



30. 6. 2022

Wafaa Kanaan and Maja Ladić

Ten women, ten different stories ...

The experience of refugee and migrant women in Slovenia

Keywords: Refugees, asylum seekers, migrant women, integration, discrimination, Covid-19

Introduction

Slovenia is still mainly perceived as a transit country for refugees as well as migrants in general. However, the number of refugees and migrants in Slovenia is (slowly) increasing. According to the Statistical Office, 8.2% of the whole population of Slovenia are non-Slovene nationals, which in numbers means 172,789 people (the whole population of Slovenia at the beginning of 2022 was 2,107,180).¹

Until the end of 2021 Slovenia granted 1,010 statuses of international protection,² and in 2022 by the end of June there were 84 new persons with recognized international protection³ in Slovenia (mainly Ukrainians). In 2021 there were 5,301 asylum applications submitted⁴ and in 2022 by the end of June already 3,747 (large majority from Afghanistan)⁵. It is still true that most of the refugee and also migrant population are men, however also here we see changes. The number of migrant women has been increasing in last years, and now women represent around 35% of the migrant population.⁶

According to the UN statistics, the share of women among the migrant population is continuously increasing – globally, as well as in Europe – and women already represent around 51% of the migrant population in the EU.⁷ They are a large and diverse group, still often invisible in society. Yet the public perception of migrants being majority (young) men still remains widely present. Migrant populations, especially those at the crossroads of discrimination due to intersectionalities, are

¹ Statistical Office of the Republic of Slovenia: <https://www.stat.si/StatWeb/news/Index/10268>

² OSIM: <https://www.gov.si/assets/vladne-sluzbe/UOIM/STATISTIKA/Januar-2022/Osebe-s-priznано-mednarodno-zascito-po-letih-2021-v2.pdf>

³ OSIM: <https://www.gov.si/assets/vladne-sluzbe/UOIM/STATISTIKA/Julij-2022/Osebe-s-priznано-mednarodno-zascito-po-mesecih-2022-6.pdf-correctedByPAVE.pdf>

⁴ OSIM: <https://www.gov.si/assets/vladne-sluzbe/UOIM/STATISTIKA/Januar-2022/Novo-nastanjeni-prosilci-po-mesecih-2021-12.pdf>

⁵ OSIM: <https://www.gov.si/assets/vladne-sluzbe/UOIM/STATISTIKA/Julij-2022/Novo-nastanjeni-prosilci-po-mesecih-2022-6.pdf-correctedByPAVE.pdf>

⁶ Republic of Slovenia Statistical Office: <https://www.stat.si/StatWeb/news/Index/10268> and Bajt and Frelih (2022): <https://www.mirovni-institut.si/en/migration-as-empowerment-and-a-personal-success-story/>

⁷ UN: <https://www.un.org/development/desa/en/news/population/international-migrant-stock-2019.html>



exposed to systematic obstacles in various fields of integration including participation in public or society at large. Experts note that this structural disparity has been exacerbated by the Covid-19 crisis in 2020 and 2021.

A recent study⁸ completed in 2021 by the Peace Institute “Reducing and eliminating discrimination based on ethnicity, ‘race’, nationality and/or religion” shows that discrimination in Slovenia based on these personal circumstances is most often experienced by foreigners, especially applicants for international protection and refugees, Roma population, immigrants from the countries of the former Yugoslavia, persons with darker skin colour regardless of nationality. Muslim women (wearing headscarf) and girls are particularly vulnerable. Such discrimination is particularly prevalent in work and employment, health care, access to services, the housing market, and in administrative procedures. Unequal treatment is usually accompanied by two other dimensions that emerge regardless of the area under consideration: prejudice and the language barrier. Lack of proficiency in local language often causes unequal treatment of migrants, despite their formal rights. Foreign citizens are regularly discriminated against on the basis of their name and surname, language, skin colour, ethnicity or religion. This means at least two types of discrimination at the same time - one based on personal circumstances and the other based on citizenship status.

