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*Irén Gödri and  
Pál Péter Tóth*

### The Social Position of Immigrants

#### Abstract

The study analyses the social position of immigrants in Hungary from neighbouring countries on the basis of a survey carried out among those who were granted immigrant status in 2001. In the first place the social position of the examined group is investigated along the dimensions of education, position in the labour market (economic activity and occupational mobility), social relations and some aspects of subjective satisfaction. On the basis of objective indicators of social position it can be deduced that, for the group as whole, migration has brought about positive changes in their position. Nevertheless on individual level downward mobility could also be observed. At the same time the subjective assessment of their own position is better than that of the Hungarian population at large.

Authors:

IRÉN GÖDRI is a sociologist, Research Fellow at the Demographic Research Institute of the Hungarian Central Statistical Office; PhD student at the Sociology Doctoral School, Faculty of Social Sciences, Eötvös Loránd University, Budapest. Research interests: international migration, relationship networks, marital relations and divorce.

PÁL PÉTER TÓTH is a demographer, Senior Research Fellow at the Demographic Research Institute of the Hungarian Central Statistical Office. Research interests: international migration, population policy.

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## The Social Position of Immigrants

### Introduction

Against a background of international migration, foreign citizens have arrived to live in Hungary from more than 136 countries. There are numerous factors that have influenced the aims and length of their residence. There are those who have been here for more than a decade and others who have only recently arrived. The different groups show great variety in both their demographic composition and their social position.

The majority of immigrants come from the neighbouring countries and are mostly of Hungarian nationality—originating from those territories with a Hungarian population that were detached from Hungary in the wake of decisions made by the Great Powers at the end of the World War I and II. In the period 1988–2001, out of a total number of 278,566 immigrants, 70 per cent came from the neighbouring countries, and in 2001, out of a total number of 110,028 resident immigrants,<sup>1</sup> 56 per cent were citizens of neighbouring countries. As the bulk of those arriving from neighbouring countries are of Hungarian nationality and Hungarian-speaking, and have a similar historical, cultural and religious background to that of the host population, their position within Hungarian society differs in many ways from the position of those who arrive from farther-away countries, or even other continents.

This study into those who acquired immigrant status in Hungary in 2001 is based on the results of a questionnaire survey<sup>2</sup> carried out among immigrants from neighbouring countries, and attempts to provide evidence of certain characteristics of this group's social position. Simply because of the particularities of this group, the picture that emerges cannot be applied to immigrants in general, even if those we describe do constitute the majority.

Social position is a composite conceptual category, which is defined by position in the labour market, or employment status, income, property, edu-

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<sup>1</sup> In any given year the number of resident immigrants in Hungary does not include those who acquired Hungarian citizenship during this period.

<sup>2</sup> According to data from the Ministry of the Interior, in 2001 close to 7,000 people with origins in the surrounding countries received immigrant status: 69.4 per cent from Romania, 17.7 per cent from the Ukraine, 10 per cent from Yugoslavia, 2.2 per cent from Slovakia and smaller numbers from Croatia and Austria. The survey, entitled *Immigrants 2002* was based on a representative sample of 1,015 members, over the age of 18, of this group, in the framework of National Research and Development Programme (NKFP 5/0084/2002).

cational background, living conditions and access to material and cultural goods. The concept of status group is also used to describe social position, and, in addition to those just mentioned, this has the defining features of consumption, culture and lifestyle, residential area, as well as ability to uphold one's own interests (Kolosi 1984). Within these various dimensions, the individual or group under investigation can occupy different levels in the hierarchy. As a function of this, questions such as how individuals judge their own situation within these dimensions, what they consider to be important, what they use for comparison, their subjective personal assessment of their social position, as well as their level of satisfaction, are also of great interest.

From this rich collection of approximations we are able to examine social position along a number of different dimensions. The primary aim of the survey of immigrants was to find their motivation for migrating, as well as their level of integration. Of course, the numerous segments of integration do reflect the subject's position within the host society, but nevertheless in this broad picture we still lack a number of important objective indicators (e.g. income, residential area, consumption, etc.). However we do have at our disposal the indicators of subjective satisfaction in many contexts.

