



EMVI - Empowering Migrant Voices on Integration and Inclusion Policies

**WP2: National Report Slovenia*
July 2022**

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This Research was funded by the European Union's Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund. The content of it represents the views of the EMVI Project Partnership only and is its sole responsibility. The European Commission does not accept any responsibility for use that may be made of the information it contains.



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I. Participation and Integration Structures in Slovenia

1. Facts and Figures

In the current year, 2,106,215 inhabitants live in Slovenia, of which 1,057,473 are men and 1,048,742 are women. The share of foreign citizens in Slovenia is 8.3% of the total population, which represents 174,340 people, namely 112,217 men and 62,123 women. Slovenia is one of the ageing societies—the natural increase in population growth has been negative every year from 2017 onwards, as more people die each year than are born. On 1 April 2022, Slovenia had 965 inhabitants less than three months earlier. In the first quarter of the current year, the number of Slovenian citizens decreased by 2,900, while the number of foreigners increased by 1,900. Of all foreigners, the largest number of foreigners in Slovenia are citizens of the former Yugoslavia (137,484), followed by citizens of the European Union (21,192), and the least number of citizens of all other countries (13,766) (Statistical Office of the Republic of Slovenia, 2022). Here, the migrant population in Slovenia is understood as people who have migrated from other countries, including asylum seekers, refugees (people who gained international or subsidiary protection), as well as third-country nationals. Most of them are non-EU and come from the former Yugoslavia’s successor states. Croatia’s status changed from third-country to EU Member State in 2013. As for the statistical composition of the female migrant population in Slovenia, it follows the general trend, as the majority are classified as third-country nationals and come from neighbouring Western Balkans, much smaller numbers come from the EU, and a tiny population are refugees. (Bajt and Frelj, 2022)

| Country of origin | Number |
|------------------------|--------|
| Albania | 156 |
| Austria | 486 |
| Belgium | 104 |
| Belarus | 182 |
| Bulgaria | 3,281 |
| Bosnia and Herzegovina | 79,616 |
| Cyprus | 16 |
| The Czech Republic | 202 |
| Montenegro | 928 |
| Denmark | 30 |
| Estonia | 30 |
| Finland | 41 |
| France | 316 |
| Greece | 72 |
| Croatia | 10,234 |
| Ireland | 64 |
| Iceland | 7 |



| | |
|----------------------|--------|
| Italy | 2.766 |
| Kosovo | 22,386 |
| Latvia | 55 |
| Liechtenstein | 2 |
| Lithuania | 44 |
| Luxembourg | 4 |
| Hungary | 666 |
| Malta | 10 |
| Moldova, Republic of | 233 |
| Monaco | 1 |
| Germany | 984 |
| The Netherlands | 255 |
| Norway | 23 |
| Poland | 279 |
| Portugal | 71 |
| Romania | 412 |
| Russian Federation | 3,519 |
| San Marino | 1 |
| North Macedonia | 14,048 |
| Slovak Republic | 472 |
| Serbia | 17,257 |
| Spain | 150 |
| Sweden | 76 |
| Switzerland | 103 |
| Ukraine | 2.397 |
| United Kingdom | 692 |
| Algeria | 25 |
| Angola | 1 |
| Benin | 1 |
| Botswana | 1 |
| Burkina Faso | 6 |
| Chad | 3 |
| Egypt | 111 |
| Eritrea | 87 |
| Ethiopia | 7 |
| Gabon | 1 |
| The Gambia | 27 |
| Ghana | 21 |
| Guinea | 3 |
| Guinea-Bissau | 2 |



| | |
|---------------------------------------|-----|
| South Africa | 55 |
| Cameroon | 18 |
| Kenya | 18 |
| Comoros | 1 |
| Congo, the Democratic Republic of the | 10 |
| Liberia | 1 |
| Libyan Arab Jamahiriya | 12 |
| Madagascar | 11 |
| Malawi | 1 |
| Mali | 3 |
| Morocco | 34 |
| Mauritius | 4 |
| Mozambique | 3 |
| Namibia | 1 |
| Nigeria | 76 |
| Rwanda | 4 |
| Senegal | 2 |
| Sierra Leone | 2 |
| Côte d'Ivoire | 3 |
| Somalia | 20 |
| Sudan | 3 |
| Tanzania, United Republic of | 3 |
| Tunisia | 70 |
| Uganda | 4 |
| Zambia | 4 |
| Cape Verde | 2 |
| Zimbabwe | 6 |
| Argentina | 52 |
| Barbados | 1 |
| Belize | 1 |
| Bolivia, Plurinational State of | 3 |
| Brazil | 158 |
| Chile | 17 |
| Dominican Republic | 165 |
| Ecuador | 9 |
| Guyana | 1 |
| Guatemala | 5 |
| Haiti | 3 |
| Honduras | 2 |
| Jamaica | 5 |



| | |
|---------------------------------------|-------|
| Colombia | 50 |
| Costa Rica | 10 |
| Cuba | 71 |
| Mexico | 63 |
| Nicaragua | 4 |
| Panama | 3 |
| Paraguay | 3 |
| Peru | 37 |
| Saint Kitts and Nevis | 1 |
| St Lucia | 2 |
| El Salvador | 2 |
| Trinidad and Tobago | 5 |
| Uruguay | 1 |
| Venezuela, the Bolivarian Republic of | 45 |
| Canada | 81 |
| United States | 437 |
| Afghanistan | 56 |
| Armenia | 9 |
| Azerbaijan | 23 |
| Bangladesh | 40 |
| Philippines | 161 |
| Georgia | 12 |
| Hong Kong | 5 |
| India | 275 |
| Indonesia | 55 |
| Iraq | 80 |
| Iran, the Islamic Republic of | 201 |
| Israel | 63 |
| Japan | 87 |
| Yemen | 4 |
| Jordan | 25 |
| Cambodia | 2 |
| Kazakhstan | 194 |
| Kyrgyzstan | 12 |
| China | 1,382 |
| Korea, Republic of | 43 |
| Kuwait | 1 |
| Lao People's Democratic Republic | 3 |
| Lebanon | 20 |
| Maldives | 11 |



| | |
|---------------------------------|-----|
| Malaysia | 6 |
| Myanmar | 1 |
| Mongolia | 3 |
| Nepal | 21 |
| Oman | 1 |
| Pakistan | 41 |
| Palestinian Territory, Occupied | 29 |
| Saudi Arabia | 5 |
| Singapore | 4 |
| The Syrian Arab Republic | 271 |
| Sri Lanka | 16 |
| Tajikistan | 3 |
| Thailand | 327 |
| Taiwan, Province of China | 23 |
| Türkiye | 406 |
| Turkmenistan | 2 |
| Uzbekistan | 26 |
| Vietnam | 22 |
| Australia | 82 |
| Fiji | 2 |
| New Zealand | 18 |
| Papua New Guinea | 2 |
| Solomon Islands | 1 |

Foreign citizens in Slovenia in 2021
(Statistical Office of the Republic of Slovenia, 2022)

The main reasons for migration in Slovenia are work, family reunification, studies, other reasons, a family member of a Slovenian citizen, and a family member of an EU citizen. Like other EU countries, Slovenia is substituting its labour deficit with migrant workers due to the declining number of people in employment. Yet, state immigration policies have long remained embedded in understanding Slovenia as a transit country (Bajt and Pajnik 2014; Bajt and Frelih 2019), and migrant integration is not deemed a policy priority.

