

Citizen Assembly on the Political Participation of Migrants in Slovenia: “Political Participation for All – Towards a Europe of Equals”¹

Report and Policy Recommendations (January 2026)

Introduction

Peace Institute organized two citizen assemblies dedicated to the issue of political participation of migrants² in Slovenia that took place on 12 June 2025 within 9th Festival of African Cultures African Village Festival on Špica, Ljubljana and on 20 November 2025 within 14th International Festival of Contemporary Dance CoFestival in Kino Šiška, Ljubljana. More than 250 people of different status, age and background participated in both assemblies, mostly migrants themselves, but also NGO and local government representatives, as well as general population.

Overall moderation of both citizen assemblies has been undertaken by **Aigul Hakimova**, originated from Kyrgyzstan and living and working in Ljubljana for 24 years. Long time activist – involved in migrant struggles for over two decades, director of Cultural Association Gmajna and member of the Infokolpa initiative, which co-runs a space of solidarity with people on the move, including asylum seekers, refugees, and migrant workers – confirmed that in Slovenia, it is still very difficult for migrants to become fully included in society. The introductory note on the political participation of migrants was prepared and presented by **Lana Zdravković**, researcher at the Peace Institute and leader of the project Citizens’ Action for Democracy – CitiDem.³

The first assembly was opened by **Daniel Nzotam**, director of the African Village Society and its festival who emphasized the importance of migrant initiatives and participation in Slovenia. Second assembly was introduced by **Rok Vevar**, co-curator of the international dance festival CoFestival, who emphasized that the history of dance is a history of migration.

¹ Find out more: <https://citizenstakeover.eu/citidem/> and <https://www.mirovni-institut.si/en/projects/citizens-action-for-democracy-citidem/>

² Migrants/people with a migration background are considered in the broadest sense, meaning asylum seekers, people with refugee status (international or subsidiary protection, humanitarian status) as well as third-country nationals (TCNs) and their descendants, including people of different ethnic origin.

³ Citizen assemblies have been organized as a part of the above-mentioned project co-funded by the European Commission Citizens, Equality, Rights and Values Programme (CERV)

Special guests from abroad included: **Seid Ibrahim** (Centre for Peace Studies, Croatia), **Djemila Boulasha** (EUMANS, France), **Sebastian Berchesan** (Stand Up for Europe, Belgium), **Konstantina Vougiouka** and **Ariadne Ntamparaki** (Citizen Crossroads – CCR, Greece), **Qendresa Mejzini** (Democracy International, Germany), **Michele Fiorillo** (Scuola Normale Superiore and Civico.eu – CitizensTakeOver.eu, Italy), and **Ada Rafalska** (Alliance4Europe, Netherlands).

Context

According to the latest data from the Statistical Office of the Republic of Slovenia (2025), the country currently has approximately 2.13 million inhabitants, of whom around 218,000 are foreign nationals, representing about 10% of the total population. In the Municipality of Ljubljana, the proportion of foreigners is significantly higher: the city has about 300,000 residents, of whom approximately 44,000 are foreign nationals, accounting for nearly 15% of all inhabitants of Ljubljana. This makes Ljubljana stand out as the most international and migrant-diverse environment in Slovenia, as the share of foreign nationals is well above the national average, and the trend has been steadily increasing in recent years due to employment, study, and lifestyle-related migration. Migrants today form an essential and vibrant part of the Slovenian social fabric. They contribute to the economy, culture, art, and everyday life. And yet many remain excluded from the political processes that most directly shape their future.

The general right to vote in Slovenia is tied to citizenship status, which means that some people who stay and live in Slovenia for a long time – especially asylum seekers and refugees – cannot influence their political future. However, permanent residency enables voting at the local level. In 2002, amendments to the 1993 Local Elections Act and the 1994 Political Parties Act entered into force. The first introduced the right to vote in local elections also for foreigners with permanent residence (but not for foreigners with temporary residence or asylum seeker status). The second one allows EU citizens to become members of Slovenian political parties (excluding all the other foreign citizens, such as ex-Yugoslav citizens, of whom there are the most in Slovenia). Several municipalities, such as Idrija, Postojna, and Trbovlje, have begun experimenting with migrant advisory boards, and the Municipality of Ljubljana has recently taken an important step by forming a working group to establish such a board. However, migrants with temporary residence cannot vote locally, asylum seekers cannot participate at all, and many long-term non-EU residents, including citizens of former Yugoslav republics, continue to be excluded from political party membership and meaningful political engagement. Migrants are usually not included into political decisions in any way. Too often decisions about migrants are made without them—and this is precisely what should be changed.