The descriptive dimensions of social strata, class, status, etc. do not take into account the fact that one of the important conditions for social well-being is integration into the network of social relations. The existence of social relations and connections to the various civil organizations, as well as the resources arising out of these, has considerable influence on the individual's well-being and state of health; it helps define social position, and also plays an important role in social success (Bourdieu 1978).

On the basis of the above considerations, we investigated the social position of immigrants along the dimensions of education, position in the labour market (economic activity and employment), social integration and the various aspects of subjective satisfaction.

### **Educational level**

Level of education plays an important role in the whole course of an individual's life, and in the opportunities available. It defines the career path and the social position each person can attain. From this perspective the immigrant group under investigation was in a strong position: among them the level of completed secondary and higher education was greater than average, both for their country of origin and for the Hungarian population as a whole. Two-thirds of immigrants aged 18 or over had completed secondary education (compared to 34.7 per cent in Hungary), while one third (31.7 per cent) of those aged 25 or over had completed higher education (compared to 12.1

per cent in Hungary). The level of completed secondary education was higher in women, while the level of higher education was higher in men (37.5 per cent of those aged 25 or over).

### **The position of immigrants in the labour market**

The position of immigrants in the labour market of the host society also helps define their level of integration. Many international investigations into the employment of immigrants have shown that, alongside level of educational achievement and age, there is a close correlation between the ethnic background of immigrants and unemployment (Ostby 2002; Gesano 2002). On the basis of the composition of the group with regard to nationality and native language, we postulate that ethnic background *per se* did have a significant influence on positioning in the labour market.

Taking the level of *economic activity* (Figure 1) among immigrants, if we compare the level at the time of the investigation with the level before they arrived in Hungary, we can see that the level of employment (both among the self-employed and those employed by others) increases, which—alongside the fall in the rate of unemployment—also relates to the fact that the majority of those previously in education have finished their studies and entered the labour market.

The rate of unemployment<sup>3</sup> fell in the group from 12.8 per cent prior to migration to 5.3 per cent, which is similar to the rate of unemployment in Hungary in 2001 (5.7 per cent)<sup>4</sup>. Within the different demographic groupings, however, there is a divergence, both in the proportion of the employed<sup>5</sup> and unemployed, and in the unemployment rate.

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<sup>3</sup> The rate of unemployment represents the level of unemployment among the economically active population. 'Economically active' refers to that portion of the population that presents itself in the labour market, i.e. the combined total of those in employment and the unemployed.

<sup>4</sup> Hungarian Central Statistical Office (2003: 53).

<sup>5</sup> We include among the employed—in accordance with the recommendations of the International Labour Organization (ILO)—those living on occasional work and their supporting family members (who were termed above *semi-active*).

Figure 1: *Division of immigrants according to economic activity before migration and currently (%)*



Note: N=1015.

The level of employment among men (70 per cent) is considerably higher than among women (50 per cent). This is due to the fact that among women—as a consequence of their higher age composition—there are more pensioners, as well as to the fact that more women than men stay at home to bring up a family. The proportion of unemployed (3.3 per cent) shows no discrepancy between the sexes, while the unemployment rate among women (6.1 per cent) is higher than that among men (4.4 per cent), in contrast to the Hungarian trend, where for many years this indicator has been higher among men: in 2001 it was five per cent for women and 6.3 per cent for men.

Investigating the situation in the labour market according to *age group*, we find that among the age group 40–49 the proportion of unemployed (9.5 per cent) is at its highest, as is the unemployment rate (10.7 per cent), which indicates that this age group had to face greater difficulties with regard to integration into the labour market after migration. Unemployment among those immigrants under 40 is lower, as it is in the corresponding age group of the host population; this does not apply to those over 60, since 95 per cent of them are pensioners.

