

RESEARCH

**REPORTS**

RECOMMENDATIONS

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# THE WAGES OF FEAR

## ATTITUDES TOWARDS REFUGEES AND MIGRANTS IN SLOVAKIA



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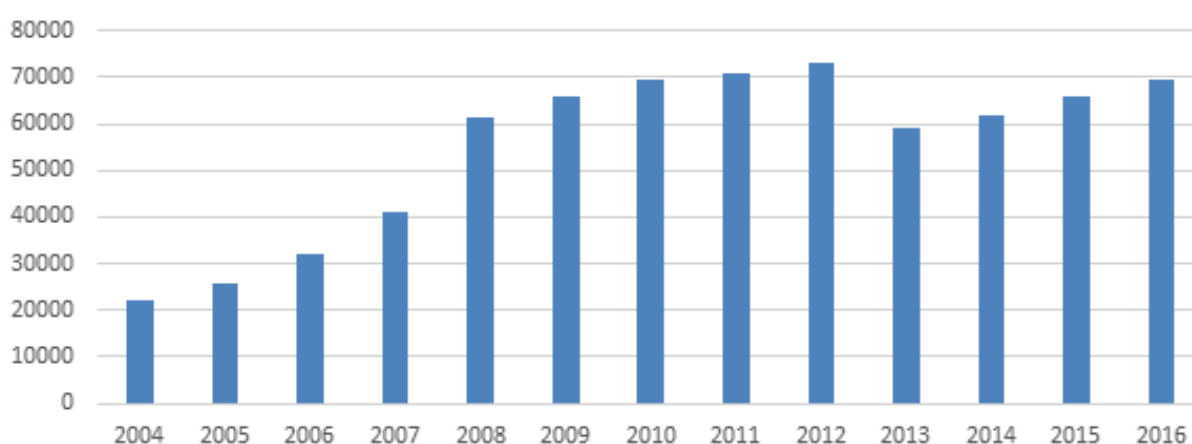
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## PART ONE – SECONDARY DATA

### Migration profile

Slovakia belong to just few (7) countries which claim to have on the territory less foreign persons (65 840 persons) without the citizenship of the reporting country in 2016 (1<sup>st</sup> January) than it had on January 1<sup>st</sup>, 2013 (72 925 persons) according to the Eurostat data. On January 1<sup>st</sup>, 2017, there were 69 695 persons without the Slovak citizenship on the territory, including stateless persons (Statistical office of SR). These numbers collide with numbers provided by the Bureau of Border and Alien Police, which states that according to the valid residence permits 93 247 persons with other than Slovak citizenship resided in Slovakia on December 31<sup>st</sup>, 2016. The difference is caused in methodological approach, as Slovakia reports Eurostat only usual residence, which by TCNs is the permanent residence, and the Bureau of Border and Alien Police considers also temporary residence and tolerated stay.

Figure 1 Number of foreign citizens living in Slovakia according to Eurostat data



On the other hand, in Slovakia resided 181 642 persons born abroad in 2016. In comparison to 2012 it is an increase of 23 478 persons, compared to 2010 an increase of 117 220 persons.<sup>1</sup>

Both in 2015 and 2016 main countries of citizenship of the foreign foreign-born population were Czech Republic, Hungary, Romania, Poland and Germany. The most populous groups of third country nationals were Ukrainians, Vietnamese and Russians.

1 Eurostat. *Foreign-born population*. Available at: <<http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/tgm/table.do?tab=table&init=1&language=en&pcode=tps00178&plugin=1>>

Table 1 Main countries of citizenship of the foreign population in Slovakia in 2012

- 2016

CITIZEN/ TIME	2012	2012 in %	2013	2013 in%	2014	2014 in%	2015	2015 in %	2016	2016 in %
Foreign country and stateless	72 925	100,0%	59 151	100,0%	61 766	104,4%	65 840	100,0%	69 695	100,0%
EU28 countries except reporting country	:		45 174	76,4%	47 202	79,8%	50 440	76,6%	53 511	76,8%
Non-EU28 countries nor reporting country	:		12 476	21,1%	13 064	22,1%	13 901	21,1%	14 687	21,1%
Stateless	1 553	2,1%	1 501	2,5%	1 500	2,5%	1 499	2,3%	1 497	2,1%
Czech Republic	14 744	20,2%	11 443	19,3%	11 861	20,1%	12 462	18,9%	13 023	18,7%
Hungary	9 920	13,6%	8 134	13,8%	8 629	14,6%	9 185	14,0%	9 799	14,1%
Romania	5 962	8,2%	4 941	8,4%	5 252	8,9%	5 779	8,8%	6 271	9,0%
Poland	7 005	9,6%	5 070	8,6%	5 192	8,8%	5 405	8,2%	5 604	8,0%
Germany (until 1990 former territory of the FRG)	4 415	6,1%	3 571	6,0%	3 650	6,2%	3 813	5,8%	3 938	5,7%
Ukraine	3 915	5,4%	2 744	4,6%	2 845	4,8%	3 068	4,7%	3 245	4,7%
Italy	2 241	3,1%	2 011	3,4%	2 134	3,6%	2 358	3,6%	2 563	3,7%
Vietnam	1 544	2,1%	1 377	2,3%	1 440	2,4%	1 485	2,3%	1 534	2,2%
Russia	1 835	2,5%	1 350	2,3%	1 390	2,3%	1 451	2,2%	1 511	2,2%

There has been no significant change in the immigration trends in the past 10 years. Slovakia belongs to countries (together with Belgium, Ireland, Cyprus, Luxemburg, Hungary, Malta, Netherlands, United Kingdom) where a higher percentage of foreigners comes from EU-countries than non-EU countries. In Slovakia, more than three quarters of foreigners have citizenship of another member state of EU.