The form of citizen assembly is important because it enables space and time for people to express what they need, how they feel, and what they believe should be improved in Ljubljana and in Slovenia—not only for migrants but for all residents. Only if the community is suitable and opened for all people that live, work and participate in it, it can be inclusive political community. At the two assemblies we tried to tackle the questions: What does participation mean? Are migrants included in society? What are we doing in our communities? What problems do we face every day, and how can we work together to solve

them? When the problems feel too big, what can we still do? Do other people listen to us? Do we feel seen and included? Do we notice more migrants every day in public? How do we personally experience discrimination? Do we feel that we belong in the community—even when belonging is difficult? Do we think it is useful to meet from time to time and talk about our common problems?

Working Groups and Recommendations

Inclusion, integration and participation cannot be separated from the material needs of migrants. The lack of good working conditions, the housing crisis, and the linguistic difficulties are the first areas of concern. Main obstacles for political participation of migrants are economic, linguistic and administrative. In order to be politically active people should have safe environment, a place to stay, decent work and feel equal and included. That's why, in the second part of the assemblies, the participants were divided into four thematic working groups:

1. Housing Issues moderated by Furkan Guner (1st assembly) and Daniel Nzotam (2nd assembly)
2. Language and Integration moderated by Hassan Alhallaq (1st assembly) and Katja Utroša (2nd assembly)
3. Working Conditions and Labour Rights moderated by Aljaž Pevec (1st assembly) and Tadej Pavkovič and Jošt Žagar (2nd assembly)
4. Racism and Discrimination moderated by Katja Utroša (1st assembly) and Moad Sabra (2nd assembly)

1. Housing Issues

Majority, almost 90% of the people present at the assembly face housing problems. Group discussion showed that the biggest issue regarding housing in Slovenia is the commercialization of real estate which results in excessively high rent and costs that exceed their financial capacity, interconnected with living in overcrowded and inadequate housing, discrimination based on origin, skin colour, or other circumstances, barriers to finding housing due to language difficulties, intolerance and racism. So, the group agreed that the hardest part of being in Ljubljana is firstly, simply finding a place to live. The second difficulty is managing the costs, once you manage to find it. The housing situation in Slovenia is becoming increasingly worrying. [According to Eurostat's](#) housing cost overburden indicator, 20.6 % of Slovenian households spent more than 40 % of their income on housing costs in 2024, which is a commonly used threshold for housing stress. [The rental market in Slovenia](#) is unregulated, too expensive and out of reach for many, while there is also a chronic shortage of public housing. One of the issues is also that migrants with permanent residence permits, who have lived and worked in Slovenia for decades, are unable to apply for non-profit or public rental housing. The only exception is housing provided by the Housing Fund of the Republic of Slovenia with cost-based rents (approximately 10+ EUR/m²), which remains insufficient to meet the demand. Moreover, the cost-based rent itself represents a substantial financial burden.

The major problem in Slovenia is that there is no protection for the basic right to housing. That's why local authorities and NGOs must take a leading role in this issue. Migrants need better representation at local and national levels, even aspiring to leadership roles such as prime minister. To make their voices visible to the authorities, migrants believe that protest and collective mobilization is also very important, in order to get the attention of decision-makers.⁴

Recommendations:

- a) The Housing Funds at national and local level should enable all people in need for housing, including migrants with permanent residence permits, who have lived and worked in Slovenia for decades, to apply for non-profit or public rental housing.
- b) The Housing Funds at national and local level including government and responsible ministries and bodies should enable that more non-profit or public rental housing be built and offered to those who need it.
- c) Responsible bodies (government, ministries and agencies) should shape the housing politics in a direction of accessible and affordable housing and fair rent for all people in need. Housing is not a privilege but a basic social right.

2. Language and Integration

Group discussion confirmed that with [learning Slovenian language for migrants everything is hard: grammar, pronunciation, the alphabet](#). Migrants in Slovenia face several difficulties in the process of learning the language. Firstly, there is not enough language courses for Slovene language, and only some are free of charge. Secondly, there is still a large difference in the quality of language courses. At asylum homes, classes can be very chaotic and offered at very specific times. Classes often mix Slavic speakers with non-Slavic ones who have very different levels of prior knowledge. The teaching style usually feels too formal without focusing enough on the real-life needs of the learners. The teachers don't have a clear strategy to provide enough practical information for everyday life. Thirdly, migrants have no opportunity to speak Slovene in their everyday life. Often, Slovenians will switch to English when speaking with foreigners, which makes practice difficult. Only older people will continue to speak Slovenian with migrants, younger people always start speaking English, which deepens language segregation. Fourth, textbooks for learning the Slovene language are not readily accessible and are expensive, so teaching methods are based on the individual teacher's personal approach. The lack of resources is also visible in the absence of toolkits, academy-level textbooks and dictionaries (for example Arabic-Slovenian). Digital tools are