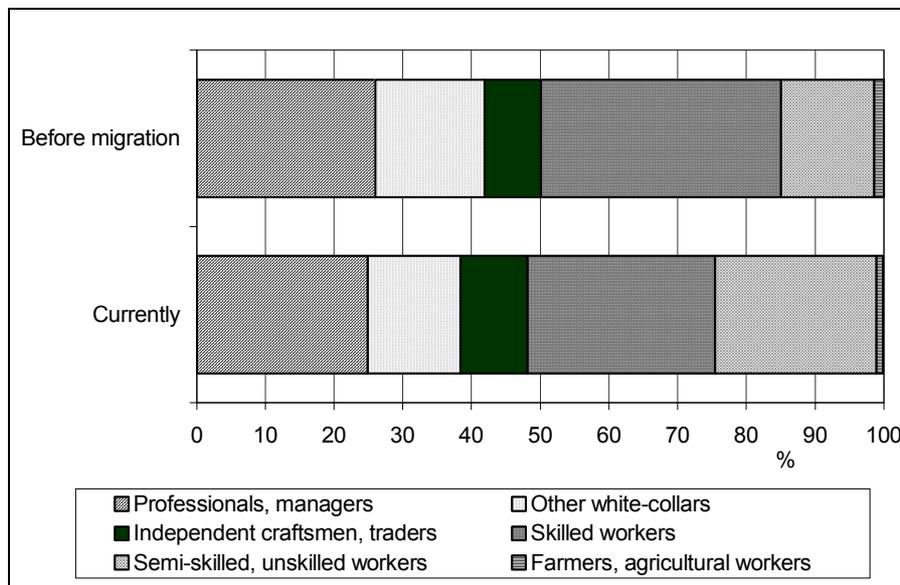
In spite of the fact that *educational level* is an important factor affecting position in the labour market, our data show that there is no substantial difference in the unemployment rate between immigrants with a higher or a primary education. The lowest rate is among those with a qualification as a

skilled worker (4.1 per cent), while the highest is among immigrants with General Maturity Certificate (5.9 per cent). At the same time, employment is higher than average among those with a higher education (69 per cent), chiefly on account of the lower proportion of non-active earners and dependants among them.

The question of *length of residence in Hungary* is also a decisive factor in determining success in finding a job, so that the rate of unemployment for those arriving one to two years before the survey was 9.1 per cent, while for those resident in Hungary for more than five years it was 2.9 per cent.

Our supposition that there would be a number of advantages in the labour market to *being of Hungarian nationality and speaking Hungarian as a mother tongue* (over those immigrants with other ethnic backgrounds) was proved to be correct: among those people of non-Hungarian nationality the proportion classified as *other non-active* (11.5 per cent) is considerably higher than for immigrants of Hungarian nationality (5.4 per cent); the same is true for those of non-Hungarian nationality working independently (16.3 per cent, as against 4.5 per cent of immigrants of Hungarian nationality). Though there are only a small number of non-Hungarians in the survey, it is possible to draw the cautious conclusion on the basis of the data that they are less able to find positions as employees in the Hungarian labour market, and that those without a workplace 'were obliged' to start up some sort of enterprise, in order to establish an income.

Figure 2: Distribution of active earners according to occupational groups (%)



Note: Number of valid cases: before migration: N=489, currently: N=583.

In addition to economic activity, an important indicator of the social position of immigrants is that of *employment status*. If we look at the distribution of the groups according to the occupation of active earners, and compare it with the situation before migration (*Figure 2*), we find that the proportion of those at the managerial and professional level is about the same; the proportion of other white-collar workers has fallen slightly; while the proportion of independent craftsmen, traders and people in the service industries has risen. The most significant change occurs in the proportions of skilled, as opposed to semi-skilled/unskilled workers: the former has fallen from 35 per cent to 27 per cent, while the latter has risen from 14 per cent to 23 per cent.

There is a difference in the current *employment composition of active earners* between men and women (*Table 1*). When we compare the proportion of employment categories according to gender against the division of active earners within the host population, we find in the case of immigrant men that there is a higher proportion of managerial and professional positions (27 per cent) than in the host population, while for women it is a good deal lower (23 per cent). This can be attributed to the fact that among the immigrants a larger percentage of men (35 per cent) have a higher education than is the case among women (25 per cent), and the educational level largely determines status in the labour market.

