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## **GlocalEAST**

Developing a new curriculum in Global Migration, Diaspora and Border  
Studies in East-Central Europe

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## **GlocalEAST**

# Review of the HE programs in migration, diaspora and border studies - Slovakia

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## Report on existing HE programs/courses in Slovakia

We were able to identify one single higher education program devoted to migration issues in Slovakia, namely the Department of Social Work at the Faculty of Education at Comenius University in Bratislava offers for its Master level students a specialisation called "International migration and development". This specialisation contains many migration-related courses (see the "Overview of HEI programs in Slovakia" in the appendix) and the students may achieve a broad knowledge including economic, legal, historic and sociological aspects of migration. The main focus is on the needs of future social workers, thus issues like migrant integration, the specific needs of migrants (in education, health-care, labour market, social care, housing) and the legal and administrative framework in Slovakia are given a special attention. However, it is important to note, that *International migration and development* is just one of the eight different specialisations offered at a Master level, and it is not opened every year.

Regarding individual courses – except for the ones offered in the above-described program – we identified 19 different courses at various Slovak universities available during the last few years (see the "Overview of HEI courses in Slovakia" in the appendix). Most of them are devoted to migration issues, while a significant portion of them available in three faculties of law across Slovakia is dealing with asylum law. Only two courses at the Faculty of Arts of Comenius University are focusing on ethnic and diaspora studies mapping Slovak ethnic communities living abroad. Naturally, some other courses might exist, but we were not able to reach them by searching for key words like migration, asylum, ethnic studies etc. (The main reason here could be that the key words are not included in the titles of the courses, or the list of courses and course programs are not available on the internet pages of the higher education institutions.) However, given the limited scope of HEI programs and courses in Slovakia, it is highly unlikely that many more 'hidden' courses exist. Naturally, issues related to migration, border studies and diaspora might be part of other courses as well, but probably they do not appear in the titles.

The characteristics of the existing courses are the following:

- There are examples for optional, obligatory and semi-obligatory courses at all levels, but usually migration related courses are offered at Master level. The language of instruction is mostly Slovak but there are examples for English and bilingual courses as well.
- The largest part of the courses is devoted to Slovak and EU asylum law and legislation, most notably 8 courses (at law faculties of three different universities) are focused on asylum and related legal issues. On the second and third place migration courses at Social Work departments and at various Faculties of Arts/Humanities/Political and Social Sciences follow. However, we found migration related courses at an economic university or at natural science and even theological faculty as well.
- Although the courses usually cover general theories, basic concepts and classifications of international migration at global level, their geographic scope is mostly focused on the European Union and Slovakia. Legal and illegal migration to the EU and within the EU, refugees and asylum, EU's common immigration, asylum, integration and border protection policies are usually covered together with the Slovak institutional and legal framework.

- With the significant exception of courses on asylum law, most courses are highly interdisciplinary, usually using the approaches of disciplines such as Political Science, Public Policy, European Studies, International Relations, Sociology, Law, Social Work and Economics but there are examples for History, Ethnology and other disciplines as well.
- The courses usually promise to spread general knowledge on migration issues, the basic concepts, theories and classifications. With the significant exception of courses at faculties of law and social work departments other skills or possible future employment opportunities are not specified in course descriptions. Law faculties usually promise for their graduates a detailed knowledge of international, EU and Slovak asylum law and system and practical skills to provide legal services for possible future clients such as refugees and asylum seekers. Social work departments similarly mention the preparation of future social workers to deal with migrants as clients, the ability to identify migrants' needs to give administrative help to migrants and victims of human trafficking and to help their integration process.

Considering the above summarized characteristics, we can state that the number of HEI courses related to migration (diaspora and border studies) is extremely limited in Slovakia. Courses devoted to asylum law make a significant exception, legal aspects of immigration, especially regarding refugees and asylum seekers are relatively well covered (8 identified courses at law faculties of three main universities of the country). All the rest is one single academic program for social work students and 11 different migration related courses spread across the whole country. Taking to account that there are 34 higher education institutions in Slovakia (3 state, 20 public and 11 private universities and colleges); these number are very low. According to our findings only 6 of them, all being public universities had migration-related courses. Naturally, as we admitted, some more courses might exist and we were just not able to identify them but it is highly unlikely that we significantly underestimated the numbers. On the other hand, not every course counted here is offered every single year, some of them were not actualized for years on the HEI webpages and some probably ceased to exist.

