival in Slovakia.

Integration itself consists of several areas that vary in significance in the whole integration process and, in our opinion, are mutually influenced and often depend on each other. They include, for example, the area of economic integration, the area of integration in education, the area of residential integration, the area of social, health, religious and cultural integration, and the area of political and antidiscrimination integration. Economic integration however, appears as a very important factor for the successful integration of refugees into a majority society.

Ager and Strang (2004), the foreign experts from the University of Edinburgh, in their final report on the Indicators of Integration presented ten indicators of successful integration that are organized in a basic structural framework. The ten domains are divided into four parts. The first one is called Markers and Means and includes four domains: Employment, Housing, Education, and Health. These domains are the major areas of attainment and are generally recognised as key factors in the integration process. Furthermore, they state that the area of markers and means includes the key areas for refugees' participation in a majority society. Often, they support achievement in other areas important for integration.

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Access to the labour market is one of the major factors influencing integration. According to Kováts et al. (2006), refugees are often disadvantaged in the conditions of getting a job as well as the type of work they can obtain. Thus, unemployment and underemployment rates are much higher in refugees than in the host population. Based on many refugees' statements, the authors present that the biggest disadvantage on the labour market is language. Other barriers include education and experience and qualifications from the refugee's original country can only rarely be directly used. Diplomas are either not recognised or are not relevant, and training is based on different technologies. It is a problem for refugees that they can't cope with stress resulting from differences between their formal qualifications and jobs offered to them. Some of them prefer staying at home and being unemployed than to take a job they think is below their skill level. The author presents another barrier that refugees face in the workplace – prejudice. Discrimination as a result of racism limits job opportunities and involves social workers in a complicated but necessary role of an advocate. Another disadvantage is living in big families. Women are often isolated at home as caregivers for other family members and men are the major breadwinners however, in many cases they are not able to ensure sufficient income from their jobs. We decided to study the above mentioned findings related to our target group of the Iraqi refugees and their economic integration in the conditions of the Slovak Republic.

Study of economic integration

The study objective was to identify the attainments in the area of refugees' economic integration. In relation to the objective, we set two partial objectives:

1. The identification of a current level of quantitative and objective indicators in the area of economic integration of the Iraqi refugees in Slovakia.
2. An analysis of a level of qualitative and subjective indicators in the area of economic integration of the Iraqi refugees in Slovakia, obtained from the statements by the experts working with refugees.

In the process of data collection, we followed the structure of integration indicators as stated by Sekulová and Gyárfášová in their publication: *Indicators of Migrants' Integration – Current Experience and Future Challenges*. "Approaches of the Member States of the EU towards monitoring the integration indicators (indicators of outcome quality or indicators of integration policies) vary; the countries apply various methodologic approaches and thus consider their own goals of integration policies, used methods, and measurements for their achievement" (Sekulová – Gyárfášová, 2009, p. 11; translated by the paper's authors). The authors state seven areas of integration; the first one is the area of economic integration. Specification and evaluation of the integration indicators in this area should allow answering several basic questions on the form and extent of participation, for example, how the refugees economically participate, in which areas they are most frequently employed, what their incomes are, in what extent and which business areas they are trade, if they face discrimination in the working process, etc.

Methods and sample

We collected the quantitative research data through studying the documents of the organization Pokoj a dobro that provides integration for the Iraqi refugees in the town of Nitra and its vicinity. We used the data along with the qualitative data collected through semi-structured interviews with the workers directly conducting the process of integration. There were eight workers: a consultant for occupational integration, a project manager, five social workers, and an interpreter for the Iraqi refugees. The research questions were open-ended and resulted from subjective integration indicators. They included areas such as: periodicity of dealing with economic issues with the clients, the importance of economic integration in the whole integration process; workplace discrimination; experience with an Iraqi refugee in the same workplace; the most common problems when employing refugees; personal attitudes of men and women towards work; etc.

Findings and results

We conducted content analysis of the collected quantitative and qualitative data; the findings are shown below.