In August 2022, 910 persons in Slovenia had recognised international protection, but 159 of them lived abroad, so 751 refugees currently live in Slovenia, mainly from Syria, Ukraine, Eritrea, Iran, and the former Yugoslavia. There are also some from Somalia, Iraq, Afghanistan, Kazakhstan, Türkiye, Palestine, the Russian Federation, and least from Sudan, DR Congo, Cameroon, Sierra Leone, Yemen, Zimbabwe, Nigeria, Albania, Ethiopia, India, Morocco, Pakistan and Sri Lanka. (Office for the Support and Integration of Migrants, 2022) Even otherwise, Slovenia is quite restrictive in terms of granting international protection, as shown in the table below.



| Year | Asylum proposals | Approved statuses |
|------|------------------|-------------------|
| 1995 | 6 | 2 |
| 1996 | 35 | 0 |
| 1997 | 72 | 0 |
| 1998 | 337 | 1 |
| 1999 | 744 | 0 |
| 2000 | 9244 | 11 |
| 2001 | 0 | 25 |
| 2002 | 640 | 3 |
| 2003 | 1101 | 37 |
| 2004 | 1208 | 39 |
| 2005 | 1674 | 26 |
| 2006 | 579 | 9 |
| 2007 | 434 | 9 |
| 2008 | 260 | 4 |
| 2009 | 202 | 20 |
| 2010 | 246 | 23 |
| 2011 | 357 | 24 |
| 2012 | 304 | 34 |
| 2013 | 272 | 37 |
| 2014 | 385 | 44 |
| 2015 | 277 | 46 |
| 2016 | 1308 | 170 |
| 2017 | 2442 | 152 |
| 2018 | 2868 | 104 |
| 2019 | 3821 | 88 |
| 2020 | 3548 | 83 |
| 2021 | 5301 | 19 |

Proposed and approved international protection statuses in Slovenia in the years 1995–2021
(Office for the Support and Integration of Migrants, 2022)

According to the interviewees’ experiences and corroborated by the experts’ advocacy work with migrants, bureaucratic matters are problematic in Slovenia. This also involves getting correct and quick information regarding various issues. Access to services is particularly difficult in smaller towns and villages (or in places where there are considered to be no immigrants). Also, there is a lack of services or support that would include migrant women in the needs assessment process. The influence of the COVID-19 pandemic on the integration processes of migrants in Slovenia has been extremely negative, especially for female



migrants. Even though the latest analyses show how education services—particularly language courses—were the most likely type of service to be moved online across all EU countries (EWSI 2022), the Slovenian reality was that most language courses for foreign nationals were stalled or even cancelled, resulting in a massive backlog in terms of accessibility. (Bajt and Frelih, 2022)

2. Main Official Institutions in the Country responsible for Migrant Integration

Within the Ministry of the Interior, the Directorate for Migration operates, whose task is to plan and implement migration policy, which means regulating the field of regular migration, decision-making procedures on international protection and integration of foreigners and persons with recognised international protection. Under the Directorate operate Migration Policy and Legislation Division, International Protection Procedures Division and Regular Migration Procedures Division. The Directorate also prepares and coordinates proposals for measures for the implementation of migration policy and normative acts, which are the basis for the work and decisions of the government Office for the Support and Integration of Migrants.

Established in 2017, the Office for the Support and Integration of Migrants is taking over part of the responsibilities that were previously under the authority of the Ministry of the Interior, such as providing asylum seekers accommodation, support and psychosocial assistance and offering integration support to persons granted international protection, while devising policies and administrative procedures for obtaining the status of international protection remain under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of the Interior. Asylum seekers are received by the Reception and Support Division, which provides accommodation at the Asylum Centre or one of its units. Through different programmes at the Asylum Centre, asylum seekers may exercise their rights per the applicable legislation. Following the successful completion of the procedure, persons granted international protection are provided assistance through the Integration Division to better integrate into Slovenian society. Each person granted protected status is provided accommodation at one of the integration houses and assigned an integration counsellor, who helps devise a personal integration plan. To ensure faster integration, persons under international protection may participate in various programmes, among which the most important is a Slovenian language course. Despite its broad name, the Government Office for the Support and Integration of Migrants is only responsible for asylum seekers and people with the recognised status of international (refugee or subsidiary) protection.

The vast majority of foreigners in Slovenia, however, are not asylum seekers and beneficiaries of international protection. Hence, integration measures in this regard remain without a proper implementation. In addition, local communities lack the formal power to implement integration policy, even though it is in actuality conducted at the local community level and sustained by various non-governmental sector programmes and short-term projects (Ladić et al., 2020).



The Office of the Government of the Republic of Slovenia for National Minorities is an independent governmental professional service that globally monitors the implementation of constitutional and legal provisions relating to the special rights of the autochthonous Italian and Hungarian national minorities and the position and special rights of the Roma community in Slovenia. The implementation of constitutional and legal provisions relating to individual areas is monitored by the competent national authorities or the authorities of self-governing local communities. The Constitution of the Republic of Slovenia affords special rights only to the autochthonous Italian and Hungarian national minorities in Slovenia, which are directly represented in the representative bodies of local self-government and in the National Assembly (parliament). The Roma community is also recognised a special status regulated by a special law. But the largest community of the ex-Yugoslav members does not have this status.

The only government agency that deals with the ex-Yugoslav minority is the Cultural Diversity and Human Rights Service at the Ministry of Culture, which ensures that rights are realised in a considered and coordinated manner in various areas, from the protection of cultural heritage through the media and concern for language policy to creativity. Therefore, they monitor the situation, consult with stakeholders and analyse the needs of vulnerable social groups, especially ethnic communities and the disabled. They propose legislative and other measures enabling these communities to preserve and develop their own cultures and allowing everyone access to the rich treasury of all kinds of cultures. They financially support cultural projects enabling social integration and social coexistence. Together with other ministries, they represent the Republic of Slovenia in international institutions that ensure the realisation of human rights and participate in creating special measures that strengthen intercultural dialogue.

3. Main Legal Framework in the Country responsible for Migrant Integration

The Constitution of RS defines the right to asylum, but the institute is further defined by the 2016 International Protection Act. With the latter, the fundamental principles and guarantees in international protection procedures, the procedure for recognition, extension and withdrawal of international protection, the duration and substance of international protection, and the scope of rights and duties of applicants for international protection and persons granted international protection are determined. The law was amended in March 2021 so that the standards and rights of asylum seekers and persons with recognised international protection were lowered. As the Ombudsperson also stressed, “some changes raise questions about their impact on the fairness of procedures and their constitutionality and compliance with EU legislation and international law” (2021: 18). The first negative change in the law is the shortening of the integration period from three to two years, which means that system support for integration is now only guaranteed for two more years after status recognition. The new amendment also introduces a so-called “integration activities agreement”, which the beneficiary must conclude with the Office for the Support and



Integration of Migrants within one month after the recognition of the status (Article 90), which shows the state's patronising attitude towards individuals with recognised international protection. This is another measure from above that places persons with recognised international protection in a subordinate position. If a person with recognised international protection signs this contract, they have access to the rights that should be guaranteed to every person with recognised international protection, regardless of such conditionality. Indeed, integration should be an inclusive two-way process, not a contractual obligation. (Ladić et al., 2022) Another damaging amendment to the law introduces restrictions on the free movement of asylum seekers (Article 78), who can only move freely within the municipality where they are accommodated. (Ladić et al., 2022) Among the most problematic changes is the newly introduced obligation of legal advisers (lawyers) who represent asylum seekers to disclose personal information about their clients to the Ministry of the Interior, under the threat that they will not be allowed to represent asylum seekers in the future. (Ladić et al., 2022)

The basic framework for migration and integration policies in Slovenia is also provided in the 2011 Foreigners Act, which regulates permission to stay by distinguishing between temporary and permanent residence status. The law further prescribes the conditions and methods of entry, exit and stay of foreigners in the Republic of Slovenia. In 2017, the law was amended to allow restrictions on the right to asylum. Indeed, the National Assembly (parliament) could vote on stopping access to the asylum procedure if migration posed a "threat to public order and internal security in the Republic of Slovenia". These provisions were later declared unconstitutional by the Constitutional Court of the Republic of Slovenia and annulled. However, the government coalition, which at that time had a majority in the National Assembly, contrary to the decision of the Constitutional Court of the Republic of Slovenia, reintroduced a similar option in 2021 with amendments in the case of a "complex crisis in the field of migration" (Articles 10a and 10b), which would allow the National Assembly to temporarily suspend the implementation of the law and limit access to asylum. (Ladić et al., 2022) The amended Foreigners Act (Article 47) also introduces the passing of the Slovenian language exam at entry-level A1 as a condition for extending the residence permit of family members of third-country nationals in general, which also affects family members of persons with recognised international protection if they fail to initiate the family reunification process under more lenient conditions (within 90 days of status recognition). In addition, the amended law introduces a new condition for obtaining permanent residence status, i.e. passing the test of knowledge of the Slovenian language at level A2. This is a significant change for persons with subsidiary protection and their family members who apply for a permanent residence permit after five years of residence in Slovenia. (Ladić et al., 2022)

The 2005 Temporary Protection of Displaced Persons Act regulates the introduction, duration and termination of temporary protection of displaced persons, the conditions and procedures for obtaining and terminating temporary protection, and the rights and obligations of persons with temporary protection.