From January 2015 until December 2016, 476 handed in asylum claim in Slovakia, 175 in this period received asylum, 53 persons subsidiary protection was granted. In 2016 only Liechtenstein (80) received less asylum applications than Slovakia (146), in Slovakia lower number of asylum applications was only in 1993 and 1994. Austria received more than 42 000 asylum applications and Hungary almost 30 000 asylum claims. Only 5 countries in EU received less than 1000 applications (Baltic countries, Slovakia, Liechtenstein). In 2016 there were 25 asylum applicants from Ukraine, 16 from Afghanistan, 14 from Syria, 14 from Iraq, 13 from Pakistan and 64 from other countries. In 2015 out of 330 asylum applications 172 asylum applicants were from Iraq, 37 from Afghanistan, 25 from Ukraine, 13 from Kosovo and just 8 from Syria (Bureau of Border and Alien Police data). Iraqi asylum applications came from 149 Iraqis resettled to Slovakia from Iraq within the ad-hoc humanitarian admission.

### **Recent trends in migration policy (since 2015)**

Until 2015, there has not been a consistent debate on migration and asylum in Slovakia. As the number of foreigners living in Slovakia constituted 1,14 % of Slovak inhabitants (1,56% considering the BBAP data) at the beginning of 2015, migration wasn't considered as crucial topic. Although there has been Migration Policy of the Slovak Republic Perspective until 2020 from 2011 and Integration Policy of the Slovak Republic from 2014 admitted, there is not one body responsible for implementation of the documents. National Border Management Plan of the Slovak Republic for 2015-2018 and National strategy for the protection and promotion of human rights in the Slovak Republic were accepted as strategic documents in 2015.

After the introduction of refugee quota system in 2015, National Council rejected this system of relocation of refugees within EU as not a systematic solution. On the other hand, they supported the need of solidarity with other EU member states related to humanitarian issues connected to migration.

In July 2015 a memorandum between Austria and Slovakia was signed, based on which Slovakia was supposed to house 500 asylum seekers, which applied for asylum in Austria. This decision was followed by a local referendum in Gabčíkovo (village, where the transit refugee camp was intended to be renewed after closure in 2009), supported by 58% of inhabitants. Despite the rejection from the locals, the Ministry of Interior considered the local referendum as non-binding and therefore placed asylum seekers from Austria to Gabčíkovo.

In Gabčíkovo were in 2015 and 2016 temporary accommodated more than 1200 Austrian asylum seekers.

In December 2015 Slovakia's parliament amended the constitution and adopted a package of anti-terrorist laws vesting the police, the law enforcement agencies and the judiciary with more powers. Furthermore, Slovakia together with Hungary brought a complaint to the Court of Justice of the European Union, asking to overturn a September 2015 decision by EU governments to share out 120,000 refugees across the bloc and ease pressure on Greece and Italy, which were struggling with mass arrivals across the Mediterranean. The Court dismissed the complaint in September 2017.

Unlike other countries, Slovakia didn't introduce the temporary border controls and didn't experience push on external borders. In September 2015, Slovakia only adopted temporary measures on Slovak-Austrian and the Slovak-Hungarian border crossing points, which were a reaction to the temporary introduction border checks of Germany at its borders with Austria.

In 2016 a legislative change has occurred because of the adoption of the Administrative Judicial Code, allowing legal representation for asylum seekers by a non-governmental organization, which provides legal aid to foreigners.

Within the relocation pledges 9 persons were admitted on the territory of Slovakia.

Slovakia held the Presidency of the Council of the EU in the second half of the 2016. One of the priorities of the Slovak presidency were "Sustainable migration and asylum policies". Slovak presidency was influenced by many external factors, among others also the migration and refugee humanitarian situation. One of the outcomes of the presidency was presentation of flexible - effective solidarity, on which the Visegrad countries agreed. Flexible solidarity is based on the concept of enabling member states to decide on specific forms of contribution considering their experience and potential. Furthermore, any distribution mechanism should be voluntary. During the Slovak Presidency, Regulation (EU) 2016/1624 of the European Parliament and of the Council on European border and coastguards was adopted, which was also implemented during the Slovak Presidency.