Quantitative indicators

We collected the quantitative data through content analysis of the internal documents that are elaborated by the consultant for occupational integration in the organisation. We selected the data providing the information on employment in the Iraqi community.

Adult Iraqis	Total	Able to work	Full-time job	Part-time job	Active job search	Does not work/Household
Women	19	10	3	2	1	4
Men	22	18	13	2	1	2
Total	41	28	16	4	2	6

Source: Own analysis

Table 1 shows the number of economically active Iraqis related to gender, and the number of those who do not work. In total, there are 20 persons working, i.e. 71.4 % of the Iraqis out of 28 able to work. Out of all men that are able to work, 83.3 % work. The non-working men, in accordance with the report by the consultant for occupational integration, either did not want to work or they quit their jobs. Out of all women able to work, 50 % worked. Except one woman in an active job search process, others did not want to work – they take care of their households.

Table 2 shows a review of specific branches of industry in which the Iraqis worked or work.

Area of industry	Number of jobs/part-time jobs in the area	Number of persons working in the area
Education (teaching, kindergarten, language school)	7	7
Furniture production, Carpentry	6	6
Gastronomy	5	3
Community	2	2
Installation/construction	2	2
Services (service station, porter's room, barber shop)	3	2
Logistics, stores	2	1
Business	1	1
Industrial production	1	1
Administration in industry	1	1
Auxiliary earthwork	1	1
Accounting, administration	1	1
Part-time job while studying at a university	4	3
Total	36	

Source: Own analysis

The table above shows in which economic areas the Iraqis find jobs in our labour market. The total number of full-time or part-time jobs which the Iraqis participated in from the beginning of the project was 36. The most frequent were the areas of education, furniture production, and gastronomy. According to the report by the consultant for occupational integration, the number of full-time/part-time jobs per one active Iraqi varied from one to four. Mostly, the Iraqis do not prefer shift work and working on the weekends. In the organization documents, they state that 86.4 % of full-time/part-time jobs were provided by the civic association Pokoj a dobro. Among the Iraqis, there are two small tradesmen, specifically in the services – a barber and a carpenter.

Qualitative indicators

We used the qualitative data to support the quantitative indicators and answer the most essential questions related to economic integration – employing the Iraqis in the conditions of the Slovak Republic from the point of view of the workers directly implementing the process of their integration. As Gavora (2007) states, through the interviews we obtained the empirical data in the form of records that we analysed. We analysed the content of the data and developed semantic categories that were the most frequent.

The table below shows common semantic categories as stated by the workers implementing the integration process of the Iraqi refugees. We used the abbreviations as follows: SW = social worker; PM = project manager; COI = coordinator for occupational integration; and INT = interpreter.