Important for the context of the political participation of migrants is the fact that in 2002, amendments to the 1993 Local Elections Act and the 1994 Political Parties Act entered into force. The first, as the most important innovation, introduces the right to vote in local elections also for foreigners with permanent residence (but not for foreigners with temporary residence or asylum seekers), while the second allows EU citizens to become members of Slovenian political parties (but not for all other foreign citizens, e.g. to ex-Yugoslav citizens, of whom there are the most in Slovenia).

4. Main Policies in the Country Responsible for Migration Integration

The field of integration in Slovenia is defined in the Strategy on Migration adopted in July 2019, where integration is one of its six pillars. (Ministry of the Interior, 2019) Previously, some aspects of integration were defined in the Decree on Aliens Integration, which was in force in 2008–2013 (supplemented in 2011) and determined the methods and conditions for the inclusion of foreigners who have a residence permit in Slovenia in cultural, economic and social life, such as: learning the Slovenian language and familiarising themselves with Slovenian history, culture and the constitutional system; inclusion in the educational system for obtaining a publicly valid education and in procedures for obtaining certificates of national professional qualification; promotion of mutual knowledge and understanding with Slovenian citizens; information regarding their integration into Slovenian society, especially regarding their rights and duties, employment opportunities, education and personal development. The 2002 Resolution on Immigration Policy confirmed and supplemented the principles, goals and foundations of the Resolution on the Immigration Policy of the Republic of Slovenia, with an emphasis on measures for its implementation in the context of modern migration movements and new approaches to the development of the European Union's common migration and asylum policy. The Government also briefly described its integration policy on the website of the Ministry of the Interior, with objectives based on the EU's Common Basic Principles, placing emphasis on the two-way dynamic of integration.

The integration pillar of the 2019 Strategy on Migration underlines the importance of a holistic approach: cooperation and complementarity of all actors in formulating and implementing policies and practices. Integration is, therefore, formally recognised as a complex process involving various fields, including protection against all forms of discrimination. It appears, however, that the question of integration is frequently reduced to learning the host country's language, which reveals an understanding of integration as only the immigrants' responsibility (Jalušič and Bajt, 2020).

In Slovenia, the field of migration, including integration, is entirely within the competence of the state, and this is primarily how the local authorities see it. The state does not transfer integration obligations to local communities, although it is evident that integration takes place at the local level. However, the Strategy states: "A large part of social and cultural integration belongs to the areas that should be regulated at the local level. Therefore, it is necessary to mobilise personnel resources also at the local level and to consider the transfer



of powers and resources for certain integration activities to the local level” (Ministry of the Interior, 2019: 39). Some local authorities carry out some activities on their own initiative or on the initiative of non-governmental organisations, but these activities are minimal and are not necessarily aimed at supporting the integration of persons with recognised international protection, but at migrants in general. The City of Ljubljana, for example, provides free premises for some non-governmental organisations (for example, Slovenian Philanthropy, which runs a day centre for refugees). On the other hand, in some local communities, there is a lot of resistance and xenophobia against migrants in general and refugees in particular. The strategy states: “It is necessary to strengthen the integration programmes of migrants and the majority population. Programmes of intercultural centres should be implemented in various Slovenian places and day centres for migrants should be established, which would give especially vulnerable individuals the possibility of information and counselling as well as participation in various group activities.” (Ministry of the Interior, 2019: 43) However, this is not the case in most cases. (Ladić et al., 2022)

As stated in the 2020 Report on the work of the Migration Directorate (Ministry of the Interior, 2021: 30), in 2020, projects were implemented to organise centres of intercultural dialogue in Koper, Maribor and Velenje, and for the implementation of these projects the amount of EUR 59,496.92 was spent: “The key goals of the project are: to create an aware and informed environment that will accept and encourage the integration of foreigners into Slovenian society, offering assistance in the integration of foreigners (applicants for international protection; persons who have already obtained it, and citizens of third countries) into the local environment, activating and connecting the local population, which is ready to participate in creating an environment open to the integration of foreigners, and raising awareness among the local population about integration as a two-way process” (ibid.). Although this sounds adequate in theory, in reality, a significant gap exists between theory and practice (both nationally and locally). There is no such body, neither at the national nor the local level, which would also include persons with recognised international protection and consult with them regarding issues related to their integration. (Ladić et al., 2022)

Another substantive gap between theory and practice can be observed if the fieldwork data is compared with the strategy statements: “It is necessary to study the possible forms and methods of participation of migrants both in the formulation of the integration policy and in the implementation of integration activities, as it will be possible to detect actual needs and simultaneously increase the motivation to participate in activities, which will lead to greater efficiency in the implementation of integration measures. It is necessary to encourage the self-organisation of persons with international protection to defend and represent their rights and the possibility of active inclusion in the preparation, implementation and monitoring of integration policies and measures. Other immigrants are mostly already organised within associations. Following the example of the Council for the Integration of Foreigners, which operates at the national level, it is necessary to consider a similar form of body that would operate at the local level to identify integration problems, find appropriate



solutions and preparing additional integration activities.” (Ministry of the Interior, 2019: 43) However, in practice, this encouragement is yet to materialise, and at most, migrants are forlorn, isolated, underrepresented and disorganised. (Ladić et al., 2022)

Slovenia introduced its first and current integration programme in 2008 called Initial Integration of Immigrants. It is a free programme for learning the Slovenian language, including learning about Slovenian society. The free and optional programme is intended for third-country nationals. The programme focuses on Slovene history, culture and constitution, and includes a mutual introduction course between foreigners and Slovene citizens. It provides language courses and civic education, but does not offer vocational training. Third-country nationals can follow 180-, 120- or 60-hour language courses, depending on the type of permits they hold and the duration of their stay before their enrolment.

For refugees, the Slovenian language course is 300 hours which is obligatory and which can be prolonged for 100 more hours in the event of 80% attendance. A variety of institutions provides the classes, usually NGOs, which are selected through a tendering procedure every two years. Within this programme, refugees get some basic information about Slovenian society carried out by NGOs.

For persons relocated to the Republic of Slovenia based on the annual quota, an orientation programme is organised aimed at learning the basics of the Slovenian language, getting to know the institutions and practical knowledge of everyday life in the Republic of Slovenia. Each individual is involved in the programme for 3 months. Similarly, basic integration support for displaced persons from Ukraine with temporary protection in Slovenia is organised and includes information on the rights and duties of persons with temporary protection for a period of 12 hours, as well as literacy and educational support for persons with temporary protection.

Web portal Info tujci (<https://infotujci.si/>) brings main information for third-country nationals and persons under international protection about the integration into Slovenian society, including information about free Slovenian language courses, examination of the Slovenian language at the basic level, health care, social security, education, accommodation, marriage, birth and parenting, motor vehicles in Slovene and English language.

The 2011 Declaration of the Republic of Slovenia on the Position of the National Minorities of the Peoples of the Former SFRY in the Republic of Slovenia refers to the members of the Albanians, Bosniaks, Montenegrins, Croats, Macedonians and Serbs who had an actual and formal constitutive role in the former common state of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia. Upon independence and the Constitution of Slovenia as an independent state, they were placed in an objectively new and different national minority position, where they are afforded all individual rights and human freedoms, but not collective ones. Although there are various societies, associations and federations of societies and associations to



ensure the preservation of their own national identity by cultivating their culture, using their mother tongue and script, preserving their history, nurturing contacts with their mother nation, developing scientific research and activities in the field of public information and publishing and strengthening the awareness of all citizens of the Republic of Slovenia about their presence and activities, their main demand to be officially recognised as a national minority is still not fulfilled. The members of the mentioned national minorities enjoy all the individual rights afforded to citizens by the Constitution, but they have the status of a “new national minority”, which is a specific legal and political conglomerate. Research in this area shows “that on one hand these minorities are not adequately represented in the existing system, while on the other hand such formal representation is not strictly necessary; of far greater importance is identification of these communities as the new national minorities and establishment of the relevant Council in the Government of the Republic of Slovenia, which would represent their voice within the Slovenian political system. Above all, it is further necessary to create an adequate socio-political climate through the school system and the appropriate support in the cultural domain, all of which would ensure that these minorities no longer required special forms of political representation.” (Striković, 2011: 15)