Due to the fact that migrant or refugee women face specific challenges and obstacles in integration, and due to our previous NIEM research work focusing more on refugee and migrant men, we identified the need to carry out additional (small scale) research with the focus solely on women. We prepared questionnaire for semi-structured interviews, with questions reflecting on personal experiences with integration in Slovenia, including the aspect of potential discrimination they might be facing, and Covid-19 impact on their lives.

In the period between December 2021 and May 2022 we have conducted **ten interviews with women** who are asylum seekers (one woman), who got international protection (three women) or who arrived to Slovenia through the family reunification with their husbands who were granted refugee status (six women). All of them have lived in Slovenia for at least one year. Out of the ten interviewed women, one was younger than 18 years, one was in age group 18–25, one in age group 26–35, six of them were in age group 36–45 and one was older than 64 years. Five women were from Syria, three from Iraq, one from Lebanon and one from Palestine, which means that all of them are originally coming from Arabic countries.⁹ Their levels of education vary from primary school to university degree: three have finished primary school, three have finished secondary school, two have university degrees while the youngest one was concluding the primary school at the time of the interview (grade 9). Among the ten interviewed women, one said she lived alone, one of them said she lived with a house-mate (a Slovenian woman), one lived in Asylum home, and seven women lived with their families (with up to 4 members). All of the interviewed women were unemployed;

⁸ See Bajt, Veronika (2021) Zmanjševanje in odpravljanje diskriminacije na podlagi etničnosti, »rase«, nacionalnosti in/ali vere: Project Final Report. Ciljno-raziskovalni projekt v okviru Ciljnega raziskovalnega programa »CRP-2019«. Ljubljana: Mirovni inštitut.

⁹ This was relevant from the language point of view because all interviews were conducted in Arabic language, thus women could easily express themselves.



however some of them occasionally did some work in the black market to increase their income. Three women had specific vulnerabilities: one is a single mother and two are divorced, while eight of them said they have health problems such as heart diseases, chronic diseases, tumor, low back pain, or other.

1. Discrimination

We asked interviewees if they had faced any direct or indirect forms of discrimination since they've arrived to Slovenia, and 60 % said yes and gave examples of different incidents, while 40 % emphasized that they have never experienced any discrimination. The majority of the women who had experienced incidents of discrimination said it happened on public transportation, in public parks, health centers and at the housing market, while two women mentioned that they faced discriminating incidents also in administrative offices.

The six women who said that they experienced several incidents of discrimination in Slovenia stated that the main reason – from their perspectives – was the religion (being a Muslim and wearing a hijab), then nationality (not being Slovenian) and the third their status (refugee, asylum seeker, a wife of a refugee). One woman who never experienced discrimination said that – in her opinion – this is because she is “blonde and looks like European women”. Women who did experience discrimination mainly didn't react to those incidents due to the language barrier. As the majority of women still don't speak Slovenian language they were not able to respond or to react properly, thus the language barrier is making them less confident despite them being aware about the discrimination. They said those incidents bothered them, but also made them stronger and more aware about discrimination. Women experience and face such discriminatory incidents in different ways. One woman said she started hating the country and is considering leaving, while another woman said that (after a few years) now she started responding and not keeping silent anymore. Now she feels stronger and more confident to take an action against anyone who may do a discriminating act either towards her or her daughter.

The following quotes from the interviews illustrate their experiences:

Quote 1: “I was in Tivoli park while I was with my child playing and suddenly a lady came and started cursing me and spitting on me without any reason and I couldn't understand what she was saying exactly and I only started crying and took my child and went back to home.”

Quote 2: “Every day I faced discrimination incidents, in the supermarket, in the bus, on the street, etc. For example, one time I was in the bus with my baby who was in the trolley, then the bus stopped at the station where I have to go down. Two young girls were standing beside the door and I asked them (in English) to let me go down with my baby, but they ignored me and started laughing. I repeated my request again but they continued ignoring me just because I was talking in English. There was a very small space for me and the baby and the trolley and it was very risky for my baby



to fall out of the bus, but they refused to give me space to go out. Then I screamed and I asked the bus driver to talk to them. He did and then finally I could go out with my baby.”