### **Attitudes to migrants and refugees – changes since mid-2015 (public opinion polls, qualitative research results, etc.)**

The Eurobarometer in Spring 2015 showed, that immigration was seen suddenly as the main issue facing the EU – in Slovakia, 35% of inhabitants marked immigration as the most pressing issue on the EU level, in autumn 2015, more than 70% considered immigration as most important issue in EU. In autumn 2016, immigration prevailed as the most important issue at the EU level, but in the opinion of just half of the respondents. On the national level in Slovakia immigration didn't play a role, which changed in Autumn 2015, where almost 20% of inhabitants considered immigration as the most important issue on the national level. Immigration of people generally evokes in Slovaks negative feelings, although less negative concerning the immigration of EU citizens (oscillates around 50%) and more negative concerning people from outside of EU (oscillates around 80%). 84% of respondents also disagreed with statement that immigrants contribute a lot to Slovakia and this didn't change significantly even in spring 2017. Immigration stayed as a marginal topic on national and personal level for respondents in Slovakia also in spring 2017, but still led as the most important topic at the EU level.

Several public opinion polls were done in Slovakia from 2015 until 2017 concerning migration and refugees. One of the polls realized already in June 2017 found out, that more than 70% of respondents were against taking in the refugees from Middle East and North Africa based on quotas. 63,4% considered these refugees to be a security threat. which followed the tragedy in Parndorf and was done as part of the civil initiative *Výzva k ľudskosti* (Plea for Humanity). In 2015 only 18% of respondents claimed to be open to accept refugees in Slovakia. 56% were against, only 16% would be willing to have in the area of their residence a refugee reception centre, 68% were against. Although people are more willing to agree to provide refugees with temporary shelter in Slovakia (49% more or less agreed), they are strictly against quotas (20% more or less agreed). The most important issues that people had regarding refugees were fear of maladjustment, lack of cultural compatibility, security threat due to religious reasons, economic fears. One of the statements said: "We are a small country. There is no space created for diversity." There are several reasons behind – fear of unknown, self-centred thinking, forgetting the global dimension

of the situation. On the other hand, respondents were willing to help the most vulnerable groups of people.

Most respondents (almost half) drew on information from media, such as television, news on TV, newspapers and magazines, social media. More than 1/3 of the respondents had information from family and friends. Refugees gradually became a pre-election topic, which respondents tended to consider when deciding whom to vote.

In February 2016 a poll showed that 85% of respondents would not accept a Muslim from Iraq as their neighbour, 66% would also refuse a Syrian Christian. In 2017, Gallup published their data from Eastern European poll, Slovakia placed 4<sup>th</sup> with strong opposition (61%) to accepting any Syrian refugees on the territory.

### **Public discourse, role of media and civil society**

In 2015, Slovakia experienced a significant turn in the field of migration, due to development in Balkans, Mediterranean and in the EU and due to the upcoming parliamentary elections in 2016. Slovakia did not have any substantive public discussion about migration until the beginning of the summer in 2015, but since then, migration became constantly discussed topic in public, media and political discourse. For the first time in the era of independent Slovakia, topic of migration echoed more frequently in public opinion polls, electoral programs and pre-election debates.

In the period from January 2015 until summer 2017 several events shaped the discourse and subsequently also the policies – the death of 71 people in a lorry close to Parndorf in August 2015, the terrorist attacks in Paris in November 2015, the Nice terror attacks in July 2016 and in Berlin in December 2016 and the parliamentary elections in March 2016.

Public discourse was shaped according to the political discourse, public opinion poll in January 2016 showed that 89% respondents agree with the government standpoint to the migration crisis. In political and media discourse many collective natural metaphors were used such as “wave”, “tide” etc. related to refugees and asylum seekers, migrants and they didn't have faces or voices in media.

There were several activities done by civil society organisations, the most visible were two – Plea for Humanity by Open Society Foundation in Slovakia



as a response to the suffocation of people in truck in Austria and the campaign Who will help? initiated by the Ladislav Hanus Community. Plea for Humanity had in 2017 more than 12 000 signatures and as it attracted support from different public figures, including president of the country, government opened a dialogue with the campaign. Furthermore, it has led to an establishment of a support fund for NGOs and their activities connected to the topic of migration and refugees distributed by OSF.

The initiative Who will help? appealed to the Slovak Government to admit 100 refugee and displaced families from Syria and Iraq and gathered more than 2 000 volunteers, who were willing to provide various types of integration assistance.

Many Slovak volunteers got involved in projects related to refugees and asylum seekers in Balkans, Austria, Hungary and other countries.

Migration, refugees and international protection were heavily covered by media in 2015 and 2016. European Migration Network and its media monitoring observed more than 5 000 press articles on average monthly basis.

## INTRODUCTION

### **Námestovo, 25.júl 2017**

Námestovo is a district city in the north of the central Slovakia, located in the Orava region.

The group: three men, two women, one of the participants was over 30 years old, four of the participants claimed their standard of living to be higher than the rest of the citizens, one of them claimed it to be the same. Three of the participants in the questionnaire shared the opinion that Slovakia should accept refugees, one was against it and for the last one it was difficult to take a stance. Since there were students in the group, a part of the answers reflected their experience from the cities where they live. The oldest participant with the most experience with working abroad expressed a significantly negative attitude. Most of the participants indirectly referred to Christianity in the discussion. The meeting took place in the local co-working centre.