5. Inclusion of Migrants in the Design and Implementation of Integration Policies

“Political integration means that immigrants are involved in political decision-making processes in the country, that they can actively participate in these processes and also influence decisions. The right to vote is very important for political integration. The right to vote in parliamentary or other elections at the state level is usually obtained by immigrants only with citizenship, while at lower levels (local and regional elections) a certain period of legal residence in the country is increasingly sufficient to obtain the right to vote. Political integration does not only mean the possibility for immigrants to participate in political processes but also the actual presence or the participation of immigrants either through elections, political parties, special forms of minority representation, etc.” (Bešter, 2007: 111)

In 2012, the Government of the Republic of Slovenia established the Council for the Integration of Foreigners, which—officially—performs the following tasks: gives opinions and recommendations on national programmes important for the integration of foreigners, gives opinions and recommendations and participates in the procedures for the preparation of laws and other regulations that affect the field of integration of foreigners, monitors the implementation of integration measures, analyses the situation and reports on this annually to the Government of the Republic of Slovenia. However, at least as of 2018, foreigners (neither persons with recognised international protection nor third-country nationals) are not members of this Council. Namely, the Council configuration was changed to include only two representatives of the Government Office for the Support and Integration of Migrants and state secretaries—representatives of ministries of the interior, of labour, family, social affairs and equal opportunities, of education, science and sport and of culture. The Council failed to meet at all in 2018 and 2019. In 2020, it did meet, and according to its annual report, it ordered two analyses related to persons with recognised international protection:



1. Government Office for the Support and Integration of Migrants shall prepare data on abuses of social transfers by foreigners with recognised international protection who leave Slovenia, and shall send it for further consideration to the Ministry of Labour, Family, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities; and 2. by the end of 2021, an analysis of the inclusion of foreigners in the “Initial Integration of Immigrants” programme (Slovene with elements of learning about Slovenian society) should be carried out, which should monitor the success and adequacy of programmes for learning Slovenian and propose possible changes (Ladić et al., 2022). The annual report also shows that the Council considers the reduction of the period of integration of persons with recognised international protection from three to two years as a tool for “encouraging persons with recognised international protection to integrate into Slovenian society more actively in the field of employment” (ibid.). The functioning of this Council is thus far controversial.

Based on the positions of the 2011 Declaration on the Status of National Communities of the Nations of the Former Yugoslavia, the Council of the Government of the Republic of Slovenia was established for issues of national communities of the former Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia in the Republic of Slovenia, as the consultative body of the Government for the area of these “new national communities”. Although—unlike the Council for the Integration of Foreigners in which no foreigner has a seat—in this Council, except for representatives of the Ministry of Culture, Education, Science and Sports; the Ministry of the interior; the Ministry of Foreign Affairs; the Ministry of Labour, Family, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities; Office of the Government of the Republic of Slovenia for Nationalities; Public fund of the Republic of Slovenia for Cultural Activities; there are also representatives of the Albanian, Bosniak, Montenegrin, Croatian, Macedonian and Serbian national communities in Slovenia, this Council is not functional, has no power and exists only formally.

From May 2022, when the new left-centre government in the Republic of Slovenia took office, the Ministry of the Interior also experienced its own transformation, which with the new minister also approached the issue of migration in a more democratic, inclusive and civilised manner, and established a Working Consultative Group for the field of migration, in to which a large number of the most prominent NGOs from the field of migration are invited. Although it is not clear, how this body will operate and how binding its proposals and findings will be, it is positive that this group includes representatives of three migrant organisations: Gmajna Cultural Association, Infokolpa and Intercultural Dialogue Society.

Also, the Office for the Support and Integration of Migrants plans to establish a consultative working group composed of refugees, but for now, this is only in the conceptual phase.

In 2006, Slovenia signed Convention on the Participation of Foreigners in Public Life at Local Level, but never ratified it. According to The Migrant Integration Policy Index, Slovenia have numeration 30, meaning slightly unfavourable regarding enfranchised or regularly informed, consulted or involved in local civil society and public life. Although this is not the best, it is still better than Italy (25), Austria (20) and Greece (20), and regarding the countries from the



project consortium, only Germany (60) is better regarding political participation of migrants. (Solano and Huddleston, 2020).

However, as the research emphasises, all integration measures will not give satisfactory results if we do not also think about how to prepare the entire society to be more open to others and different and to be able to accept and respect cultural differences between people (Bešter, 2003: 116).

6. Main Migrant Organisations in the Country

There are many cultural societies operating in Slovenia that nurture the language, culture and traditions of the countries of the former Yugoslavia, which are united in the Association of Cultural Societies of Constituent Nations and Nationalities of the dissolved SFRY in Slovenia. The Association has tried to recognise the minority status of these peoples officially, but so far, without success. The most active of the individual organisations is the Cultural Society Danilo Kiš, whose activity goes beyond the Serbian community and is dedicated to reflecting on minority status in general and discusses all relevant topics from the Balkan region.

Other migrants—asylum seekers, refugees, and immigrants—are primarily not organised in their own societies but join non-governmental organisations that enable them to participate, integrate and engage. Slovenian Philanthropy – Association for the Promotion of Volunteering is a humanitarian organisation that has been working in the public interest since 1992. As part of the Migration Programme, they deal with various aspects of modern migration. Individuals and groups of migrants, such as asylum seekers and persons with recognised international protection, unaccompanied children, undocumented and other migrants are offered counselling, information, psychosocial and psychotherapeutic assistance and advocacy. They organise various activities to facilitate the integration of migrants into the new environment, such as familiarisation with the local environment, organisations and institutions and the habits of the majority population, assistance in arranging documentation, learning the Slovenian language and teaching assistance, social, sports and cultural activities and other forms of integration assistance. At the systemic level, they advocate for appropriate legislation and practice in the field of migration in Slovenia and Europe, as well as for adequate access for migrants to health care and other public services. Day centres for migrants were established in Ljubljana and Maribor, which, with the constant increase in users, prove how important it is to implement such programmes, especially in larger cities, which also represent a safe spot for all migrants. Since 2010, every year on World Refugee Day (20 June), Slovenian Philanthropy has organised the Migrant Film Festival to offer domestic audiences a selection of insightful and provocative films that highlight current topics related to migration, asylum and refugees. They also prepare a rich festival programme with various workshops and talks with filmmakers every year.

Association Odnos – an organisation for the development and integration of social sciences and cultures, develops community activities aimed at supporting and helping asylum seekers



and persons with international protection in arranging their living situations, i.e. it offers personal information, counselling, educational assistance, and organises various group meetings. The purpose of their activities is social inclusion, including the upbringing and education of children and young people for a creative, non-violent, socially diverse, and responsible life. In this way, they create the conditions for encouraging creativity and obtaining diverse informal learning and social and cultural experiences. They strive for social science literacy or sensitising children, adolescents and adults for active and responsible citizenship and participation in a culturally plural modern society. They have specially designed social literacy and integration and emancipation programmes for migrant women.

The Humanitas Association – Centre for Global Learning and Cooperation is a non-governmental, non-profit and independent organisation that has been working in the field of global learning and support programmes for children and local communities since 2000. In 2019, they created the interactive performance *Through the Eyes of a Refugee*, which puts the audience in the role of a refugee on a dangerous journey to Europe and thus brings the refugee experience closer to the audience through empathy. The performance has already had 60 repetitions and was seen by more than 2,000 people.

Global – Institute for Global Learning and Project Development is a young non-governmental organisation founded in 2010 that realises its goals through activities divided into two main areas: global learning and project development. In the field of global learning, they want to encourage a process of learning and action that emphasises interdependence and the individual's involvement in global events. In the field of project development, they offer individuals and organisations professional support in the form of finding financial resources, finalising ideas into concrete projects, and project management and implementation challenges. The most recognisable project of Institute Global is the launch of the restaurant and catering company *Skuhna* (2012), which offers authentic dishes from Africa, Asia and South America prepared by international chefs, in most cases migrants themselves. The value that pervades *Skuhna's* entire concept is that diversity enriches us and mutual cooperation infuses us with strength.