**Table 1: The distribution of immigrants and Hungarian population according to occupational groups (%)**

Occupational group	Immigrants*		Hungarian population**	
	Male	Female	Male	Female
Professional, managerial	27.2	23.0	22.6	34.5
Other white-collar	7.4	19.8	2.5	17.1
Independent craftsmen, traders	9.4	10.2	9.6	6.2
Skilled workers	33.6	20.7	32.2	11.9
Semi-skilled and unskilled workers	21.1	25.6	26	28.2
Farmers and Agricultural workers	1.3	0.7	7.1	2.1

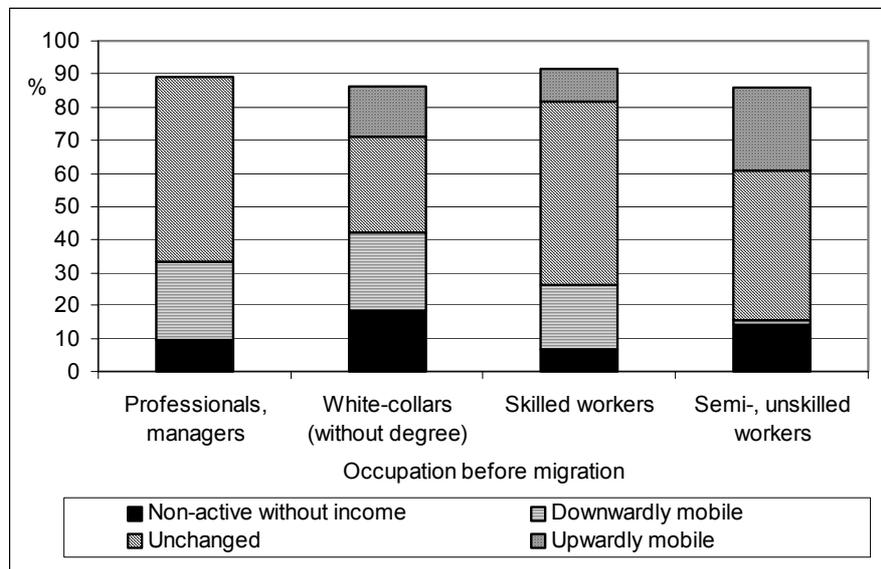
Source: \* *Immigrants, 2002 survey*; \*\* HCSO (2003).

The number of white-collar workers among immigrant men is proportionally greater than that of the host population. At the same time, the proportion of women working in private business and as skilled workers is higher in the case of immigrants (10 per cent and 21 per cent, respectively), than among the host population. It is noticeable that the proportion of unskilled labourers in the case of both sexes is slightly lower among immigrants than in the host population. For immigrants, the proportion of independent farmers and agricultural workers is insignificant.

**Occupational mobility in relation to position before migration**

On the basis of the evidence so far, we can see that, in terms of the labour market, the immigrant group surveyed has not assumed a marginal position following their immigration. In fact, from the perspective of employment, they have actually improved their position; for example, the proportion among them of unemployed has fallen. However, the apparent variations in employment composition do not reflect actual shifts, but rather variations that can be perceived in the structure itself. This derives, in part, from the fact that all movements into and out of the labour market took place in the period between the two points in time, and, as is indicated by the increased number of *currently active*, more people joined than left. A significant proportion of the earlier inactive became active earners: three-quarters of the students, and two-thirds of the group making up those on parental leave, the unemployed and other inactive individuals (but only three per cent of pensioners in total). At the same time, of the previously active earners, more than one fifth became inactive: 5.3 per cent became unemployed, 6.2 per cent became dependent, and the rest (10.9 per cent) ended up in the category of inactive earners (on parental leave or pensions). All these fluctuations can, in themselves, give rise to changes in the pattern of employment.

**Figure 3: Occupational mobility according to occupation before migration (%)**



*Note:* The remainder—making up 100 per cent—is formed of those becoming non-active with income (i.e. those going on parental leave or retired).

Between these two points in time, there has also been internal movement between the employment categories. That is, while those entering the labour market can increase the number in each of the categories (and, correspondingly, those leaving will reduce the numbers), so too can 'transition' between the various employment categories.