### **Bratislava – Nové Mesto, 12. September 2017**

One of the city districts of Bratislava, statistically known as the most “foreign” one. In addition to its populous Vietnamese community, there live also employees of various international corporations that reside here.

The city district establishes a community center where the focus group took place. The foreigners are not the regular visitors of the centre, the community center program is set for leisure activities for seniors, exercise, counseling and cultural events.

(Note: On September 23, OZ Mareena opened a community center for refugees and migrants in the Bratislava center – it shall be interesting to work with the residents of the vicinity in the neighborhood of the KC in the future).

Not all the participants of the focus group come from Bratislava, however, they have all lived here for some time. All of them are university graduates, two of them teach at a university.

### **Nitra, 21. september 2017**

The participants of the focus group consider Nitra a racist city with an atmosphere of fear of various extremist groups. Since 2016, a group of Assyrian Christians from Iraq have been integrated here (149, 25 families, some of them have returned) with granted asylum: the children go to schools, there is assistance available for them (social workers, OZ Pokoj a dobro). In August 2016, a community center for refugees was open in the city. In the group, as opposed to other cities, people working in the manufacturing sphere were represented as well (they make a living doing manual work), the most tolerant attitudes were expressed by one of the punk subculture participants, often himself confronted with violent manifestations of the right-wing extremists.

## **FINDINGS FROM FOCUS GROUPS INTERVIEWS**

### **1. Experience with refugees and other migrants**

Although the locations in which the focus groups were conducted were chosen based on the representation of refugees and migrants, it played almost no role in the composition of the individual groups: the respondents do not come into contact with refugees and migrants almost at all, in other words, they cannot identify them as refugees in their cities. The identification of immigrants from other countries that they do not personally know is based on language differences and different visual characteristics of often irrational nature:

*When I look at him, I can see straight away, that he is not from Námestovo.*  
(M, Námestovo)

*I saw them when I was taking a walk, a group of approximately eight people, all of them were men, all of them in black leather jackets... it was clear they were not locals. (M, Nitra)*

*... from time to time one can see a veiled family which can also be a family of an ambassador... (M, Bratislava)*

In the case of a small town in the north of Slovakia, the participants of the focus groups register the presence of a small number of immigrants from foreign countries with whom they have no relations. They are mentioning the planned arrival of about a hundred migrant workers from India and Serbia who are supposed to lower the labor shortages of foreign engineering companies around to the city. The Punch Campus Námestovo company currently employs Serbian workers living in a hostel on the outskirts of the city to solve the deficit of domestic labor, as it is difficult to find workers in Orava who would be willing to work at assembly lines for eight to ten hours a day.

In the capital, the participants were aware of the “Vietnamese at the markets, kebabs, Italian restaurants”, as well as rising numbers of students from abroad (including students escaping the war in Ukraine) or international corporations employees from different (especially EU) countries. The discussion has shown that the focus group cannot correctly label the foreigners in their city as refugees or migrants and rather include them in the “tourists” category. One of the participants volunteered (she was teaching Slovak) in a “Kto pomôže” initiative that was looking for volunteers to help refugees from Iraq and Syria in 2015. Her reflection on the subject based on personal connections was the strongest one in all the focus groups. From time to time, the names of public figures have come up in the discussion, who have publicly presented their stories of a foreigner or a migrant and often co-operate with various non-government organizations focusing on the issue of migration and the coexistence of the natives and non-natives. Overall, however, they perceive Bratislava as a not-so-diverse city with a rare opportunity to meet foreigners.

During the focus group in Nitra (a city where 25 Christian families from Iraq moved in 2016), the need to distinguish between the „old ones“ and the „new ones“ grew throughout the discussion. A lot of immigrants from Italy, Albania and Tunisia settled in the city in the 1990s. They are mostly entrepreneurs in the gastro area (restaurants, bars, disco bars) and have obtained the Slovak citizenship.

*All in all, I see it differently: the ones that have lived here for twenty years, I see them as citizens of Nitra, they have lived here for their whole lives, they are Tunisians, they are immigrants, they own properties, in a nutshell, they have their possessions, they, in fact, live here and are included in the local events... but considering the ones who are supposed to come in large groups, because they are escaping and have no place to go and nothing to do, that is different... (M, Nitra)*

If the focus groups participants get in touch with migrants or foreigners in their cities (more often at work), almost all of them consider it troublefree, they do not perceive them as „standing out“ in the crowd in the streets and they have not noticed more of them in the last couple of years, either.

*I have not noticed anything different since the days of Ibrahim Maiga. (M, Nitra)*

Only one of the participants expressed resolute rejection. She does not have any bad experience and on her daily walks to and from work she used to pass a school that is attended by children of Iraqi families now.

