

Elderly immigration to Hungary

Sándor Illés¹

Abstract

In general, younger cohorts dominate in the international migration flows, but new form of migration develops, namely, the elderly migration. The old age international movement of people is a migratory phenomenon of the last decades of the 20th century. Parallel with the accelerating ageing process, the share of long-term elderly immigrants has been growing since the middle of nineties in Hungary. In the millennium every tenth long-term immigrants staying in Hungary was 60 years old and over. The share of persons over 60 gaining Hungarian citizenship also increased and stabilised around 12 per cent. The expansion of old-aged immigrants and new citizens is not advantageous under the prevailing legal rules in case of international migration policy preparing utility principles. If the elderly migration to Hungary becomes greater in level, it will be necessary to intervene into the spontaneous process. It is important to state that the emerging problems must be managed in a differentiated manner according to the types of the elderly migrants.

Keywords: international retirement migration, migration policy, Hungary.

Introduction

The study investigates the demographic and territorial aspects of the connections between aging process and migration. By examining the number and rate of foreigners migrating into Hungary in their old age we are trying to form a clear notion of the characteristics of this new type of migration (Rogers et al. 1992; McHugh et al. 1995; Haas and Serow, 1997; King et al. 2000; Williams and Hall, 2000; Michalkó, 2005). We must forewarn that changes in status presented a major problem in analysis and evaluation throughout the

¹ Sándor Illés (PhD), Senior Research Fellow of the Demographic Research Institute of Hungarian Central Statistical Office, Budapest, Hungary. E-mail: illess@mailop.ksh.hu.

research. By changes of status we mean transitions from tourist to asylum-seeker, from asylum-seeker to refugee, from refugee to immigrant, from immigrant to citizen and the various combinations of these (Tóth, 2004). Such transitions are capable of disturbing the consistency between flow data and stock data even if the statistical work was done competently. Receiving citizenship is the change, which makes the most powerful impact among the Hungarian legal conditions (Gellérné, 2004). The number and share of foreigners residing in Hungary in their old age shows the combined effect of demographic processes (natural aging of immigrants already in Hungary) and migration processes (those immigrating in old age) (Vergoossen and Willekens, 1987; Poulain, 1988).

Migrants and new citizens

By analysing the numbers and rates of foreigners migrating into and out of Hungary we draw attention to the new tendencies observable in the waves of migration affecting Hungary and try to identify certain peculiarities. The small number of immigrants in the 1980's included a very small, 2% share of old people. Nor did the share of old people rise over 3% in the large waves of immigration in the late 1980's and early 1990's. The relative breakthrough took place from the mid 1990's onwards when the participation of old people within the yearly immigration flow reached and even exceeded 6%. The peak was in 1998, after this their proportion stabilised at just over 7%. The acceleration in proportion, which began in the mid 1990's, deserves attention because the retired took up an increasing part within an already growing and reviving wave of immigration. In the four years after 1997 altogether more than 5800 old age foreign citizens came to live in Hungary. During the same period of time only 196 elderly persons emigrated from the country, so the balance of the period was overwhelmingly positive in terms of old age international migration. Thus we can point out that the majority of old age immigrants settled in Hungary and were not prone to emigrate from this country.