*Figure 3* illustrates the employment mobility of those belonging to the different employment categories. In addition to those who are—occupationally—upwardly or downwardly mobile, we list separately those who become non-active without income (unemployed, home-builders, or other inactive).

We can observe that migration produces significant mobility of employment, but in different ways within the various employment categories. If we consider together the downwardly mobile and those who become non-active without income, then one third of those belonging to the managerial and professional level were in a worse situation after migration, as were 42 per cent of white-collar workers, 26 per cent of skilled workers, and 16 per cent of semi-skilled and unskilled workers. Upward mobility is also observable, but in those white-collar workers without diplomas and among skilled workers it is much less common than 'slippage'. Upward mobility is only really noticeable among semi-skilled and unskilled workers (25 per cent). It can be seen that a significant proportion of both the managers and professionals, as well as the other white-collar workers, were obliged to perform work of a lower status, and this was, in total, the biggest change that took place in the above categories.

The fluctuations given above concern the group that was employed before migration, which accounts for 47 per cent of those in the survey. On the basis of the employment mobility and economic activity of this group, it can be said that, in total, downward mobility (29 per cent) was greater than upward mobility (11 per cent), which indicates that, on an individual level, more people ended up in a somewhat worse situation as a consequence of migration than might be assumed by looking at the employment composition of the whole group of immigrants. This is because one third of those who were students entered the professional and managerial category, while 21 per cent entered the marketplace as other white-collar workers and a further 21 per cent became skilled workers (12 per cent continued their studies).

### **Social integration of immigrants**

The social position of immigrants is also determined by the resources they can derive from social relations. The attributes of an individual's personal network of relations, as well as their involvement in the various civil institutions, are an important indicator of their social integration.

The group of immigrants surveyed already had a network of connections in Hungary, even before their migration. Principally, many of them had family members or relatives who had already moved to Hungary, but references to Hungarian relations or friends were also quite common. The integrating power of their network of contacts is measured by the resources that are available through them, and the help and assistance they offer in resolving everyday problems and difficulties. We employed a reduced version of the eight-situation Fischer Method<sup>6</sup> to examine the immigrants' network of contacts that enabled resource transfer. This measures the level of contacts that help to ensure feeling of solidarity and resources in different areas by looking at three hypothetical life-situations.<sup>7</sup> The situations cover the various relationships providing practical and emotional assistance.

An examination of the size of networks reveals that the extent of relations differs in the three hypothetical situations: on average, more people were mentioned in connection with everyday assistance and recreation (3.5 and 4.2 respectively) than was the case for the discussion of important issues (2.0). This also indicates that immigrants appear to have more contacts of a practical nature, and precisely because of migration they have fewer relationships of an expressive nature, since this type of relationship is the hardest to form, or at least takes a longer time, in a new environment.<sup>8</sup>

On the other hand, in all three situations there were a significant proportion of respondents who could not come up with a single contact person: 21 per cent for the household assistance question, 38 per cent for the recreational activities question, and for the discussion of serious problems 26 per cent did not come up with anyone. For all three situations, that is a higher proportion than in a 1998 survey<sup>9</sup> of Hungarian society.

Taking all three situations together, some nine per cent of respondents could not give a single contact person, while the total number of people mentioned averaged 4.7. This is actually higher than the results found in the corresponding Hungarian investigations: 3.5 in 1997 (Angelusz and Tardos

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<sup>6</sup> For more on the Fischer Method see Fischer and McAllister (1978).

<sup>7</sup> The three situations cover the most important situations in inter-personal relations: requiring assistance in daily household affairs, maintaining relations through shared recreational programmes, and discussing serious important questions and problems. With all three situations we first of all inquired about the existence or not of the relevant contact(s), then the number of contacts, and finally some socio-demographic indicators (sex, age, educational level, place of birth) for the main contacts (a maximum of 5 per situation) and the nature of the relationship.

<sup>8</sup> At the same time we need to pay attention to the methodological point that the order of questions might also influence the number of people mentioned (in the last situation most of those asked thought of fewer people than in the first situation) and the question about discussing serious problems was given last.

