

CONTEXTUAL FACTORS OF FAMILY REUNIFICATION AND SOCIAL ADAPTATION

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Abstract

Purpose – to discuss about the role and potential impact of contextual factors of destination country for family reunification and family migrants’ social adaptation.

Design/methodology/approach: secondary data analysis of and qualitative research.

Findings: Sociological analysis of ethnic minorities’ and migrants’ social adaptation suggests taking into account the relevance of social context of the receiving society. In order to explain the concept of social context, it is suggested to apply segmented assimilation theory. According to the theory social context of the receiving society consists of three items: migration and migrants’ integration policies implemented by the host country’s government; receiving society’s attitudes and prejudices about immigrants; co- ethnic communities of immigrants and their resources to support newcomers. This paper discusses about the role and potential impact of the first item – migration and migrants’ integration policy for family migrants’ social adaptation. Migration policy is one of the most important contextual factors as it is the first one that migrants face and continually have to deal with it their entire life in a destination country.

Empirical data of the research, which aim was to reveal patterns of social adaptation of persons reunified with their family members in Lithuania (family migrants), confirms that social context of the host country has an impact for migrants’ social adaptation into receiving society. The analysis of national policies in the context of family reunification and secondary data analysis of the study MIPEX suggest that conditions for family reunification in Lithuania are ‘halfway favourable’, but the status of family migrants is extremely vulnerable. Migration policy and its measures applied for family reunification in Lithuania can be ascribed to the governmental response of ‘passive acceptance’ – there is a possibility to reunify with the family in Lithuania, but

the process to receive residence permit is very bureaucratic and long-lasting, and, consequently, limiting migrants' social adaptation.

Research limitations/implications: This study broadens the knowledge of the phenomenon of family reunification in Lithuania and suggests a theoretical insight to study social adaptation of family migrants taking into account the impact of contextual factors of the receiving society by applying the segmented assimilation theory.

Practical implications: Family reunification is one of the most popular grounds of non-EU citizens' migration to Lithuania. Besides, this group of migrants is more likely to associate their life with the country as they extend residence permits more often than other groups of migrants. Taking into account the demographic situation of the country, it is important to create more welcoming conditions for those who are willing to stay and put a contribution to the welfare of the host country. The analysis of contextual factors for family migrants' social adaptation is relevant to find out what developments in the field are needed and required to achieve changes and facilitate their social adaptation.

Originality/Value: The study focus on the phenomenon of family reunification, which is methodologically and empirically, marginalized in the context of migration research both on national and international level. Besides, it suggests a theoretical insight to study family migrants' social adaptation taking into account the impact of contextual factors of the receiving society by applying segmented assimilation theory.

Keywords: family reunification, social adaptation, contextual factors, migration policy,

Research type: research paper.