*I dont want them here, the new ones (and I wouldnt have wanted the old ones, either, when it comes to that). My opinion is, if we came there, they wouldnt want us either, their religion is different, they would very much like to build their churches here and I really dont like it when we go to the ZOO and little children are praying and kneeling there, they will find a spot anywhere on the lawn and profess their religion there... (Ž, Nitra)*

Personal experience with the foreigners is a very important factor in forming attitudes towards refugees and migrants. Most of the young people in focus groups from Námestovo or Bratislava gained such experience through a student exchange programme or working abroad. Regular and personal contact contributes to a certain extent to building openness to foreigners on an individual level. Encounters with classmates and knowing their personal stories strengthens the search for similarities and the realization that there is no room for fear. The participants of the focus groups mentioned student exchanges under the Erasmus programme and staying in touch with their peers who came to study in Slovakia for a short time period. The female participants have built stronger bonds with Ukrainian students.

Many of the participants gained experience with migrants during their stay abroad (part-time jobs, job opportunities), where they found themselves in the role of migrants, which they more or less reflected here. One of the participants was a part of a student exchange programme in Switzerland at a time of strong anti-refugees campaigns...*a môžem povedať,*

*...and I can say that I felt like a migrant there and it was very unpleasant: I was walking across a station and there were huge billboards against the migrants, saying that they should send them away... Communities (mainly the ones living in the mountains) are scared of migrants... (Ž, Bratislava)*

Personal experience seems to be perceived as enriching (cultural confrontations, observation of religious practices, discovering the language, culture, values), however, it rarely forms positive attitude towards the refugees, or this wave of migration (one of the participants who worked part-time in the vineyards of Austria together with two Muslims greatly appreciated the conversations about religion and rituals as well as cultural get-togethers, which, according to his words, affects his positive view of the contemporary events). The experience of travelling abroad for work ranged from three-year stays in England to a three-month summer part-time job in Scotland in an Indian-Turkish restaurant, a part-time job in a Turkish restaurant in Germany, a few semesters in Switzerland or Oslo in Norway. The experience from abroad, even the mediated one, strongly diverges the attitudes towards migrants. Despite the often expressed view that contact with foreigners helps eradicating negative stereotypes, many reluctant attitudes are of experiential nature.

*... people who are working in Germany or France at the moment know what migration looks like these days... (M, Námestovo)*

I have met the second generation of migrants in Germany and they were such a natural part of the community, that they were much better-off than the Germans, they had much more money (...), which was making the Germans understandably angry... (Ž, Bratislava)

*...anyone who is right in their mind must realize that allowing such body of migrants into Europe is not right... (M, Námestovo)*

## **2. Arguments against the reception of refugees**

All the focus groups participants agreed that the attitude of the Slovak society towards migrants is generally reluctant. A big part of the young participants from Bratislava perceived the negative attitude against refugees in their environment critically (they are more understanding in the other two cities) and in their referential communities (their families and neighbours) they are attempting to create an attitudinal opposition. The participants themselves can see several reasons for negative attitudes towards refugees, migrants and anything foreign in their surroundings:

- Negative judgement based on a different colour of the skin and strong eurocentrism (migration inside of Europe is accepted)

*Some people cannot even accept the fact that someone is not a blue-eyed blonde.* (Ž, Bratislava)

The sister of my friend lives with her boyfriend in Germany and they are on social support system after a year of working as migrants, taking advantage of the generous social system, but they claim the Arabs to be a lazy nation. (M, Bratislava)

*My uncle left for Germany, my mother lives in Austria, they are migrants in a way but, paradoxically, even though we have such migrants in our family, they are considered a different category...* (Ž, Bratislava)

- Generation opinion gaps, where old people (the generation of our parents and grandparents) generally have a negative attitude towards refugees and pass it on their grandchildren.

*My mum can bake cookies for her children in the kitchen and she is a really nice person, but the second she hears a migration report on the news, she turns into a strong neo-fascist...* (M, Bratislava)

- The distancing of local communities in Slovakia and their resistance to anything “different”, the attitudes towards the issue of migration are shaped in an environment where, for example, any other religion than the dominant one is traditionally not accepted and even migration within the country is responded to sensitively.

*My aunt told me: Don't marry Boris Kollár or a protestant, let alone a migrant.* (Ž, Bratislava)

*I have experienced it several times... I have experienced conflicts based on the colour of the skin, appearance, national prejudice...* (M, Nitra)

- Only rare occasions of meeting foreigners, lack of experience, the inability to travel during the times of socialism rooted the fear of the unknown, of a new culture in people, one of the participants of the focus group in Nitra labeled the „the different is automatically wrong“ phenomenon as the heritage from Ostblok.

- The media pressure and current limited sources of information in Slovakia, the media picturing the refugees as terrorists caused the focus groups participants to see their acquaintances being scared of visually different people waiting in the queue at the airport or during a Coldplay concert. One of the causes of the refusal is the portrayal of the refugees as aggressive people who rape women in the accepting countries.

*... they (the media) are trying to keep us scared... (M, Nitra)*

The situation in Nitra is even more specific. Each of the participants labelled it as a racist city. A strong and obvious representation of neo-nazi groups and frequent attacks caused by a different colour of the skin, different language or appearance create a tense atmosphere in the city. The focus group participants consider the dominant attitude of the local citizens anti-immigrant.