<sup>9</sup> Omnibus survey about relationship networks was carried out by the 'Communication Theory' Research Group, Hungarian Academy of Sciences and Eötvös Loránd University. The investigation was led by Róbert Angelusz and Róbert Tardos. The presented results here are Irén Gödri's own calculations.

1998), and 3.8 (Omnibus Survey). Presumably—quite apart from any age or educational peculiarities of the sample—this is aided by the fact that migration produces situations in which interpersonal relationships become more important, and so the migrants have mobilized their existing relationships to a greater extent.

When we investigate the extent of contact networks across the various socio-demographic indicators, we find that it is mostly in the realms of age and educational achievement (and then, following these, economic activity and occupation) that a difference may be seen. Similarly, in investigations of the Hungarian population we found that as people grow older the extent of their contact network declines, while the higher the level of schooling the wider the network: for those with basic education and over 55 years of age, the average number of contacts is under four, while for those with higher education or under 30, the average is above five. Professionals (but not managers) have a wider than average network of contacts, as do the other white-collar workers and students. Interestingly, so do the unemployed, which indicates that this group is not necessarily in a disadvantageous position from the point of view of relationships, unlike the Hungarian unemployed, for whom a lack of contacts is a feature.

The richness of contacts is slightly higher in towns than in villages, although, in contrast to the Hungarian trend, the smallest number (4.2) is found in Budapest. This may be a consequence of the more impersonal officials in the big city, with whom it is more difficult for immigrants to establish new relationships.

Taking the people mentioned by the respondents as the five individuals most important to them, we find that, of those mentioned in the first two places, the greater proportion originate from the same country as the respondent, while the fourth and fifth most important are largely people born in Hungary. Overall, 50 per cent of the most important relationships are with people from the same country of origin, while nearly the same number (48 per cent) are with native Hungarians, with the proportion of relationships with people from third countries being insignificant. If we leave out relationships with family and relatives, then almost one third (32 per cent) of respondents gave the most important relationships as being with natives of their own country. So, despite the newly formed relationships with Hungarians, the basis for solidarity and mutual assistance is provided, to a significant degree, by networks formed from people with the same place of origin.

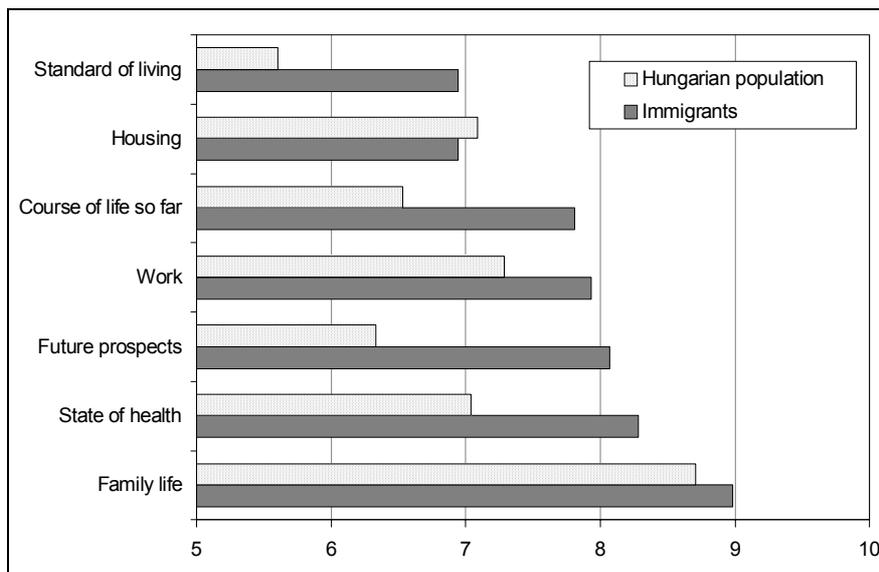
*Membership of organizations and societies* can also be seen as a factor promoting integration, since a certain communal solidarity is gained through the membership. However, only 13.4 per cent of respondents said that they were members of any cultural, political, professional or social organization, society or club. In the first instance, these were church organizations, or recreational and sporting associations. The proportion of membership was

somewhat higher for those under 55 (15–16 per cent), for men (16 per cent) and for those with a higher education (20 per cent). Nevertheless, these were still below the levels found in the Hungarian population: in 1987 20 per cent of respondents, and in 1997 one third of respondents, were members of some organization or society (Angelusz and Tardos 1998).