Quote 3: “Once I was walking with my little daughter on the street and from the other side a lady was riding a bike and coming in our direction. She then started to talk in Slovenian and her face expressions showed that she is angry. My daughter, who can understand Slovenian, told me that she is cursing and saying bad words to us. Also, the lady was spitting on us. Because I couldn’t speak good Slovenian I couldn’t reply.”

Quote 4: “Two days ago in the bus station, an old woman was there and she said “you are like Cigan”, so I replied back and said “No, you are like Cigan, you are not Slovenian because Slovenians are kind, not like you.” She said to me: “You should stay at home with your clothes,” because I am wearing hijab and long clothes. Then she refused to continue talking to me.”

2. Housing

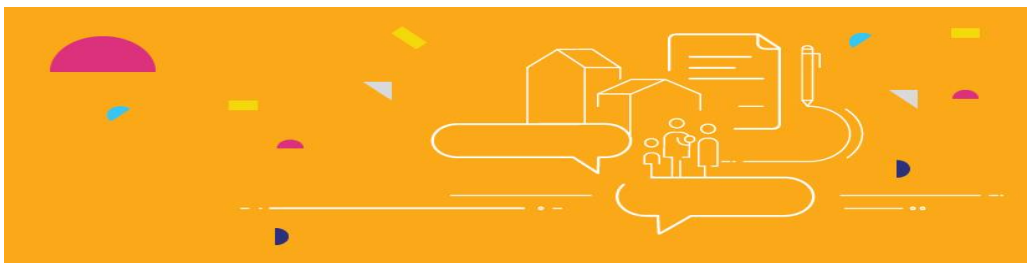
Housing is a burning issue in Slovenia in general, especially in the capital city Ljubljana. However, it is even more challenging for refugees and migrants to find affordable and appropriate housing for themselves and their families. All ten women we interviewed have faced several challenges when searching for a house or an apartment. The majority mentioned the same two problems: the rent is too expensive compared to the monthly income, and the discrimination they faced as owners usually refuse to rent to refugees or migrants, especially if they are unemployed. Other problems were also mentioned, such as bad infrastructure, remote locations and difficulty to access main services, and small space causing overcrowded living conditions especially for bigger families.

The following quotes from the interviews tell us a lot about the situation at the housing market and about the problems the interviewed women experienced in Slovenia:

Quote1: “The renting cost is very expensive compared to the social assistance I receive and even compared to the salary wages in Ljubljana. Another issue is that the government is supporting the rent cost for a limited period of time while we need more time to study and integrate and then find a good job. Why they are not like other EU countries in supporting the rent cost for longer time.”

Quote 2: “The rent cost is very expensive, the contract conditions are really difficult, like limited number of family members, some owners refuse to give a house to a family that has children, others refuse smokers, etc. Also the houses and buildings usually are very old so the infrastructure is very old”.

Quote 3: “Many owners refused to sign rental contract with me because I am a refugee; they were concerned about giving me the permanent address. Another problem about one owner who was a cheat and got money from six families including mine at same time for the same house.”



Quote 4: “We are living in a very old house; it is in a very bad condition in terms of bad ventilation, cracks in the wall, etc. so it is not healthy to live in, especially for my children. We are waiting for so long to get another house”.

Quote 5: “Owners usually refuse to rent to refugees or to a family with many children. Also, owners ask for higher rent while the houses available are not so many and they are very small. Usually when I look for a house I ask a Slovenian friend to call not me, because if I call and the owner realizes that I am not speaking good Slovenian he will refuse to continue talking to me or refuse to rent me the house/apartment”.

Quote 6: “We are living in the same small house since we arrived. It is only two rooms not enough to all the family members and very expensive 800 euros. The kids sleep in the bed room while me and my husband we sleep in the living room”.

Quote 7: “We were living in another house but it was in a remote area not close to services but with lower rent. This is the second time we moved to another place, this house is in a better location but higher price - 800 euro/month and with bills we pay 1200 euros per month while I am not working and only my husband is working”.