The Institute for African Studies – Centre for Research, Education, Migration, Diversity, Intercultural Dialogue, Advocacy, Sustainability and Global Perspectives is a non-governmental and non-profit organisation that operates nationally and internationally with the aim of being an educational and research centre in the field of discrimination, advocacy, social justice, migration and global perspectives. Their vision is to become a research and education centre and information bank on African and global perspectives.

ADRA (Adventist Development and Relief Agency) Slovenia is part of an independent international humanitarian organisation, ADRA International, founded by members of the Adventist Christian Church. One of the areas of their activity is migration. They work mainly at the humanitarian level and help refugees to collect funds to pay the costs of family reunification.



Cultural Association Gmajna is a non-governmental and non-profit association established in 2002 to implement social welfare, culture, and education activities. Since its establishment, it has worked with asylum seekers, refugees and migrant workers. After opening and closing the Balkan corridor (2015–2016), it has been actively engaged in the integration of refugees and asylum seekers. Members of the organisation are volunteers, activists, migrants, refugees and asylum seekers who daily work with people on the move before and after the reception phases. Association carried out necessary steps in the first period of integration just after the recognition of international protection status; these are social and child allowance rights, opening a bank account, searching for housing units and needed supplies, volunteer opportunities or paid work, a broad range of information on services available and suitable for refugees and organising cultural and public events. The association is a member of the initiative Infokolpa involved in border monitoring and research of the push-backs and chain push-backs on the Balkan Route.

The Intercultural Dialogue Society was established in 2007 by Turkish intellectuals inspired by the teachings and example of Muslim scholar and peace advocate Fethullah Gülen, although it is not a religious or ethnic organisation. The organisation's main aim is to advance social cohesion by connecting communities, empowering people to engage, and contributing to the development of dialogue and community-building ideas. It brings people together through discussion forums, courses, capacity-building publications, and outreach. It stands for democracy, human rights, the non-instrumentalisation of religion in politics, equality, and freedom of speech. Activities include weekly meetings of reading, listening and speaking of the Slovene language, intercultural dialogue activities such as join activities, personalised courses for immigrants, culturally connecting through cooking and connecting families of Turkish immigrants and Slovenian families that both feel excluded.

Two self-organised collectives have been active within Rog Autonomous Factory, a squatted bicycle factory in Ljubljana that was used as a self-managed cultural, social and political centre from 2006 until 2021. After years of debate over its future, the City Council evicted the centre in January 2021.

Rog Embassy was a self-organised community established in 2017 managed jointly by refugees and activists, new and old squatters, artists, students and workers from all over the world. Together they were dealing with bureaucracy and helping one another survive in an increasingly hostile Europe. Their work involves linking communities, organising events, cooking free meals, educational activities, and social and legal assistance. They work outside the framework of the institutions and primarily rely on the solidarity network of activists and supporters who want to create a different environment with them. Especially for persons without status, it represents a space where they can engage, meet, share, and plan various activities.

Second Home was a self-organised community established in 2016 in the void of official integration programs in Slovenia. The idea from the beginning was to assist migrants with their daily errands and connect them and organise them in a political sense by organising



assemblies of migrants, meetings, and lectures in primary and secondary schools, faculties, youth centres, and squats around Slovenia, until violent eviction, their space was opened—unlocked for 14 months in 2016 and 2017—and also functioned as a sort of caravan-saraj for migrants passing through Slovenia and homeless migrants (mostly sans-papier). The main goal of their engagement was for migrants to understand the reality of Europe's periphery, their limited chances, the ideology of the European border regime, growing racism and economic devastation.

Infokolpa is a self-organised migrant community formed from the disbanded group Second Home and is currently the most prominent and engaged organisation of migrants for migrants. They continue activities dedicated to the political emancipation of migrants and also research and point out the push-backs happening in Slovenia-Croatia and the chain push-backs (Slovenia-Croatia-Bosnia and Herzegovina).

There are only three exposed and well known prominent individuals in Slovene public space in high political positions so far that are migrants, of which two of them moved to Slovenia already in times when it was a part of SFRJ.

Dr. Emilija Stojmenova Duh is economist and politician, minister without portfolio responsible for digital transformation, member of The Freedom Movement political party. She moved to Slovenia in 2002 from Macedonia, when she received a scholarship from the agency Ad Futura for schooling as part of the International Baccalaureate.

Peter Bossman, a Slovene physician and politician, in 2010 as the first black citizen of Slovenia, as a member of the Social Democrats political party, was elected mayor of the Municipality of Piran, where he remained for two terms until 2018. In the 1970s, due to the heated political situation and the coup d'état in his native Ghana, he decided to study medicine in what was then Yugoslavia. The Guardian described him as the first black mayor of Eastern Europe, the BBC portrayed him as the first black mayor in Slovenia and the former Yugoslavia.

Zoran Janković, Slovenian economist, businessman and politician, immigrated to Slovenia from Serbia as a child. After 1978, he started working in economics and management, and in 1997 he was appointed to the position of director of the Mercator board. In 1990, he founded his own company Electa Inženiring. In 2006, he was elected for the first time to the position of mayor of the City of Ljubljana and in every election thereafter. In 2011, with his own newly founded political party, Pozitivna Slovenija (Positive Slovenia), he ran in the parliamentary elections and won. He accepted a mandate from the President of the Republic to form a new Slovenian government, but he failed to receive enough support in the vote in the National Assembly. Then he froze his position as party president, returned the parliamentary mandate and returned to the position of mayor, where he is still today.



II. Evaluation of the One-To-One Interviews

Ten interviews were conducted, namely: Biljana Žikić (naturalised immigrant from Serbia, 20 years in Slovenia), journalist, cultural and NGO worker in Cultural Centre Danilo Kiš; Denis Striković (first generation of immigrants, born in Ljubljana to immigrant parents from the former Yugoslavia), NGO worker in Association of Bosnian-Herzegovinian and Slovenian Friendship Ljiljan; Zlatan Čordić (first generation immigrant, born in Ljubljana to immigrant parents from the former Yugoslavia) rap musician, cultural worker and political activist; Max Zimani (naturalised immigrant from Zimbabwe, 35 years in Slovenia), NGO worker in Institute Global / Skuhna, political and cultural activist; Alaa Alali (refugee from Syria, 5 years in Slovenia), political activist, cultural mediator; Wafaa Alburai (refugee from Palestine, 1 year in Slovenia, family reunification), Aber Algendi, (refugee from Syria, 4 years in Slovenia, family reunification), Furkan Güner (political refugee from Turkey, 8 years in Slovenia), NGO worker in Intercultural Dialogue Society, Aigul Hakimova (naturalised immigrant from Kyrgyzstan, 21 years in Slovenia), political activist and NGO worker in Cultural Association Gmajna; Prabh Singh (refugee from India, 10 years in Slovenia), cultural worker.

1. Migrants' Needs

1.1 Better Education about Political Engagement within Integration Process

The most important need, which all interlocutors highlighted, is better integration of migrants in Slovenia in the field of political participation, which means more information, education and teaching about the political system in Slovenia and their rights and duties.

“We as migrants are not aware of our rights and obligations, so this is the most important issue that has to be improved.” (Alaa Alali)

The interlocutors perceive the need for better education about systemic possibilities and levers and ways that as asylum seekers, refugees, immigrants or members of a minority can integrate and co-create political life in Slovenia. But they also have to understand the Western world, the concepts of democracy and representation, because only when they understand them can they actively use them.

“But also migrants should be educated to be open and aware of issues of human rights, women rights, the rule of law... the pure fact that you are migrant does not entitle you for political participation. You should be politically aware as well, including about western society. So, first is good integration, rights and duties and then political participation. That’s why the integration process is important, and language is the most important. Good language courses are missing. And the course about how the system functions, how politics, culture, society function.” (Alaa Alali)

“It takes some time to be in the environment to realise that you are informed, aware so that you can vote.” (Zlatan Čordić)



The more migrants are integrated into society, the more they will experience it as their own and the more engaged they will be. If political participation is not made possible for them, they will feel excluded and unmotivated, which is not good for them, other citizens, or society as a whole. The integration process in Slovenia is focused on language, employment, health and housing, and education about political participation is lacking.