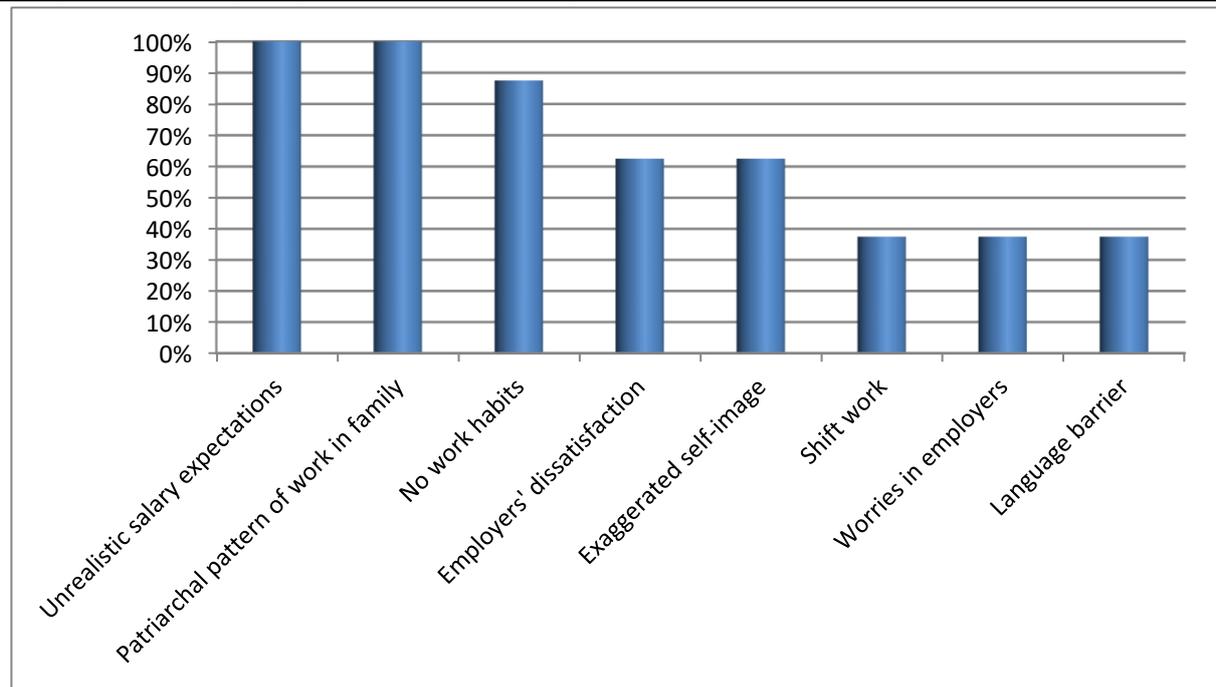
Table 3: Evaluation of the economic integration level in specific workers									
Respondents' statements	Induced categories	SW 1	SW 2	SW 3	SW 4	SW 5	PM	COI	INT
"We deal with economic issues almost every day"	Frequent issues	X	X	X	X	X		X	X
"Economic integration influences the whole integration process"	Importance	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
"I have not encountered discrimination; their wishes are rather met"	Positive discrimination		X			X		X	X
"Working with an Iraqi at the same workplace was good; it is more difficult to explain them our realia"	Positive experience	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	
"Mostly, they do not have the same jobs here as they had in Iraq; it is different because of norms and regulations"	Different jobs	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
"The fifty-year-olds do not want to work anymore"	Big issue	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
"There were cases of discrimination from their colleagues –humiliating remarks"	Discrimination						X	X	

Source: Own analysis

In the table above, we can see the most frequent semantic categories which were stated by the respondents in the interviews about the economic integration of the Iraqi refugees. All the respondents attached great importance to the economic integration of the refugees in relation to the success of the whole integration process. All of them also stated that the Iraqis mostly do not perform the same jobs as they did in Iraq because of different job requirements in our conditions. Furthermore, all the respondents stated problems with employing refugees of a higher age that is not considered a retirement age in our conditions. Dealing with economic issues with the refugees every day was stated by seven respondents; the project manager does not deal with those questions so often, related to his position. Also, seven respondents spoke positively about working at the same workplace with an Iraqi person. Two respondents encountered discrimination of the refugees at a workplace. There was a predominance of positive discrimination from the employers towards the Iraqi refugees – the employers met their wishes, tried to help them, for example, through changes in working hours or salary.

In the graph below, we categorized the most frequent answers of the staff implementing the integration process of the refugees related to the problems and different expectations when employing the Iraqis.

Graph 1: Most frequent problems related to employing the Iraqis



Source: Own analysis

As Graph 1 shows, all the respondents (8) stated unrealistic salary expectations of the Iraqis in our conditions along with the related patriarchal pattern of work in the family according to which usually only a man works and thus supports the whole family. Seven respondents out of eight stated an issue of lacking work habits that are common in our country – for example, informing an employer about absence at work because of illness, or adequate observance of working hours. Five respondents stated employers' dissatisfaction with their job performance or effectiveness which related also to the exaggerated self-images and ideas about their job performance. Three respondents stated the problem areas of shift work and working on Sundays which often resulted in the Iraqis not wanting to accept a job or not wanting to continue in it. Then, there were worries with the employers that related mostly to insufficient awareness, for example, if the Iraqis have work permits. In addition to this, a language barrier often limited the Iraqis ability to work in certain job positions.