⁴ Cf. Kaja Gajšek and Aigul Hakimova, The Issue of Adequate Housing in Slovenia with a Focus on Migrants, ČKZ 293, 2024

also missing. Free Apps for learning Slovenian would be especially helpful and useful for migrant workers who cannot attend in-person classes.

Recommendations:

a) More language courses should be organized for migrants, and they should be free of charge. This is especially important for those who want to achieve higher-level certificates, such as A2 or B1.

- Expanding the availability of free language courses, tailored to different proficiency levels and different language needs, would help migrants to better understand local policies and participate in civic life.

- Teachers teaching Slovenian should ideally speak the native language of the learners and share the learners' cultural background.

- Classes should also be flexible, accommodating work schedules and providing childcare where needed. More availability of classes during the day and in an available place are necessary.

b) Alternative forms of language learning should be adopted also in the form of language cafés for children and adults.

- Many older people are lonely, and many migrants need to learn Slovenian. There could be opportunities for pensioners who want to teach Slovenian to help migrants practice the language.

- This should also be combined with measures that achieve greater language accessibility (targeted language courses), translations of documents available, translators at meetings etc.) allowing for greater participation throughout.

- Digital tools for learning Slovenian should be developed and introduced as an additional way for learning but also especially to those migrants who from whatever reason cannot follow in-person classes.

c) Local and regional authorities should ensure that materials related to migrants' rights and available services, as well as information about legislation and ways to participate in policy processes and the development of strategies and plans, are translated into commonly spoken migrant languages and are easily accessible both online and in person. The participatory processes should also be organised guided with the thought of language accessibility. Multilingual information accessibility would help bridge the communication gap and enable migrants to better understand their participation options.⁵

⁵ Check also the recommendations regarding language issue by the Info Kolpa collective: <https://push-forward.org/novica/javna-pobuda-peticija-za-izboljsanje-programov-ucenja-slovenskega-jezika-za-tujce-public>

3. Working Conditions and Labor Rights

Group discussion showed that there are several overwhelming problems in the current employment system.

- a) The bureaucracy — especially at the Administrative Office and the Employment Office — is extremely slow. To get a work permit, approvals are needed from both offices, which often takes an unreasonably long time. This delay makes it incredibly hard to find work and survive in the country. By law asylum seekers can get access to the labour market after 3 months - however, due to administrative delays, they sometimes wait longer for their work permits. One must apply for both asylum and a job, and the process is often unclear and frustrating.
- b) Often, the education or professional qualifications that migrants obtained in their home countries are not recognized in Slovenia. Even if one have a degree or professional diploma from another country, it often holds no value in Slovenia. Consequently, foreigners are denied fair opportunities based on their education and experience.
- c) Many migrants can only work on temporary employment and through agencies that often violate workers' rights. Wolt and other platform workers must cover all the production costs, such as fuel and equipment by themselves. Some job agencies take as much as 25% of workers' wages as commission. Due to low wages, many migrants work only to pay rent and buy food, with no possibility of saving money. This is deeply unfair and makes it even harder for people to survive.
- d) General bad work conditions, including blackmail and exploitation as employers often force people to work extremely long hours under the threat of replacement, stating that they “can always find someone else.” Migrants are particularly vulnerable with no safety measures and no clear information about wages or working conditions, working long overnight shifts, often without knowing exactly how many hours they're working. Wages are very low, while night shifts and overtime are often underpaid or not paid at all. Many migrants are coerced into unregistered (black) work, which means no social security or retirement benefits. This leaves people without long-term protection or stability.
- e) Migrant face situation where employers demand a high level of Slovene language, which creates additional barriers.

Recommendations:

- a) Employers should offer incentives for language education, with the support from the state. They can also organize free language classes for their employees or pay language course for them. Helping migrant in learning the Slovene language will empower them and easily include them into the labour market.
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b) It is important to respect all workers and their rights including migrants, regardless of where they come from. Bureaucratic procedures (issuing work permits and similar) should be accelerated. Labor inspection should be more efficient in prevention and punishment of workers' rights violations. Labor policies should go into the direction of equal working rights and solidarity.

c) If employers lack the understanding of different culture and backgrounds, training and workshops for understanding cultural diversity should be organized including inviting migrant workers to share info about their county and culture. Employers can cooperate with migrant and other NGOs in developing such activities.