“I don’t know what my rights are exactly, as nobody is talking about that. In the integration course, nobody mentioned anything about political engagement. They only spoke about language, education, health system and labour market, how to find a job, that’s all.” (Wafaa Alburai)

The problem is also that certain rights only exist on paper, but one thing is right, and the other is whether one has the power to assert that right. Therefore, not enough people are aware of the importance of politics, engagement and their rights.

“I personally don’t feel like I’m anywhere, neither a migrant nor anything, but I’m simply a person who has the right to live anywhere in the world and engage politically.” The interlocutor also stresses that the Western Balkans countries must join the EU as soon as possible so that everyone can enjoy the same rights. “When you are a migrant in another country, you are always treated worse, you do work that the locals don’t want, and you are always subordinate.” (Zlatan Čordić)

“Immigrants who come from countries that are not in the EU and do not have Slovenian citizenship, they have no chance, no one asks them anything or helps them to integrate. Then the other thing is that those who achieve certain citizenship can then participate, but in this process, when they tried to achieve this, 10 years passed, and they were not involved anywhere because they were only concerned with work and survival. Society does nothing to help them through these years. Maybe only these small cultural and religious associations help them feel at least a little bit at home. Now, those who are from the former Yugoslavia, for example, are more educated, they had the opportunity for greater inclusion, but they are treated willy-nilly as citizens of the second or third world.” (Denis Striković)

1.2. Involvement of Migrants in Decision Processes in all Levels

The next important need in connection with previous is that migrants are involved in all processes on policies, laws and provisions that apply to migrants and migrant issues.

“The needs are actually to be engaged. When the government is setting policies, laws or new provisions to deal with migrants or migration issue, the migrants should be included in this process.” (Alaa Alali)

“It is important for people that they can influence the system, that they can express their needs, that the state hears them and deals with it.” (Biljana Žikić)



All interlocutors expose the vital need to be involved in the decision process and be included more systematically in policy-making regarding migration in Slovenia at all levels.

“I need some more space to share my opinion, and experience. I need that decision maker can hear us more because they should listen to us because we know what we need better than the other stakeholders or organisations, so we have to be a part of the decision making process for new legislation, policies, laws... anything that the government do in connection with migrants, that will influence us.” (Wafaa Alburai)

As for the members of minorities, especially the first generation of immigrants from the former Yugoslavia, of whom there are at most 200,000 in Slovenia, they do not have any special, collective rights, and although they advocate for minority status, they only have a Resolution that allows them individual, but not collective status.

“We oscillate between two extremes, assimilation and integration, but we have no concept of inclusion in society. It means that people feel that they are part of society. That they are not perceived as strangers, other and different. That there are more other cultures, languages, and traditions of other countries, not only Slovenia. They talk about integration, but in reality, it’s assimilation.” (Denis Striković)

“Whenever a certain community starts seeking its rights, a problem arises. Everyone who wants to live and work in Slovenia should have the same rights. When you give a person the opportunity to socialise and integrate, he will also contribute and feel part of this country. He will also be more active and co-create the political landscape.” (Zlatan Čordić)

“There is no systemic financial scheme for the former Yugoslav cultural associations. As small cultural minority associations, we apply for tenders with large national associations and sometimes only get crumbs. It is not fair.” (Biljana Žikić)

1.3. Systemic Solutions, Collective Representation, Giving a Voice

There is a need for a representative consultative body of migrants (asylum seekers, refugees, minorities) to represent migrants and be a government interlocutor. And that migrants have actual seats in these councils. The interlocutors recognise that an inclusive policy towards migrants is good for everyone, society as a whole, not just for them.

“Migration is a fact, and there will always be migrants together with war, climate changes and development ... and so more migrants are included the better for Slovenia in total and all of us.” (Wafaa Alburai)

“Individually you can cooperate but it should be more systematic. Including migrants in the society is good for the entire Slovenian society and for the Slovenians as well not just for us, migrants.” (Alaa Alali)



“Africans in Slovenia have no leverage to influence Slovenia’s policy towards Africa. It would be good if there was a consultative body that would shape Slovenia’s attitudes towards Africa and give advice in this area, especially with regard to development cooperation.” (Max Zimani)

Of course, one representative cannot represent all migrants, so it would be necessary to have a group of migrants and also a system of exchange, rotation and exchange.

“Not one representative, but a heterogenous group of representatives of different languages, cultures and nationalities, to represent all migrants. Also with a special focus on migrant women who are even more vulnerable than male.” (Wafaa Alburai)

2. Migrants’ Readiness for Political Participation

2.1. Political Activity

Almost all the interviewees expressed their desire to participate in a consultative body, political organisation or institution if given the opportunity. They are ready to share their knowledge, experience and ideas. Many are already engaged in various ways, some more than the average Slovenian citizen.

Biljana Žikić leads a minority association that popularises Serbian culture in Slovenia, but their activity is also broader and opens up the issues of minorities in general, political participation and a fairer society. After ten years of operation, Biljana says: “I can’t imagine that someone from the Middle East or Africa would be chosen for an important political position”.

In Slovenia, political participation is only possible at the individual level. You can only participate as a citizen. It would be important to democratise the political system and political parties. That immigrants, migrants, asylum seekers can also participate. Things are slowly changing, though.

Denis Striković at the time (2012–2016) worked as a city councillor of the United Left coalition in Ljubljana, but again not as a representative of any minority, but as an engaged individual (with a minority background) within the framework of a political party. As he says: “Personally, as a member of the Bosniak minority, I am of course more sensitised to minority issues, but I was a councillor as a party politician and not as a representative of the minority”.

If people feel excluded from society, they will not even participate politically. The more they are included in society, the more motivated they are to participate. The more systemic levers for engagement, the more engaged they will be.

Zlatan Čordić ran for office in the last parliamentary elections (April 2022) on the ticket of the newly founded party Our Future, but again as a citizen, an individual, or, as he says, “as a human being” and not as a minority representative. He invested his recognition as a musician and his energy as an activist for political engagement. Although the party failed to



enter the parliament, this process and this experience were important for him. “Why did I run for office? Because only through politics can you change something, through music, through film, through art, these are stories for small kids”.

In addition to his other work, Max Zimani is active as the head of the Working Group for Politics at Platform SLOGA (Slovenian Global Action).

Aigul Hakimova has been politically active since she arrived in Slovenia in various self-organised collectives and non-governmental organisations. As she says: “I would shortly like to share my experience of how I understand political participation. I came here in 2001 as a student. I wanted to go away from Kyrgyzstan to study, to know the world. I met some people here who are trying to fight for the rights of people that were discriminated: the erased, migrant workers and others. I didn’t come from Palestine – where you know your fight. It was a learning process. You fight for your community. [...] Political participation is a long process where you unite yourself on a problem. You work, find what kind of problems you have, speak up, and find supporters. Sometimes problems are solved, and sometimes they are not. Political participation is a moment of visibility.”

2.2 Self-organisation

There is a messy situation regarding the self-organisation of migrants. In Slovenia, there is no single organisation that is strictly migrant-led and managed by migrants for migrants. “We don’t have a voice, no representative, no strictly migrant organisation in Slovenia.” (Alaa Alali) Different NGOs are dealing with migrants, but there is no base just for migrants to serve to migrant issues at all levels.

“Self-organisation is not possible without a system of education, emancipation, push.” (Wafaa Alburai) That’s why orientation, training, and workshops should come from the state for a migrant to get as much information as possible. Only then, emancipation can follow.

“We Africans are poorly organised, and the question is whether we even deserve the name community. Many people are individually active. I am successful not because of the African Community in Slovenia, but because of my actions. Likewise, Mr. Bosmann, who became mayor, or Sekumadi Conde, who is a very good journalist. The community does not function as such.” (Max Zimani)

The work of non-governmental organisations empowering migrants to be engaged is, therefore, important. However, the most important thing is that the migrant feels like an equal part of society. Only then can they engage.

“If you want to create something new, it has to be something real influence the organisation should be new, wide, big with including a lot of migrants from different background, nationalities that they can deal in their own language as well. And economic stability of that organisation should be assured to change something really.” (Alaa Alali)



E-participation would help but is not crucial because it is a systemic disempowerment of migrants.

Some migrants experience discrimination or even systemic racism and as a result, fear to engage politically.

2.3. Right to Vote

The right to vote in Slovenia is tied to citizenship status, and permanent residence enables voting at the local level. It means that some people who stay and live in Slovenia cannot influence the political future, especially asylum seekers and refugees.