*Its enough for someone to speak English in the city for the citizens of Nitra to be racist, which is really pathetic... (...) ... I do not recommend to visit the corso in Nitra unless you are a white, Slovak-speaking Slovak... (M, Nitra)*

*In my neighbourhood... dumbasses, „Nitra fans“, doesnt matter if he is of a different nationality or a Michal is walking by – look, he has a dreadlock there – he is after him... (M, Nitra)*

*They resent different cultures and subcultures, even different opinions ... they are half-militant groups who think they are the ones to save Slovakia... (M, Nitra)*

In the arguments against accepting refugees, presented as opinions of the focus groups participants, several motives appeared:

- The uniqueness of the current situation – a huge number of people coming in and fear (in case of Slovakia, a very platonic one) of a „giant mass“. The refugees are viewed as a huge, dangerous, anonymous, socially and culturally homogenous group.

*I dont mind foreigners (mentions a lot of friends from several asian countries), but what I do mind are millions of some kind of half-literate people rolling in from Africa. (...) ... we have a problem with what is controllably (or uncontrollably?) rolling into Europe right now. Millions of mostly inadaptible young people are coming to Europe, ready to feast on this system, they do not have the intention to adapt to the country and culture they are entering. (M, Námestovo)*

*I adore foreign cultures, they are amazing, but I dont want a lot of foreigners here... (M, Námestovo)*

- Being convinced of their unwillingness to adapt and their intentions to take advantage of the social system of the accepting country.

*They want to come here, they dont even know why and... its not normal for millions and millions and millions of people to just start flooding in here... it is not our responsibility to solve their problems. (...) When I wanted to go to Africa as a volunteer, I didnt get a warm welcome either, but I had to state what I want to do in the country, why am I going there, what brought me there, etc. ... but*

*not like Here I am at your door, take care of me – thats not the way. (...) If I have a vision in my life and Im from Syria and I want to go to Slovakia, because life is good there, I think the person would get here. If he applied for the visa, for the stay according to the rules the country has, he would get here. (M, Námestovo)*

*When I went to an office as a foreigner, I tried to speak their language – English, I didnt sit in front of my house all day, I went to work – I was not on the social support and I tried to fit in the culture somehow and I tried to function in a way the society functioned (...) maybe thats why the society didnt see me as an invader. (M, Námestovo)*

*I absolutely feel for the people who leave their countries because they are at risk of death because of the war ... But then there is a second group who want to get well-off by exploiting us... (Ž, Bratislava)*

*...Im not afraid of these foreigners and half-illiterates because of myself, I am afraid because of the children, women, because of the direction of our society. (M, Námestovo)*

Being convinced about the incompatibility of „cultures, religions and mentalities“ no matter what the source of such beliefs is. There appeared a belief of innate or culturally acquired aggression or a reasoning that we as people are trying to change the things that are given, which causes problems.

*I think you never know whats inside of their minds and they can go crazy anytime...But we here, our motto is more of a „the dog that barks doesnt bite“ - that is what our Nitra citizens are like: they jump and jump and thats it. But they are silent, they are looking, observing, you never know, what might happen... I consider them a lot more dangerous than our Gypsies, who just yell but do no harm, but they are unpredictable, I think... (...) they dont belong here in this world... I am strongly against it. (Ž, Nitra)*

*... our religion preaches to love your brother no matter what, but islam claims that all those who dont believe in Allah are betrayers and enemies, and I think thats a serious problem (Ž, Bratislava)*

A description of an experience from England when muslim women started throwing rocks on him, when he was urinating by the fence on a bean field... I didnt throw stones at him for praying next to me and I was peeling beans next to him, but he wanted to kill me... or to hurt me...I would help them anyway because I respect them, its just the way they are, they were raised this way – its not their fault as people... but red is red and blue is blue... we are here and they are there.



- Being afraid of Slovak people losing their jobs because of them  
... unless they take our jobs, I dont mind (...) that I will have nowhere to work, because they will be squeezed everywhere, because they will get a lower salary than me... (Ž, Nitra)

*Either we have a problem with Gypsies who dont want to work, or we have a problem with migrants who want to work... (M, Nitra)*

- an acquired image of rejected help

*They didnt even appreciate what they had got from us, they only wanted money... (Ž, Nitra)*

- Justifying the legitimacy of rejection by the historical experience of the Slovak people in America:

*... who helped them there, nobody cared about them... (...) nobody waited for them there to give them food or clothes, nobody cared at all... and why should we care about them. I dont care, they can feel free to adapt, but I dont want them to threaten us... (Ž, Nitra)*

- Slovakia not being ready as a country to accept such a commitment and integrate the the extensive „migration wave“

*... we will get in trouble, since we cannot even integrate our Roma people (M, Námestovo)*

*One needs to fix their own problems before fixing others problems and this is the way it has always worked, works right now and will work in the future. (M, Námestovo)*

### 3. Sources of information

While the attitude towards migrants and foreigners as individuals is formed to a large extent by personal experience or experience mediated by ones close surroundings, or cnversations with tourists, the attitude towards „the new migration wave“ is influenced mainly by the media. The participants agreed that lately (summer 2017) the issue has disappeared from the media (they keep silent and act like the problm doesnt exist).