To sum it up, according to our estimate from a total number of roughly 100 thousand students attending Slovak HEIs, only few hundred are inscribed to migration related courses each year. Thus, the role of these courses within the academia as well as their impact on the society is rather small if not marginal.

Most courses are probably strongly related to a few academics with expertise in migration topics, rather than attached to specific institutions. It is highly likely that if these teachers leave the given institutions, the courses will cease to exist. However, the mobility of teachers between various universities is low in Slovakia, and this ensures the stability and endurance of the courses. Therefore, it is highly likely that – although in limited numbers – they are going to remain on the list of available courses.

### **Non-academic programs/courses:**

Since the number and scope of academic courses on migration issues is extremely limited, and people with higher education most often lack any specific knowledge (gained during their studies), the NGOs sometimes try to fill the gaps, reaching broader audience (beyond university students). One good example is the initiative by the International Organization for Migration (IOM) in the Slovak Republic called “Enhancing Intercultural Competencies

and Regional Cooperation of Experts Working with Migrants in the Slovak republic (2010 – 2015)”.<sup>1</sup> The series of interactive trainings and workshops had been attended by more than 500 participants from the following institutions: foreign police, labour and district offices, municipalities and offices of self-governing regions, health insurance company, Centre for Legal Aid, labour inspectorates and others. In addition, information days for migrants were part of the project enabling participants to meet with immigrants and improve their knowledge and skills and try it in real-life situations and communication. “The participants gained skills in intercultural communication and knowledge in the field of migration and migrant integration that can be used in their work with migrants as well as in the cooperation among their institutions” – as the IOM states.<sup>2</sup>

Moreover, the IOM in Bratislava regularly organises educational seminar devoted to current migration trends, which is attended by various actors working on the migration agenda (both state and non-state). In the framework of the European Migration Network, the IOM publishes informs, bulletins and other informative publications about migration agenda in Slovakia<sup>3</sup> and publishes actual data (both in Slovak and English)<sup>4</sup>.

Several non-governmental organisations (such as People in Peril, Milana Šimečka Foundation, Mareena) offer educational and awareness-raising activities (targeting also secondary school students and teachers, and public in general). CVEK works also with representatives of municipalities and teachers. In a comprehensive way, the Human Rights League offers fundamental overview about situation of refugees and migration in general through various tools: accessible e-learning course<sup>5</sup>, asylum and migration glossary<sup>6</sup>, set of explanatory papers<sup>7</sup>, videos<sup>8</sup> and podcast series<sup>9</sup> (in Slovak).

Certainly, the above mentioned NGO initiatives are important and useful efforts, however they can't fully and systematically replace the largely missing education process at the universities. Ideally, NGO initiatives would be rather complementary to the existing HEI programs and courses and not trying to substitute them.

To conclude, there are substantial gaps in the Slovak higher education system regarding the coverage of issues related to migration. There is only one single university program devoted to the topic of migration and very few courses exist only at 6 universities (from the total of 34) attended by low numbers of students.

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<sup>1</sup> Available at: <https://www.iom.sk/en/activities/migrant-integration/previous-integration-projects-and-activities/435-enhancing-intercultural-competencies-and-regional-cooperation-of-experts-working-with-migrants-in-the-slovak-republic-2010-2015.html>

<sup>2</sup> „The fundamental part of the programme was a series of interactive trainings, followed by workshops organized in the regions of Slovakia. The education was focused on trends, policies and practice in the field of migration and migrant integration globally, in Europe and in Slovakia; related legislation; work with prejudice and stereotypes; good practice in providing services to migrants; and strengthening the cooperation among offices. Cultural mediators – representatives of migrant communities – presented their personal experience of living in Slovakia.” (ibid.)

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.emn.sk/en/download>

<sup>4</sup> <https://iom.sk/en/migration/migration-in-slovakia.html>

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.hrl.sk/sk/info-o-migracii/e-learning>

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.hrl.sk/sk/info-o-migracii/slovník/azylový-a-migracný-slovník>

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.hrl.sk/sk/info-o-migracii/azyl>

<sup>8</sup> <https://www.hrl.sk/sk/info-o-migracii/video/pozrite-si-nase-video-na-temy-tykajúce-sa-migrácie-integrácie-ci-utečencov>

<sup>9</sup> <https://www.hrl.sk/sk/info-o-migracii/https://www.hrl.sk/sk/info-o-migracii/podcast/podcast-migracny-kompas-vysvetlujeme-detaily-o-migracii-integrácii-a-azyle>