“I have a Slovenian child, but I don’t have an opportunity to vote and influence politics for the future of my child.” (Alaa Alali)

“I don’t have any political rights at the moment, as all political rights are connected with the status of citizenship. From the perspective of refugees and especially women family reunification, Slovenian society is very closed. Many people come here, but a small amount stays here. The asylum policy is very restrictive. We don’t have any political influence in Slovenia.” (Abir Algendi)

However, the interviewees note that Slovenians themselves are passive in political activity. Sometimes immigrants are more motivated and engaged than natives, and this could have a positive impact on the development of the political culture in the country.

“Slovene people don’t participate in the political process. Migrants are already excluded from society in Slovenia, but even Slovenes are excluded – especially young people. They don’t even go vote. If the migrants knew half of what Slovenes knew, they would be active in society, and this would help Slovenia become a more cohesive society. It is good to have better ties with the country. Because when you are excluded, you don’t do anything for the country. When you feel your word counts, you participate and contribute. This is actually the vision of Slovenia. It is our responsibility. I’m from NGO. To help people live freely.” (Furkan Güner)

3. Recommendations

– Systematically involve migrants and migrant communities in formulating policies that relate to them.

– Systematically include migrants and migrant communities in consultative bodies that relate to them:

There is not a single representative of foreigners in the Council for the Integration of Immigrants. This must be changed urgently;

The Council for the Issue of National Communities of the Peoples of the Former SFRY is not functional, has no power and exists only formally. This must be changed urgently.



- All people who legally reside in the country for at least one year should be afforded full voting rights.
- The Government Office for the Support and Integration of Migrants should be more engaged into the integration of all of all immigrants (now, they deals mostly with asylum seekers and refugees).
- The Government Office for the Support and Integration of Migrants would need a consultative body that would include refugees and asylum seekers.

III. Evaluation of the Focus Groups

Three focus groups were organised and attended by: Biljana Žikić, Cultural Center Danilo Kiš (NGO); Saša Hajzler, Infokolpa (self-organised collective); Sonja Gole Ašanin, Office for the Support and Integration of Migrants (government office); Polona Mozetič, Human Rights Ombudsperson (government office); Wafaa Alburai, refugee; Katja P. Nussdorfer, Ljubljana Public Education Center – Cene Štupar (public educational institution); Špela Kastelic, Slovenian Migration Institute at the Research Center of the Slovenian Academy of Sciences and Arts (public research institution); Katarina Kromar, Association Odnos (NGO); Franci Zlatac, Slovenian Philanthropy (NGO); Iva Perhavec, International Organization for Migration Slovenia (international organisation); Albin Keuc, Platform SLOGA (NGO network); Romana Zidar, UNHCR Middle Europe (international organisation) and project team members, as moderators: Lana Zdravković, Katja Utroša and Aigul Hakimova.

1. Main Fields for Empowering Migrant Voices

1.1 Decentralisation of Integration and Holistic Approach

The participants pointed out, as one of the most important findings, that the field of migration is a double-edged sword, which is used by each political option in power in accordance with its ideological orientation and pragmatic interests, but none of them systematically regulates it to the end. So, on the one hand, we have an acceptable government policy that understands the importance of integration and regulates the rights of migrants. On the other hand, we have one that cuts these rights and is more conservative. Some participants, therefore, advocate the decentralisation of integration and moving the integration process to the local and regional level, which is undoubtedly more suitable than centralisation from the perspective of efficiency and implementation.

“The key thing that should be done is, of course, decentralisation. This means that integration and all these activities are brought down to the local level because it is easiest to do these things at the local level. Not only from the perspective there are fewer people in quantity, less of this particular issue, or rather it is specific to a certain local environment. Moreover, also because it is significantly more effective because all the structures know each other, they know each other’s operations, and solutions can be found more quickly. So, certainly now, at least for me personally, they are closer to models where it is already arranged at the local level that they have representatives of migrants involved, in the



planning of activities and elevation meetings, based on which problems are perceived or some problems that start anew appear in a certain environment. So that all these local structures can react in time and can prepare some plans, solutions and rehabilitation of problems. Now everything is done centrally in Slovenia, which is, of course, significantly more difficult. If, once, when the state policy accepts to go to the local level, I believe that then funds will be allocated for this purpose, and everything will be easier from that point of view.” (Sonja Gole Ašanin)

The participants also agreed that a holistic, integrated approach to integration is important, as emphasised by Albin Keuc, which includes consultations at the local level with all important actors or institutions that shape the integration process: mayor, local authorities, police, centre for social work, healthcare centre, school, kindergarten, library... Mutual coordination between all involved actors is necessary, and SLOGA has already implemented some projects that tried to encourage this coordination at the local level.

1.2 Universality of the Right to Vote

Regarding the universality of the right to vote, the participants agreed in principle that people living in a particular area should all enjoy the same rights. However, for the right to vote, some believe that a person should have lived in Slovenia for at least some time to be entitled to vote. “However, if we are talking specifically about the right to vote, it is difficult for someone who has been granted a permit for one year but then will never be here again to decide on something because he does not even live in this country anymore.” (Sonja Gole Ašanin)

Saša Hajzler pointed out the paradox caused by the mutual conditionality of citizenship and voting rights or political participation, namely in the case of the Slovenian diaspora, which also does not live in Slovenia and does not necessarily have close contact with Slovenia, but has the right to vote—different than the majority of foreigners who live, work and, last but not least, pay taxes in Slovenia. In short, those who are not even in Slovenia have more rights to make decisions about Slovenia, just because they are citizens or their descendants, than those who actually live in Slovenia and contribute to society, just because they are foreigners.

Nevertheless, the participants agreed that a certain amount of information and understanding of the political system is necessary for political participation and a certain length of stay in the country. “I think that you can live in one environment for a while to understand the system itself. Thus, the right to vote is certainly possible, but not immediately. There must be a certain period, for example, that you live in an environment, in a country. I wouldn’t provide it right away, I don’t know, the first year.” (Katja P. Nussdorfer)



Research in the field of migrant integration, as pointed out by Iva Perhavec, shows that political participation is one of those areas that can significantly contribute to the social inclusion of migrants in democratic systems. Therefore, she advocates that the right to vote is also an essential part of the integration of migrants. Having a voice on policies that concern you and also the possibility of co-decision-making in the country helps migrants begin to experience the country as their own. “Research and practice show that migrants are generally not less politically active or they are not less politically engaged than the native population. It’s just a matter of whether they have that option or not.” (Iva Perhavec)

Engagement at the political level is different and should also increase with age and level of education among migrants, points out Špela Kastelic. Their research confirms that the higher these two factors are, the greater the political participation. This is also influenced by the length of stay in a certain country and, of course, the naturalisation process, which also allows the expansion of these rights the most. It also turned out that second-generation migrants are, in principle, more active than first-generation migrants, and this is because, in principle, they are no longer supposed to solve basic needs, for example, which arise, but also because the level of belonging is much higher. “So, in addition to education, which is necessary to understand political processes, political participation is also influenced by knowledge of the language, inclusion in the labour market, and also being together with family members, because we see this from our own practice that until these basic things are arranged, for each person, it is difficult to deal with other matters. There are some priorities.” (Špela Kastelic)

1.3 Active Citizenship

Active citizenship, as empowerment for political action and political education, is important for everyone, both those who have just arrived in the country and those who were born in the country but actually did not know exactly how things work. “Only, these rights are not an abstraction. This also comes with a certain responsibility. It seems to me, how will you work with people from the point of view of rights and certain responsibilities, that it is actually necessary to have general political education, not only for people who would technically or theoretically want to integrate or to get some rights but also for those who live with them. So both ways, right, citizens of Slovenia, who are citizens of Slovenia only because they were born here and actually somehow did not go through some kind of political education.” (Saša Hajzler)

In particular, the need for educating migrants towards active citizenship was highlighted, as they often come from radically different environments. “There is no such thing, and the biggest thing is in the Initial Integration of Immigrants programme, where the political scheme in Slovenia and the electoral system are explained to them. Then there is the integration into the labour market, which we implement in cooperation with the Employment Agency, and these are the only two such programmes where there is actually a pinch of this active citizenship. All others in Italy, Greece, and Austria basically have the Slovenian language course included as part of the basic programme, but when the



immigrants arrive in the new country, they have additional lectures of active citizenship. We don't have that here, and we miss it. All the others, other European countries, are ten years ahead of us." (Katja P. Nussdorfer)

The interlocutors noted that women migrants who come to Slovenia because of family reunification are in the most difficult position and have the hardest time integrating into society, so it is especially necessary to work on special integration programmes for them.