Quote 8: “First I was living in asylum home, then they gave me negative decision and a positive decision to my husband. So we asked them to stay together in the asylum home, but they offered us a shared room with other family, so we refused”.¹⁰

3. Employment

Even though the unemployment rate in Slovenia is dropping (for example, unemployment rate in May 2022 was 5.7 % according to the Statistical Office), and despite the fact that in June 2022 the highest number of workers was reached,¹¹ finding a job for refugees is difficult due to various reasons.

The ten women were all unemployed at the time when we conducted the interviews. Some of them had occasionally worked in the black market, but others did not. They mentioned different obstacles they face when trying to access the labor market: the language barrier, proving their education or skills, and discrimination (either due to the refugee status, or due to wearing hijab). Five of them mentioned that they have medical problems so they cannot do physical work, and three mothers mentioned that taking care of their children is another obstacle for them to find a job. None of the women mentioned the Employment office as a problem. Five women said that their only income is

¹⁰ Additional explanation: the woman received negative decision and appealed, which means she could still live in the Asylum home until her decision was final. Her husband received a positive decision; he received a refugee status, and was supposed to move out of the Asylum home, to find an apartment on his own. Not to be separated, they asked OSIM if they could both stay in the Asylum home. OSIM offered them a room, which they would need to share with another family. That is why they refused this offer and they both moved out of the Asylum home.

¹¹ Republic of Slovenia Statistical Office: <https://www.stat.si/StatWeb/Field/Index/3>



the social assistance, while four women said that their families mainly live on their husband's income.

Quote 1: "I am not working currently but I am obliged to look for a job that is less than my qualifications and education. I am a doctor, but I am looking for jobs like working in restaurants".

Quote 2: "They are always pushing us to work while we don't speak the language. I didn't pass the A1 exam and then the Employment Office took me out of unemployment register until I will pass the A1 language exam. To do the exam again, I have to pay around 150 euros, which I cannot afford. Now we are thinking seriously to move to another country in EU."

Quote 3: "I don't think language is a problem to access the labor market. Even though I am still not looking for a job, I think that maybe hijab and religion will be a problem to find a job in the future for me".

4. Health care

"In Slovenia, public healthcare activities are carried out within a public healthcare network, and public healthcare institutions are also designed as service providers. These include primary healthcare centres, hospitals, social assistance institutions, pharmacies, and other institutions."¹²

Refugees have the same access to medical care as the citizens, while asylum seekers only have the right to urgent medical care (which includes emergency medical assistance and emergency rescue services based on the decision of the doctor), the right to emergency dental assistance, and health care for women.¹³ In order to understand the quality of the health care services provided in Slovenia from migrant and refugee women's perspective we asked the interviewees about their experiences when seeking health care services either for themselves or for their family members.

Eight of the interviewed women had a personal doctor, while two of them didn't: the oldest one who is still living in the asylum home and another woman who has been living in Slovenia for 3 years now and she still did not find a doctor or a gynecologist. Also three of those who have a personal doctor mentioned that it was difficult to find one and it took them a very long time. All of the interviewed women have health insurance, except the one that is still an asylum seeker; but she is getting all the health services she needs free of charge (which is not the case for all asylum seekers, in her case it is probably due to her vulnerable situation).

Regarding their needs to access a psychiatrist or a therapist, two out of ten women said they feel they may need a therapist. The youngest woman said that she got some kind of psychological support before the surgery she had, and she feels that she needs a therapist, but she does not feel

¹² Ministry of Health: <https://www.gov.si/en/policies/health/organizacija-zdravstvenega-varstva-2/>

¹³ Article 86(1) International Protection Act



comfortable to talk to anyone. One of the women said that her priority now is to get a personal doctor (for her this is more important).

The interviewed women have had different experiences while getting medical services either for themselves or their family members:

Quote 1: "I had accessed health services several times either for the low back pain or because I had an accident where my nose was broken and need long time treatment and physical therapy. I need a specialist in nose reconstructive surgery but I couldn't find one here".