In all three discussions the media were attributed a great power in creating the picture of the migration phenomenon (both a positive and negative one) even when the participants themselves didnt follow news or read newspapers.

*...just when the people at work talk, because I dont watch the news on principle... I dont have any opinion about this, neither a good one, nor a bad one, I actually dont really care, as long as I live just the way I have until now, they can walk around... unless something happens (Ž, Nitra)*

The groups participants considered the conspirational websites, articles and discussions on social networks unreliable and harmful, but at the same time they claim them to be a common resource of information on this issue in their environment. The need to critically assess various resources has appeared several times.

*Many people dont even know that selection is something they have to do.*  
(M, Bratislava)

The attitude towards assessing the media input itself ranged from disinterest to critical analyzing and absolute distrust.

*I realize that the media are owned, that there is censorship* (M, Námestovo)

The media sources vary depending on profession or study field as well: the participants working in the IT environment speak against social networks, the university students work with scholarly translations from European parliament, a participant who works with media is purposely looking for so called conspiracy websites (its a great intellectual exercise).

As a rare case, one of the participanta verifies the information through the foreign media and in order to see the whole picture he reads through the annual reports of human rights organizations with the conviction that they also manipulate the public opinion in favor of receiving refugees. The main source of information sought by the participants of the groups were the mainstream media that are considered balanced (here, the „good samaritans“ are getting some coverage, too - well-known celebrities who are involved in supporting refugees). Hatefree websites or videos with commentaries that explain the context of situations are considered beneficial.

The discussed media images of refugees were people struggling with fences, people traveling on the highway, vans with refugees, a mention of an editor who tripped a running migrant and the police to catch him, a girl who showed the editors the situation they got into while on the run, men sailing in boats ...

The participants of the focus recognized some intention behind the work of the media: on one hand, they deliberately spread fear, presenting refugees as terrorists and dangerous men with aggressive tendencies, on the other hand they deliberately conceal the true image of the refugees when, for example, more and more pictures of mothers with small children appear.

The local media did not play any role in the interviews, none of the participants remembered discussing the topic

#### 4. Towards hate speech and violence against refugees

The media play the key role in informing about spreading displays of hatred and violence towards the refugees. They picture various forms of mass protests, as well as individual speeches of politicians. Any dehonoring expressions in the focus groups were met with rejection (i.e. nobody expressed their open support). However, no individual attacks or group protests have personally been experienced. The most prominent representative of extremist expressions is the far-right party *Ľudová strana Naše Slovensko*, which has been a parliamentary party (the party with green T-shirts) since the elections in 2016. Its members, even as the deputies do not shy away from hateful statements against various groups (foreigners, Roma people, people with physical or mental disabilities) - this example is assessed as an extreme.

A protest is legitimate, but a clearly anti-islamistic vocabulary has no place in a parliament, where anyone can say that islam is a pedophile satanic work of the devil – that seems to me absolutely disrespectful and I don't believe that we have anyone like that in the highest state facility. (M, Námestovo)

It is this party that is the most mentioned in connection to the local attacks on anyone who is „different“. In Nitra, a series of group attacks against the owner and visitors of the Mariatchi bar took place, the owner of which openly supports diversity. The fact that after three years two people were convicted for riotous conduct and health injuries, was evaluated with satisfaction.

One of the participants personally knows a student in the city where she is studying – an Erasmus guy, a Frenchman of a dark complexion who has been attacked and stabbed. The students have been warned several times to avoid places where the party members in green shirts are gathering. A participant from Bratislava met with Khadra Abdile, a refugee from Somalia, who has been brutally attacked several times in Bratislava, where she lives with asylum protection. Khadra spoke publicly about her experience and along with her lawyer, they won the White crow award for a bold civic act in 2016.

In the focus groups, several examples from the media have been mentioned: degrading shouting at dark-skinned football players, slogans from various protest rallies (Go home! We do not want you here! This is our home!). From her stay in Switzerland, one of the participants recalled a campaign with the theme of an apple tree, where the rotten apples under the tree represented migrants ...A view was represented that the anti-immigrant rhetorics attacks the low instincts:

*If the people said no (to the migrants) and they can see they are not tolerated, they group with someone who listens to them... (M, Námestovo)*

In connection to racist violence, one of the participants pointed out that the attacks in Europe are directed against the locals. Different attitudes were reflected in the interpretations of these events, most often the attacks are attributed to the frustration of migrants in European cities, other times to the presumed cultural patterns:

*... the migrants have the most humiliating jobs, they feel pushed aside and when this is overlooked, they are radicalizing. (Ž, Námestovo)*

It is often people who have been unable to assimilate, adapt, they arrived somewhere with a sense of superiority in them, perhaps they had lived in Africa before, maybe they have been involved in some violent activity, fighting, maybe they have been raping, killing, so that is why, since they came to Sweden, Germany, and so on, they have just kept doing what they used to. (M, Námestovo)

## **5. Response to pro-refugee arguments**

Most of the young people have declared open attitudes towards accepting the refugees - people fleeing war, considering it as a naturally human attitude, even a life philosophy.