Conclusion

“Integration means that refugees maintain their own culture, but at the same time they adapt to a culture of a receiving society. According to the political statements and strategic plans, this seems to be the best outcome, but a harmonic integration is very rare. Harmonization of religious and cultural values, that are often confrontational and contradictory, and finding the time and energy to respect the customs and maintain the languages of both cultures for a long time, often for several generations, is not easy” (Kováts et al., 2006, p. 178; translated by the study's authors).

The paper's objective to identify the results in the area of the economic integration of the refugees was achieved. Through the analysis of this area where we have joined the results of quantitative and qualitative indicators, we could study the issue of incomes and employing the refugees in our conditions more.

Employment provides a mechanism for income generation and economic advancement and, as such, is generally considered by both policy analysts and refugees themselves as a key factor supporting integration. Jobs are also valuable in (re)establishing valued social roles, developing language and broader cultural competence and establishing social connections (Ager – Strang, 2004).

We would like to summarize the findings from our study. From the quantitative indicators we found that out of all refugees able to work, there are 71.4 % of the Iraqis working at the moment, which we consider a successful occupational integration. Often, there is a difference between their education or type of work they used to do at home and their jobs in our country. In Iraq, they had various roles, for

example, they were civil engineers, but their diplomas of education are not valid in the SR and other EU countries. In addition to this, they had to get a new driving licence in the SR, etc. In Slovakia, they worked mostly in education, gastronomy, and furniture production. We found that all the respondents perceived economic integration as very important, if not the most important, in the whole integration process, and often it related to the worries the Iraqis had about a lack of money to support their families. The respondents stated that economic security in our country is very important for the Iraqis and resolved the related issues and questions about economic security on a daily basis. The main problems result from different expectations and exaggerated ideas the refugees came to Slovakia with and which relate to big cultural differences and different economic, social and occupational settings in our and their country. At the beginning, this resulted in a big cultural shock for them and many of the refugees left Slovakia. Those who stayed tried to gradually adapt to the differences and find possible solutions with the assistance of social workers. Before war, their country was richer than Slovakia, and when only a man worked in a family, he was able to financially support all of his family. In their country, a woman usually took care of their children and household. In Slovakia, they gradually needed to get used to different settings, and after a mutual agreement women tried to work in our labour market, but there are certain limitations; and resulting from their culture, women cannot work as, for example, as waitresses or cleaners. Furthermore, when choosing a job, they often insist on one-shift services, up to eight-hour working hours, and not working on Sundays. Particularly at the beginning, it was very important to explain to them the work habits in Slovakia: a habit of date and time – informing an employer about any absence at work, and a faster work pace. Also, there is an issue of employing older Iraqis (>50 years of age) when they often feel old and ill but, in our conditions, they are still considered being in a productive age. As we found out, in their country, a family, i.e. this older member, has a certain background – for example, a shop that provides for his family. As one of the respondents stated, this might relate to the fact that the Iraqis respect themselves, their women and families more, and thus require a certain respect for themselves as persons. As for discrimination, the workers encountered it minimally – only in two cases. Rather, they spoke about positive discrimination, as their employers, colleagues and other people tried to meet their wishes and help them to integrate as much as possible in our conditions.

In the paper, we offered a view of the issue of the economic integration from the area of the experts working in the organization implementing the integration of the Iraqi refugees in Slovakia who are in direct contact with the refugees every day. Last but not least, besides the mentioned problem areas, we would like to emphasize also multiple positive experiences with this target group. The Iraqi refugees are very nice, friendly and hospitable people who try to integrate in our society as much as possible. Many individuals and also entire families have succeeded in this. We can say: the younger they are, the easier it is for them to integrate. They learn the language better, find new friends, are successful in their studies, part-time or full-time jobs, and see their future in Slovakia.

, The paper can bring suggestions and instructions for improvement and more effective work with this target group based on the identified, mostly problem, areas. In the future, it would also be interesting to supplement the studied area with subjective statements by the refugees themselves.

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