4. Racism and Discrimination

Group participants agreed that racism and discrimination are interconnected with all the other problems that have been discussed, such as housing, work and language. Participants reported their everyday experiences of racism in Slovenia: being refused service in restaurants or cafés, taxi drivers ignoring them, discrimination at administrative unit, where there's a "Slovenian only" policy and no translation support, unequal treatment in social situations. It is the situation nicely expressed with the expression: *"They give you the pen, but not the book."*, meaning you are expected to participate, but the system is not built for you—you're excluded in practice.

Racism and discrimination are visible especially in the employment field, because migrants are treated differently than Slovenians by the employers. ID cards like the "yellow card" are often not accepted by private employers. Migrants feel that their only option is hard physical labour, like construction. There is also discrimination in schools, especially from teachers rather than from other students. Part of the problem is also the media, as too often, it spreads fake news or portrays migration only in negative terms. Migrants are rarely given a chance to take part in media conversations or tell their own stories.

Recommendations:

a) Increasing knowledge on policy participation processes for migrants is essential.

- Educational programs and workshops should be organized as a part of integration process by local and national authorities in collaboration with NGOs, that explain the ways migrants can engage in the creation of the policies. This includes providing civic education and engagement initiatives for migrants, to know about voting rights, participation, and having information sessions on the administrative system and understanding the legal obligations.

- Clear information on what integration strategies entail, and what role migrants can play in shaping and evaluating the political life is crucial. Migrants should be well informed on how they can be included in other migrant organisations but also in the bodies within local/national authorities that are dealing with local integration, including alternative offline and online participation methodologies.

- Activities should keep in mind language accessibility as well as accommodation of work schedules and providing childcare when needed.

b) It is important 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.

- Migrant organisations should be structurally financed better through different public calls and funds, especially focused and designed to support migrant-led associations and their projects and initiatives, to strengthen their capacity to organise and participate in policy processes and advocacy engagement.

- It is crucial to simplify bureaucratic complex procedures which are an obstacle to participate in public tenders or carry out projects reducing growth opportunities for smaller associations and limit their impact. More technical and training support for fund management and tender participation should be provided.

- Consultation of migrant organisations needs to be more valued and viewed as an integral part of decision-making. Cooperation between the administration and migrant organisations should be reimbursed with appropriate project funds or specific funds for consultation services. It is only fair to compensate the consulting of migrant organisations and migrant representatives with professional fees.

c) It is important to assure public spaces are available and affordable for migrant organisations which will help them in gathering, organisation and working. Migrant and migrant organisations need meeting places for organisation, socialisation and production making as well as public spaces for events, gatherings and presentation of their activities.

- Migrant and migrant organisations should be visible in order to be better integrated and having their own spaces for production and promotion is one of the crucial conditions. This includes organizing more anti-racist cultural (culinary, sport, art) activities which are important for breaking down barriers and stereotypes.

- Citizens assemblies are very helpful, and there should be more similar activities that promote inclusion and enable for migrants and locals to meet and connect.

General Recommendation and Conclusion:

a) To build a sincere political community that includes everyone, **migrants must have an equal say in all areas of life—not as guests, but as full members of society, with the same rights as locals echoing the EU motto: "United in Diversity."** Creating more empowering narrative regarding social inclusion, recognizing the value of cultural diversity and promoting true political integration based on dialogue and collaboration between institutions, associations, and local communities is crucial. **Migrants and migrant organisations should be more included in the integration and participation processes of local and national governments as well as shaping of the integration strategies with a special focus on political/civic participation.**

b) Employment or engagement of **cultural mediators in local/national institutions** beginning with municipalities would be an important step in this direction. Cultural mediators can help open the processes of participation and make them more inclusive. Dialogue and communication channels between local and national authorities and migrant-led associations and advocates should be established on a regular basis, and other methods of participation in city and national policies and issues should be opened to the participation of migrant associations and advocates and made more inclusive to promote and include greater representation of migrants in institutions.

c) Also, a **stronger network between associations and organizations operating in the area of integration** should be developed, which should be able to intercept the means and the political focus of local and national authorities. This kind of widespread perspective could also be useful for addressing the lack of representation of migrants in the public and institutional sector, promoting the creation of spaces dedicated to inclusion and integration.

More info and contact:

Lana Zdravković, Peace Institute

lane.zdravkovic@mirovni-institut.si