## Satisfaction

A subjective indicator of social position is level of satisfaction, which can be broken down into different components—life circumstances, financial situation, state of health, etc. The components we present below are those for which it is possible to draw a comparison with levels of satisfaction measured in the Hungarian population (*Figure 4*). In this case the source of the Hungarian population data is the investigation entitled *Turning Points of the Life-course*.<sup>10</sup>

**Figure 4: Measures of satisfaction in different spheres of life among immigrants and the Hungarian population, 2001/2002 (scale averages)**

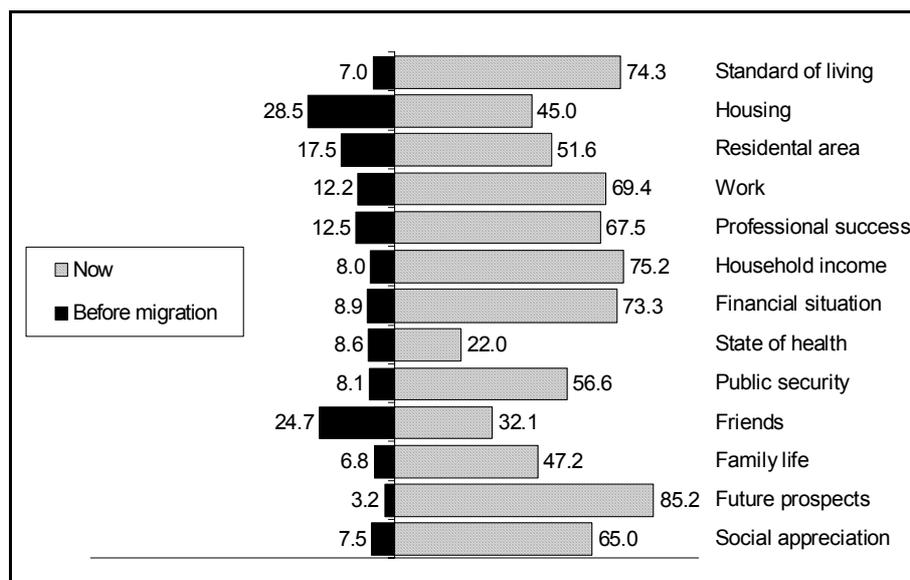


*Note:* The responses are measured using an 11-point scale, where 0 means extremely dissatisfied and 10 means extremely satisfied.

<sup>10</sup> The socio-demographic data collection *Turning Points of the Life-course* is a panel survey started by the Demographic Research Institute of Hungarian Central Statistical Office. In the first wave between November 2001 and February 2002, this covered a representative national sample of 16,394 individuals aged 18–74. For more on methodological description, see Kapitány (ed. 2003).

It is noticeable that satisfaction in most of the spheres is on average higher among immigrants than among the Hungarian population. The only exception is in housing, where immigrants show themselves to be a little less satisfied, which is not surprising when we consider that in all only 56 per cent of them live in their own property.<sup>11</sup> The greater satisfaction with their state of health can obviously be attributed to the fact that there is a higher proportion of younger people among them. Nevertheless it is clear that they are a good deal more satisfied than the Hungarian population, not only with the course of their lives so far and their present standard of living, but also with their future prospects. These ties in with the fact that they assessed their satisfaction with their circumstances of life prior to migration at an average of 5.5 on the 11-point scale, their present life at 7.2, and their circumstances in five years' time at 8.7. Their optimism is also reflected in the fact that 70 per cent considered the statement '*I have confidence in the future*' to be *definitely true*, and a further 26 per cent thought it *probably true*.

Figure 5: 'When were you more satisfied?'—distribution of valid answers (%)



Note: The remainder—making up 100 per cent—is formed of those who experienced the same level of satisfaction in the given area before migration as they do now.