Quote 2: "The gynecologist was very bad, few years ago I was pregnant and I had bleeding for two months and the baby was alive then I got abortion. She was treating me in a very bad and hard way. After two months I went to the hospital and there they told me "why you didn't come here before?"".

Quote 3: "I have needed to access health services several times for myself and my son, I had my pregnancy follow up and birth here as well. All were good except my experience with Emergency department, it is really bad in terms of long time of waiting, could be 7 or 8 hours."

Quote 4: "During chemotherapy treatment, I received pills not chemotherapy sessions in the hospitals and the pills were not always available. During my treatment I stayed 6 months without getting the drugs and then I asked some friends to bring it from outside Slovenia. Sometimes they gave me only one pill. It was a very hard time and they didn't care. The tumor was due to hormonal problem so they advised me to have a baby and do breastfeeding so I decided to get a baby and till now I am still doing breastfeeding. Now I am not doing any follow up with the doctor about the tumor even sometimes I feel tired and not good but to be honest now I want to receive my treatment outside Slovenia."

Quote 5: "Also for my baby, I took him several times to the hospital when he was few months old. He was so sick and he couldn't breathe well. One time his skin color started to turn blue due to difficulties in breathing. So I took him to the emergency room but they started to ask questions about corona and my child couldn't breathe while they should treat him immediately then ask questions."

Quote 6: "During giving birth, they didn't treat me well. I faced discrimination from the staff. A nurse instead of giving me the drugs each one alone with time intervals between each drug, he gave me all together at same time, so I got severe allergy while I was in the hospital."

Quote 7: "When I arrived to Slovenia the doctor told us that I have to do a surgery. My experience during the surgery and after the surgery was really good as the medical staff were so much caring especially nurses."

Quote 8: "I have many health problems. Every day I need to take at least 10 to 15 pills of different drugs for the chronic diseases I have. I get the medication on a regular basis from a health center for free. During Covid situation, I was too sick and admitted to a hospital. There, the doctor was really



very good with me and explained everything to my sons and daughter but the nurses not all of them were good with me, some yes and some no."

Quote 9: "I have bad experiences: one of them when I did three surgeries due to hernia and they were too bad and I got post-op complications. Also, my experience with child birth was bad, after 6 hours of trying to get birth, I also had complications after the delivery and I was walking using crutches, then I needed physiotherapy sessions. Also my husband usually waits for so long to get an appointment even for a surgery".

Quote 10: "The gynecologist needs so long to reply to the email and to give me an appointment. For example one time I needed to do lab tests but the doctor didn't come back to me to let me know what are the results, this took like 5 months until I heard back from the doctor. Also due to the problem in my back the doctor referred me to physiotherapy but it took one year until I started the physiotherapy sessions and during this year I was really suffering from the pain."

Quote 11: "For my children, they were examined by the dentist only one time and since then no more checkup or follow up until this moment; around two years now".

Quote 12: "In general I feel that there is no proper care in the health system in Slovenia. Also, if I only need like antipyretic and I sent an email to the doctor, he will refuse to prescribe and I have to pay while it should be covered by the health insurance".

Quote 13: "I have hypertension and abdominal hernia. I am suffering of a continuous headache and they didn't do anything except vision test and they told me the reason of headache is the hypertension but I still suffer. Also, I have the abdominal hernia but they refused to do the surgery and the doctor said when your case is urgent we will do the surgery while I am really suffering and couldn't walk due to the pain and the hernia. Additionally, to get an appointment for an x-ray, it took several months."

Quote 14: "My experience is a mix of good and bad. The gynecologist refuses to speak to us in English and she is always saying you are living here for years and you should speak Slovenian. But the general doctor is really very nice."