"I am here for one year only for the reason of family reunification, and I believe that it's still too far to talk about a real political participation. First of all, because I can consider myself a newcomer and I can say that I still don't know about my rights for political participation in Slovenia because when we arrived here, of course, we got different integration courses which were really helpful, but nothing was mentioned about our rights regarding political participation." (Wafaa Alburai)

1.4 Inclusion of Migrant Voices in Policymaking

a) Self-organisation of Migrants

The participants agree that education is important, as is the right to vote, but that for the political engagement of migrants, it is also necessary to encourage their self-organisation since political participation transcends a mere right to vote. "It seems to me that many times when we talk about political participation, we focus only on the right to vote, which is very important and has some symbolism, but not in these nation states. But on the other hand, there is probably also room for some political activity, which is not so much regulated, but is possible as some kind of political self-organisation, and creating pressure, for example, on the authorities." (Saša Hajzler)

This self-organisation, which goes beyond the political rights granted by the state and is formed based on the concrete needs of the migrants themselves, is considered quintessential. This raised the question of how much time and capital migrants have to be socially engaged with all the work they have to do with rebuilding their lives, and with the everyday challenges of integration, learning the language, finding a job, housing, or in general by working in several shifts.

"So, it's just a question of whether a person is even capable, despite the abundance of things that he has to deal with in his life every day, week and month, plus also support his family, to even engage in this way, to try to somehow change the situation, to influence someone etc." (Špela Kastelic)

Migrants who come to the country have a lot of work at the beginning to do with learning the language, and looking for housing, and employment, so socio-economic problems are often above political organisation. However, the participants agree that they usually do not have the time and energy to engage, as some work 12 hours a day, taking care of their families, and many send money home.



“I think that here first this primary goal is to satisfy the basic needs and only later in the second phase when that is covered, because the vast majority 95% of them still take care of the whole extended family in their country and send, in my opinion, 90% of what they earn money back home, there is political engagement.” (Katja P. Nussdorfer)

Many interlocutors stressed that Slovenia is a rather hostile environment for migrants to settle down and gain status. Although many have lived here for 10, 15 years, they still do not have the opportunity to mobilise fully. Likewise, the absence of systemic funding and incentives for migrant, minority and immigrant organisations affects the difficult political self-organisation.

b) Political Engagement

Experiences, when organisations encourage people and help them self-organise, are good. The research conducted by the interlocutors shows that a bottom-up approach is necessary and very effective and that asking people directly about their needs encourages their engagement.

“Political capital is built slowly, and until you have some clean basics, it is very difficult to even think about getting involved politically. That’s why we talked to asylum seekers and asked them what they wanted. So, start from the bottom up, so that they have the opportunity to co-decide on things that are connected to their daily life in the house.” (Romana Zidar)

“We also noticed that, in fact, this bottom-up approach of the migrant initiatives themselves, with our minimal support, exclusively in the sense of giving them some push to organise themselves and begin to recognise their rights, possibilities and how to carry out the whole matter, they organise it themselves, somehow informally, if they start organising it on others because this is basically the best way. Without us, the saviours, who enable them by basically being on another project through other activities, we try to direct this into a kind of self-organisation, self-initiative, which is the easiest, so that it is not only projects that start, some may end, but that matter, if nothing else, constantly develops through projects”. (Špela Kastelic)

However, some participants emphasised that political organising can arise precisely as a result of a bad life or that the search for ways to improve life is political activity par excellence.

“I don’t know, but it seemed to me that all the migrants I came into contact with, regardless of how many jobs they had or how many children they had, regardless of whether they were men or women, were quite politically articulate, and if only they had the possibility of some leverage for their voice to be heard, they would use it. I haven’t noticed, at least with the people I work with, that they are very passive. Rather the opposite. The only question is whether they have an addressee whom they can turn to now with their problems. And I also have a lot of problems with what I would call it middle-class political activity, that is to say,



you have to have a stable first and a cow and then you will engage in politics. It seems to me that this is not the best strategy, not because of this, but because once you have a stable and a cow, why exactly are you fighting? For a slightly larger stable or another cow. No, the duty, basically political participation or engagement, comes when you have a serious problem. At this point, people need to be engaged.” (Katja Utroša)

c) Representation of Migrants

Many participants understand political organising as mutual help and integration within one ethnic, national or religious community or collective action and advocacy for rights. The discussion was about how to get the right representative, whether each ethnic community should have its own representative, and how to organise this representation in the first place. Many agreed that an umbrella organisation for migrant organisations would be a good interlocutor with the state and also successfully carry out advocacy both at the national and local levels.

“That’s why I think it’s missing in Slovenia—in other countries, it’s more developed, because there has been a tradition of immigration for so long, and communities have really already been created and so on—some organisation that would really represent and connect, in fact, all migrants and that it could really be an equal partner in all political processes. There is no such thing. So, if there is no umbrella organisation, like we have, for example, CNVOS for non-governmental organisations, then everything is more difficult. It seems to me that this is exactly what is missing here: some kind of umbrella organisation that would connect it and have some power and validity.” (Sonja Gole Ašanin)

In this sense, the need for institutions to employ more intercultural mediators was also highlighted, which would help the broader society to become more aware of migration and also help migrants to integrate into society more easily. Intercultural mediators would also be excellent political representatives of migrants and their interests and good interlocutors for the government in political processes.

3. Recommendations

- Education for political engagement is needed for both migrants and the Slovenian population.
- It is necessary to systematically and financially encourage and support the self-organisation of migrants, their organisations, networks and associations. Bare rights do not mean much if there is no power, empowerment, or emancipation to realise these rights.
- State and other institutions should employ and involve more people with a migrant background, including cultural mediators.

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Annex

Interviews and Focus groups Data

Ten interviews were conducted, namely: Biljana Žikić (naturalised immigrant from Serbia, 20 years in Slovenia), journalist, cultural and NGO worker in Cultural Centre Danilo Kiš; Denis Striković (first generation of immigrants, born in Ljubljana to immigrant parents from the former Yugoslavia), NGO worker and Association of Bosnian-Herzegovinian and Slovenian Friendship Ljiljan; Zlatan Čordić (first generation immigrant, born in Ljubljana to immigrant parents from the former Yugoslavia) rap musician and political activist; Max Zimani (naturalised immigrant from Zimbabwe, 35 years in Slovenia), NGO worker and Zavod Global / Skuhna, political and cultural activist; Alaa Alali (refugee from Syria, 5 years in Slovenia), political activist, cultural mediator; Wafaa Alburai (refugee from Palestine, 1 year in Slovenia, family reunification), Aber Algendi, (refugee from Syria, 4 years in Slovenia, family reunification), Furkan Güner (political refugee from Turkey, 8 years in Slovenia), NGO worker in Intercultural Dialog, Aigul Hakimova (naturalised immigrant from Kyrgyzstan, 21 years in Slovenia), political activist and NGO worker in Cultural Association Gmajna; Prabh Singh (refugee from India, 10 years in Slovenia), cultural worker.

Three focus groups were organised and attended by: Biljana Žikić, Cultural Center Danilo Kiš (NGO); Saša Hajzler, Infokolpa (self-organised collective); Sonja Gole Ašanin, Office for the Support and Integration of Migrants (government office); Polona Mozetič, Human Rights Ombudsperson (government office); Wafaa Alburai, refugee; Katja P. Nussdorfer, Ljubljana Public Education Center – Cene Štupar (public educational institution); Špela Kastelic, Slovenian Migration Institute at the Research Center of the Slovenian Academy of Sciences and Arts (public research institution); Katarina Kromar, Association Odnos (NGO); Franci Zlatar, Slovenian Philanthropy (NGO); Iva Perhavec, International Organization for Migration Slovenia (international organisation); Albin Keuc, Platform SLOGA (NGO network); Romana Zidar, UNHCR Middle Europe (international organisation) and project team members, as moderators: Lana Zdravković, Katja Utroša and Aigul Hakimova.