If we compare the present level of satisfaction of immigrants with their level of satisfaction before migration, we find that there are some spheres in which

<sup>11</sup> On the other hand, 56 per cent is a surprisingly high figure for those owning their homes, considering the respondents acquired immigrant status only in the previous year.

they are much more satisfied with the present situation (*Figure 5*). The fact that only an insignificant number were more satisfied with their future prospects before migration points to the lack of prospects experienced by the group at that time. There are two areas in which relatively many of them claimed to be more satisfied with the situation before migration: housing (28.5 per cent) and circle of friends (25 per cent). Considering their actual housing situation, the former is completely understandable, while the majority of those who were more satisfied with their circle of friends before migration were those who had only arrived in the previous year or two, or else who were elderly.

### **Summary**

This study has attempted to shed light on some aspects of the social position of those immigrants from neighbouring countries who acquired immigrant status in Hungary in 2001.<sup>12</sup> On the basis of objective indicators of social position—their place in the labour market—it can be deduced that, for the group as a whole, migration has brought about a positive change in their position, both with respect to their situation before migration, and even relative to the Hungarian population at large. At the same time, the degree of employment and the changes occurring in the individual level of employment mean that significant mobility has taken place, in differing ways among the various occupational groups. Positioning in the labour market has been most successful for those previously at the professional and managerial level, as well as for skilled workers, despite the fact that, from the point of view of employment, a significant proportion have ended up in a worse position. The decline was worst for white-collar workers without a diploma—both from the point of view of being forced out of the labour market, as well as from having to work at a lower level.

As for the social integration of immigrants, it can be stated that, despite the richness of their social relations, it is largely the people coming from the same country of origin that provide their basis of solidarity and mutual assistance. This, however, depends upon the extent of their circle of family and relatives who have moved to Hungary. Apart from this, native Hungarian contacts do form a significant part of their network of relationships. However, it is not the case that there is significant integration of immigrants into civil society.

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<sup>12</sup> In interpreting the results it is important to be aware of the peculiarity of the sample, in that they are individuals who have already acquired immigrant status: the position of this group—and also of those in the process of acquiring this status—is decidedly better than that of other migrant groups in Hungary (for example, guest workers).

Judging by the satisfaction expressed in various spheres by immigrants from neighbouring countries, it appears that their subjective assessment of their position is better than that of the Hungarian population at large. Their current increased satisfaction both in their objective situation (standard of living, income, financial circumstances), and in their future prospects, means that in all ways migration has made a positive change to their lives.

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**Tamás Kolosi, György Vukovich, István György Tóth eds.**

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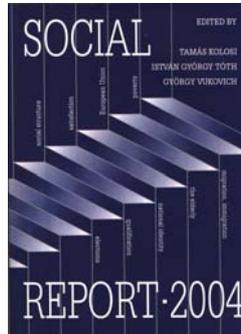
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Contact information:

Ilona Pallagi

H-1518 Budapest, Pf. 71., Hungary

E-mail: [pallagi@tarki.hu](mailto:pallagi@tarki.hu)

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Address: Budaörsi út 45, H-1112 Budapest, Hungary  
Postal address: P.O. Box 71, H-1518 Budapest, Hungary  
Phone: +36 1 309-7676  
Fax: +36 1 309-7666  
E-mail: [tarki@tarki.hu](mailto:tarki@tarki.hu)  
Internet: <http://www.tarki.hu>

**Useful Addresses:**

President: Tamás Kolosi, [kolosi@tarki.hu](mailto:kolosi@tarki.hu)  
General Director: István György Tóth, [toth@tarki.hu](mailto:toth@tarki.hu)  
Scientific Director: Tamás Rudas, [rudas@tarki.hu](mailto:rudas@tarki.hu)  
Survey Dept: Matild Sági, [sagi@tarki.hu](mailto:sagi@tarki.hu)  
Data Archive Dept: Zoltán Fábrián, [fabian@tarki.hu](mailto:fabian@tarki.hu)  
Office Manager: Katalin Werner, [wernerka@tarki.hu](mailto:wernerka@tarki.hu)