5. Education

"According to the legislation, migrant children residing in Slovenia have the right to attend primary school under the same conditions as children of Slovenian citizens. However, at the upper secondary education level only citizens of other EU Member States, Slovenes without Slovenian citizenship and refugees can enroll under the same conditions as Slovenian citizens."¹⁴

¹⁴ NIEM report on Slovenia for 2020-21: <https://www.mirovni-institut.si/wp-content/uploads/2022/05/niem-SLO-web.pdf>



The law provides that the right to elementary education has to be ensured to asylum seekers no longer than three months since they lodged their application.¹⁵ There is no age limit attached to this provision. Child asylum seekers are ensured access to education in vocational and secondary schools under the same conditions as Slovenian citizens; adult asylum seekers are also allowed such access. Furthermore, asylum seekers are allowed access to post-secondary and higher education programs and to programs designed for education of adults. The law expressly sets out that, if necessary, preparatory educational assistance has to be provided to children in order to facilitate their access to the education system.¹⁶ This all sounds great on paper, however also in this field newcomers (asylum seekers, refugees or other migrants) are facing various obstacles and challenges – the first one being the language barrier as the whole education system in Slovenia (at all levels) is in Slovenian language.

We asked the 10 women about their experiences with educational or vocational programs. Four of the women mentioned that they are enrolled in the language school (learning Slovenian language). Three of them said that they are enrolled in primary school for adults (two are in 4th grade while the youngest one said that she is in 9th grade). Two of them are planning to enroll in the University but not yet; one of them is waiting for ENIC-NARIC center¹⁷ to reply regarding the assessment of her education certificates; and another woman, a single mother, said: *“I would like to study in the University, but I have two children, one of them is a teenager and the second one is a baby, and both of them need huge care. I am a single mother so I don’t have time to study”*.

Three out of ten women expressed their interest and willingness to enroll in vocational programs, but they have to first finish the primary school. All of the interviewed women confirmed that Covid-19 has negatively affected the education process. Online classes via “Zoom” were less effective due to poor internet connection, noise, difficult to focus and listen, more interruptions at home, no active participation, etc.

The majority of the women agreed that the primary school for adults was more effective in teaching the Slovenian language than the actual Slovenian language courses provided by the Employment Office or other state institutions. They all said they also had to wait quite long for the language course to start. Regarding language learning support, four of them mentioned an NGO Slovenian philanthropy as a good supporter for language learning (with their volunteers), while one woman mentioned that she participated in a sewing/dressmaking course supported by an NGO Odnos.

Regarding children’s education support, the mothers agreed that their kids received some kind of support, but it is still not enough. The children are still struggling with the Slovenian language and also with other subjects at school. One mother said that her oldest child, who was supposed to

¹⁵ International Protection Act (Art. 88): <http://www.pisrs.si/Pis.web/pregledPredpisa?id=ZAKO7103>

¹⁶ International Protection Act (Art. 88): <http://www.pisrs.si/Pis.web/pregledPredpisa?id=ZAKO7103>

¹⁷ ENIC – NARIC centre is the national academic recognition information centre, according to the Act on Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications concerning Higher Education in the European Region, responsible for the assessment and recognition of education in the Republic of Slovenia.



enroll into the University, was not able to do so; because despite finishing the 300-hour language course it was still not enough for him to learn the language at a level needed to study in the University. All mothers agreed that the Covid-19 pandemic has affected the education of their children as the online classes were not effective. They said the performance of their children deteriorated significantly. However, the teachers were trying to provide all the needed support in terms of sending emails and explaining homework.

It is worth mentioning that women did not mention any discriminatory incidents related to the education process and institutions.

Quote 1: "My children receive assistance at school for the language, but it is not enough because the teachers are treating my kids like Slovene and they are not considering that they are still learning the language. Teachers should provide more support and assistance".

Quote 2: "I would like to professionally cook, but they told me that this needs an educational certificate. I have very good skills in cooking, but I have to get a certificate, go to the secondary school; and for this I need a good level of the language so I still need to study the language".

Quote 3: "The problem is that after finishing many hours of the language course I didn't get any benefit as the teachers speak English and Slovenian and I don't speak any of these languages. But now at primary school for adults it is really better because they teach us as if we are in grade 1."

Quote 4: "I would like to study dress making and design, and now I started the primary school (for adults) in order to later study dress making."