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In attempting to explain this phenomenon it seems highly likely that the young and middle aged persons who had arrived with the immigration waves of the late 1980's and early 1990's from the neighbouring countries eventually brought their parents along, too. In other words, the parents had decided that they would follow their children and relatives who had moved to Hungary. Essentially what we saw taking place was a movement toward family re-unification. Its unique distinguishing feature is that the father who had once come as a young guest worker was not followed by a wife and children, as is customary in Western European patterns, but instead the nuclear family had immigrated together, and the elderly relatives followed suit later (Fokkema, 1996; Dwyer, 2000). The motivations may have included the fact that if the elderly parent comes to live in Hungary they are easier to look after, if need be, than if there is a distance of several hundred kilometres. If the immigrating parents were ill, they were able to expect a higher standard of health service than at the place they had left behind. And if they were healthy they could give the money from selling their property in the country of origin and from gaining Hungarian pension to the younger generation as a sign of inter-generational solidarity, alongside offering use of their activity itself. Obviously, parents following their children are not the only pattern for old age immigration – there must be others. Second significant section of old age immigrants consists of persons who had once emigrated from Hungary and wish to return to their roots. A third significant layer of elderly immigrants is that of foreigners with no Hungarian background who are seeking for the more pleasant side of life here (Bell and Ward, 2000; Gustafson, 2001; Warnes, 2001). It is hard to judge the sub-rates of the individual groups on the basis of macro-statistics, using a single source of data. We would need a combination of several data sources, such as sample surveys or in-depth interviews in order to explore the various characteristic sub-types, the motivational systems and networks of contacts of migrants as well as their life conditions in Hungary and their plans for the future.

The number of old people classified as immigrants to Hungary is reduced significantly by their becoming a Hungarian citizen as well as by emigration or death. Demand for Hungarian citizenship increased sharply during the transformation period, partly because of immigrants and partly because of returning Hungarian immigrants who had lost their citizenship. The share of persons who became Hungarian citizens in old age has been rising permanently from the mid 1990's, aside from minor fluctuations, and stabilised around a 12% share around the millennium. This proportion is much higher than the proportion within the annual flow of immigrants or the share among the stock of foreign residents. Thus we can draw the conclusion that over-60's are over-represented among the new citizens if compared against immigrants. However, their proportion is below the share of old age Hungarian subpopulation, which was around 22%. The figures above reveal quite clearly that the high proportion of old persons among immigrants and particularly among new citizens is a question, which deserves attention. The further detailed and thorough examination of these areas promises significant scholarly achievements in Hungary. And as far as policy-makers are concerned, the tackling of the above-mentioned problems cannot be delayed any further (Blakemore, 1999; Rodríguez, 2001; Bendel, 2005).

Conclusions

International elderly immigration has emerged since the mid 1990's in Hungary. While the aging process was becoming accelerated in Hungary, the share of old people among foreign immigrant stock in this country was also rising. At the time of the millennium they reached a roughly 10% proportion which means that one in ten immigrants staying in Hungary are of sixty years of age or older. In demographic point of view the increasing proportion of old persons among immigrants can be retraced to two factors. One is the natural aging of earlier immigrants themselves in the destination area. The other comes from the effect of the immigration of increasingly older persons. A third factor could be the

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low mortality rate of old age immigrants, which arises from their extremely good state of health. For lack of specific research on this question, however, this can only be formulated as a hypothesis.

The financial situation of the pensioners who have come to live in this country as part of a family reunification seems far from satisfactory. Although their relocation probably entails capital transfers to this country, without the protecting environment of their family or immigrant origin community they would not be viable in their new setting. Besides taking advantage of pension, health and social services based on public funding (which is increasingly problematic), these people are also in need of income transfers from their family network. It is highly likely that one of the biggest problems of the social insurance systems (mainly pension and health system) of the near future will be the necessity of surplus financing for the significant number of aged parents who have come to be resident in Hungary and have been naturalised. We are certain that such a spontaneous process is not desirable in the long term and cannot be maintained in Hungary if the country wishes to carry out an effective migration policy. We probably profit more from those pensioners who are re-settling in Hungary after living in emigration in the West and from the non-Hungarian elderly amenity-seeking migrants who draw the decent pension from abroad, which is required for a high standard of living.

As a final conclusion we may state that a further increase in the share of old age immigrants and new citizens is in no way desirable within the present internal regulatory framework. If the flow of old age immigration continues on a large scale combined with the growing elderly demand for citizenship, this will necessitate interference with the spontaneous processes. It is important to treat the various problems in a differentiated fashion depending on the layers of elderly.

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