There has often been an argument that our help is needed in the countries where people need to escape from war, that European countries should help solving war conflicts.

*... on one hand, yes, but if I am fleeing the war in Syria, then it is necessary to solve the war in Syria, but I am now on the Slovak border and the four years until it is solved will not help ... I think that we always need to be open, we are all human, secondly, there have always been and will be immigrants, people have always been fleeing war and such things and, unfortunately, with the climate change, the situation will get worse, even if there was world peace. (M, Bratislava)*

Gradually, various different conditions correcting the declared openness arose from the argumentations:

*That's not the problem, the religion is the problem... we should accept people to a certain extent... not everyone to Slovakia... each gets the same share... there is war and there are little children there... (M, Bratislava)*

*Yes, we need to treat them as people... and then, if they obey the conditions,*

*they can stay, if not, they have to go back, we do not talk enough about the causes... (M, Námestovo)*

*When they integrate into the system that we have here: that they find work and live an organized life, they will go to work, they will pay taxes to our country, so we do not have to pay it for them ... but there must be a limited number of them, because among the Slovak people themselves there is the highest unemployment rate in Europe, I guess... the work situation here is quite terrible and I think that the foreigners are one of the causes of this. (Ž, Nitra)*

*We do not have the right to send them away, but they need to adapt themselves, find accommodation as normal people do, find a place to rent, start working ... let them lead a normal life, let them not expect to come and get everything for free... I basically agree, but there are some conditions ... (M, Nitra).*

Many reflect on the refugee past of the Slovak people:

*I think we definitely need to help them at the beginning. A lot of countries have helped us in the past ... We need to let the people feel that this is a place where they are not only accepted and where we will let them stay, but where they can also feel good. But the question is who can afford it, for example, Slovakia can not take in 2 million refugees ... these people have to adapt (I do not want to change their religion, I do not mind that they walking around all covered up, I'm wearing a hood all year long..). ..*

Various ideas were expressed about the level of adapting. One of the models referred to an analogy of a family that receives a guest:

*Come in, help around, join us for a walk, but do not act as the head of the family, you can contribute humbly, but one cannot come and attempt to move our house to their castle so that we mow their lawn and wash their floor ... (M. Námestovo)*

There has also arisen a need for a social agreement to reach a model that would be fair to everyone (M, Bratislava). The participant assumed that the conditions could also be very unacceptable - for example, to change their belief to Christianity. One of the participants was convinced that in the next few years there will be no big opening in Slovakia, he can imagine pleasant neighborly relations with the Muslims and even a mosque built in the city ...

It seems that the openness towards the acceptance is rising when people do not feel culturally threatened, when they even feel no inclination towards the Slovak culture, when they are able to perceive the richness of other cultures, to reflect the influence of the Arab world on the European culture and perceive

the migration as mutually enriching. Their concept can be expressed with the gastro language.

*... when I feel like eating kebab, I want to be able to get kebab, if I feel like having sushi, I want to be able to have sushi, If I feel like eating dumplings with cheese, I can look for some dumplings with cheese... (Ž, Bratislava)*

The notion of the cultural benefits serving as an argument for their admission to the country has been narrowed down especially to the area of gastronomy services.

The economical benefits as an argument for the admission of refugees to Slovakia was unambiguous.

*... when they work, they contribute, when they do not work, they do not contribute ... (M, Bratislava)*

On one hand, there is a consciousness in Slovakia that the area of labor the migrants work in is not interesting for the local population, on the other hand, some concerns have arisen about the loss of employment opportunities.

I believe the government should pass a law that cheap labor force from abroad can only be represented in a certain proportion to the local workers ...

*The first generation takes advantage of us and their children are already educated ... (Ž, Nitra)*

One of the participants pointed out that linking migrants to socially and financially poorly-valued job positions is making their social interaction difficult.

## **CONCLUSIONS, RECOMMENDATIONS, GOOD PRACTICES (proposals that arose from the FG)**

Looking for ways to improve the relationship between the residents and the newcomers on a community level:

- language teaching (since the language is considered a major obstacle in the integration process): ... when they feel no openness and start to (logically) search for their own people and then create a community, and when they are not forced by the outside circumstances, they remain in their habits and language, which is a big problem...
- creating opportunities for direct contact and real encounters to fight against the prejudice (neighborhood relations, events), joint culinary meetings (food connects), discussions, introducing each other;
- offering alternative sources of information (expanding the offer of infor-

mation about the reasons for their escape, balancing through positive information from the factography (the ambition of one of the participants to write articles about everyday things that come from the countries that their citizens have to flee now), destroying myths

- education in context, lectures, travelogues (even the seniors could be delighted), personal stories, expansion of films that thematize refugees

- trying not to generalize, becoming mature “as a nation”, opening people’s eyes (I know intelligent people, who are still fascists ...)

putting pressure on the media to change their attitude (... if we keep seeing in the news how the Muslims bomb places, seeing them as suicide bombers, we will not be looking forward to have them here), it is necessary to show that there is more to it than that, give people some details.