Quote 5: "My children received help with mathematics, biology, other specific classes and also they have benefited from the language classes at school. Teachers were very supportive and caring either in the language learning or the difficult subjects; they take them to other individual classes. My son is very smart in math because of the teachers' support".

Quote 6: "I really would like to get a volunteer to practice the language with me. This is something available in other countries. I asked once and got one from Slovene philanthropy but it was only for one month. Then I gave birth and now I need one again. This could really help us to speak the language faster and also will help Slovenian people to accept us more. But it seems, because there are not many Arabic people in Slovenia, this is affecting people to accept us. Now all what I do is practicing with myself using my mirror.

Quote 7: "My teachers and other students used to help me to understand the language. Also during the first year I had an assistant teacher who used to be with me in the class to support me in my lessons. She was explaining to me more so I was able to understand better. I was in the 5th grade at that time, now I am in grade 9 and I have no more problems with the language".



6. Arranging formalities

Five of the interviewed women mentioned that they faced challenges during the Covid-19 pandemic when they had to arrange formal matters, procedures or documents. Either they couldn't or it was very difficult. They were struggling with divorce arrangements, driving license, communication with doctors and getting appointments, applying for social assistance, applying for rental assistance, changing the address, etc. The main problems mentioned were the long waiting time, not being able to communicate, or officials postponing the appointments. Three women said that they had no problem in terms of arranging formalities during the pandemic, they used emails or post to communicate, but they were not able to get a face to face appointments.

Quote 1: "My problem was with driving schools, all were closed and I was planning to get my driving license and this made a delay in my plans".

Quote 2: "My divorce arrangements took longer time due to Covid, we were not able to meet the lawyer during the lockdown and also Slovene philanthropy was closed for a while during that time and they were helping me on this".

7. Covid-19 impact on refugee and migrant women

In Slovenia, the first infection with the coronavirus was confirmed on 4 March 2020. Following the global Covid-19 pandemic, on 12 March 2020 epidemic was declared also in Slovenia. From that day on, several measures have been adopted at the state level to prevent the further spread of the virus. An increase in testing helped Slovenia to monitor the epidemiological situation in the country and, on the basis of the number of positive tests, measures to contain the spread of the coronavirus among the population were adopted and adjusted, including the lockdown.

Women were asked about how coronavirus and preventive measures affected their lives. According to their answers, the pandemic has significantly affected all life aspects of the interviewed refugee and migrant women. Regarding life expenses and income, they all agreed that the main change was that the living costs went up due to spending more time at home, which resulted in consuming more food, electricity, heating, internet, etc. And in addition to all this they were also facing more stress due to the fear of being infected. Two out of ten women said that the owners allowed them to pay less rent during the pandemic and lockdown, while seven women said that the rent did not change during this period. One woman mentioned that their family income decreased because her husband's salary decreased, while their expenses have increased. Another woman mentioned that all activities and events have stopped and due to this, she lost sources of income (before she was an active participant in such types of events).

On the other hand, Covid-19 has affected the appointments (postponing or cancelling them) with official institutions and with doctors which also caused inconveniences to people. All mothers



agreed that the pandemic has also affected the education of their children as online classes were not effective. Consequently, the performance of children deteriorated significantly.

During the lockdown some people were struggling with shopping and home delivery. One woman said: *“During lockdown we were not able most of the time to go out to bring food or items to prepare food. There was delivery service from Mercator but I couldn’t afford it. I need to buy items at least 100 Euros in order to let Mercator bring the items to my house. On the other hands due to stay at home we need to prepare more food because children are at home, no schools. Now we are eating better balanced diet.”*

Regarding the assistance and support that was not available during lockdown, women mentioned the following:

- a) shopping/online shopping/delivery during lockdown;
- b) accessing the market due to the limited bus transportation;
- c) the income should increase to cover the increased living expenses during lockdown;
- d) communication with doctors was really bad, they didn’t reply to emails and it was very difficult to get an appointment;
- e) the need for psychological support as people were afraid of being infected, they were mainly staying at home and that affected their psychological condition (also children) and sometimes resulted in some kind of violence.